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Carol Helstosky

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ARTICLES

Fascist food politics: Mussolini's policy of alimentary sovereignty¹

Carol F. Helstosky

University of Denver

Abstract

Fascist food policies were based on the notion of alimentary sovereignty, or total self-sufficiency with regard to food supplies. Although the régime was unsuccessful in achieving complete self-sufficiency, alimentary sovereignty had a significant impact on everyday life and today challenges us to reconsider the authoritarian nature of Italian fascism. Fascist food policies reversed important trends in food habits and nutritional levels from the era before and during World War I, by holding down imports and encouraging the consumption of an austere diet based on bread, polenta, pasta, fresh produce and wine. Using archival sources, scientific writings and other printed materials on food consumption, this article traces the development of alimentary sovereignty as the guiding principle of fascist food policies, from the early years of fascist rule through World War II. This article argues that the history of food policies reveals the peculiar nature of fascist attitudes towards the Italian population, given that both food and population were controlled as strategic, then expendable, resources. Fascist policies also affected popular attitudes towards food and food preparation that extended into the postwar era.

Keywords

Food policy, consumption, nutrition, Italy, fascism, World War II, autarky.

For many European countries, the period between the two world wars constituted a critical period for state intervention to manage the production and consumption of food. Wartime conditions, the proliferation of black markets and ongoing economic crises necessitated government food policies for liberal democracies and authoritarian regimes alike.² No government appeared to be more publicly committed to food policies and controls than fascist Italy. From the pictures of Mussolini threshing wheat to the distribution of food baskets on Epiphany by the *Fasci Femminili*, food was ever-present in fascist activity and propaganda, and with good reason. Controlling the production, distribution and consumption of food guaranteed popular health and political stability; these concerns were particularly significant to Mussolini and his regime, given fascism's goals of consensus and imperial conquest. In Italy, where levels of popular nutrition remained substandard for much of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, food carried substantial material and symbolic weight,

precisely because of its absence in everyday life. The regime's management of food provided an indicator of how 'modernizing' fascism was as a government, given the inadequacy of pre-1922 consumption levels and scientific consensus that the Italian diet was nutritionally backward compared with that of other industrialized nations. Food provisioning also highlighted the supposed benevolence of the regime as well as its concern for the health and productivity of the population.

This article traces the history of fascist food policies in order to shed light on how modernizing and benevolent the regime was when it came to managing food as a resource for popular consumption. More importantly, this article demonstrates how the development of fascist food policies more adequately characterizes fascism's authoritarian nature – still a subject of debate among historians. Fascist food policies gauged both the regime's intentions to control the population as a valuable and strategic resource and the regime's success in meeting the basic needs of its citizens. Moreover, the administration of other policies – demographic, economic, imperial – depended on the ability of the regime to control what, and how much, Italians ate. Yet historians of fascism have often overlooked food's significance, particularly with regard to the regime's economic and social policies.³ Food is either mentioned as part of the regime's agricultural programs or is given fleeting reference in relation to everyday life, social conditions and fascist culture. An analysis of food's role in fascist politics, however, might enable historians to appreciate the significance of material conditions and everyday life to understanding the nature of fascist rule.⁴

For example, the development of fascist food policies highlights the regime's ability to blend demographic concerns with and imperial ambitions. If Italians were going to reproduce, fight and conquer, they were going to have to maintain at least a minimal standard of nutrition. Food policies wove together elements of the biological and the social because they were oriented toward improving the health and viability of the Italian people *and* achieving some measure of popular support for the regime. However, all of this was to be accomplished on fascist terms. The subordination of consumption and production schemes to autarky meant that fascism rejected an expansive model of mass consumption in favor of a particular model that urged restraint and limited resources, especially with regard to the nation's food supplies.⁵ This model could be described as a policy of 'alimentary sovereignty' or a constellation of initiatives focused on the ultimate goal of complete self-sufficiency in food provisioning. Although Mussolini, scientists and bureaucrats used a variety of terms to describe their food policy goals, the phrase 'alimentary sovereignty' is a useful one for defining the guiding principles behind fascist food policy. The term 'sovereignty' captures food's symbolic significance to the regime, in the sense that one of the ways in which the regime chose to define Italian independence and distinctiveness was through the everyday practice of food consumption.

However unrealistic it was in theory, alimentary sovereignty had significant impact on everyday life in Italy before and after fascism. Alimentary sovereignty

reversed wartime and postwar trends toward greater diversification in popular diet, causing nutritional levels to revert to pre-World War I standards, standards considered inadequate and even miserable by the Italian scientific and medical communities at the time.⁶ The fascist regime reduced food imports, encouraged consumers to reduce their food intake, and mobilized scientific support for fewer calories and nutrients in diet. The regime's goal of reversing consumption trends stands in stark contrast to the other aspects of fascist rule that emphasized fascism's modernizing trends or pioneering approaches to social and economic problems. Although the fascist regime ultimately failed to make the nation self-sufficient by compressing popular consumption levels, food policies had dramatic impact on what people could, and could not, eat. Food prices rose throughout the 1930s, while efforts to command an Italian empire in Ethiopia contributed nothing to the domestic food supply. The cumulative effects of such ill-conceived policies, augmented by Mussolini's growing relationship with Adolf Hitler, had disastrous consequences for popular nutrition levels and Italian food habits. Before and during World War II, average calorie intake in some Italian cities dipped under 2,000 calories per day and most food (as high as 70 per cent in some cities) was available only on the black market.

Autarkic policies became the cause of suffering, hunger and hostility toward the regime. Thus, the fascist legacy to post-fascist government and society can be measured by the economic and social consequences of poor health and productivity in the immediate postwar era. Less obvious, however, is the cultural legacy of alimentary sovereignty in terms of postwar food habits and attitudes toward food and diet in Italy. The foods officially endorsed by fascism, the dishes promoted by domestic economists during this era and the rules of nutrition formulated by scientists were still popular in the postwar period, not because Italians were nostalgic for fascism, but, rather, the austere food habits learned under fascism had become difficult to discard, even in the midst of economic prosperity. After 1945, guest worker migrations and the economic miracle did not instantly transform Italian eating habits; rather, consumers purchased more of the foods they had always purchased and prepared them in familiar ways. Certainly, fascism's positive linkage between an austere version of the Mediterranean diet (the predominance of bread, pasta and fresh produce over dairy products and meat) and *italianità* shaped the contours of Italian food habits after 1945. By examining fascism from the perspective of alimentary sovereignty, we are forced to re-examine the question of how much power the fascist regime exerted over people's lives, both during Mussolini's reign and after his fall from power.

Although expediency, contingency and inconsistency played a role in the unfolding of food policy, alimentary sovereignty remained consistent in its goals to subordinate the desires and nutritional needs of the Italian population to autarky. The events of the World War II greatly intensified popular hardship. The Nazi exploitation of Italian resources and the population, coupled with the intensification of alimentary sovereignty in wartime, led to widespread misery

among many Italians. And, finally, the fascist government clearly influenced the ways in which Italians thought about food. The very nature of Italian cuisine today has its roots in fascism's reversal of dietary trends within Italy and efforts to halt the influence of mass consumption from without.

The origins of alimentary sovereignty

By 1922, Mussolini and his ministers inherited a situation whereby popular consumption levels increased steadily throughout World War I because of subsidized wheat prices. In effect, the wartime bread subsidy freed up household budgets so that Italians could purchase more expensive items like dairy products, fresh produce, meat, wine and olive oil. Prior to the war, social science monographs recorded that up to 70 per cent of a family's budget went toward bread, salt and oil; thus spending on bread occupied a significant portion of household budgets. World War I actually improved the nutritional quality and diversity of popular diet, partly because of state intervention and partly because prewar levels of food consumption were inadequate.⁷ When postwar inflation and the abolition of the bread subsidy cut into consumer purchasing power, Italians protested loudly, taking to the streets during the standard of living riots of 1919 and protesting the proposed abolition of the bread subsidy in 1920.⁸ Postwar governments confronted a critical issue: whether or not to continue subsidizing an improved diet at the cost of driving the national economy into further debt. While the left remained intransigent on the bread subsidy issue, conservatives worried about growing Italian dependence on foreign food sources.⁹

Postwar inflation, in particular rising food prices, further divided left and right in terms of setting priorities for Italy's economic recovery. The last word on the postwar crises came from the newly formed National Fascist Party (PNF). In June 1921, the PNF in Rome staged demonstrations and handed out leaflets stressing the need for greater public vigilance over merchants to ensure lower prices. Fascist squads also marched down Rome's Via Condotti on 17 June in order to make sure goods sold by local merchants were made in Italy.¹⁰ It appeared that one political party was willing to intervene forcefully to control prices, but could the fascists hold back inflation through bullying and intimidation? 'Could they protect the price of every last chicken?' wondered Ugo Trevisanto, president of Venice's Chamber of Commerce, warning that, in the long term, this solution was impractical: 'It is absurd to think one could overcome economic difficulties with brute force' (Trevisanto 1921 [1924]: 140). Meanwhile, consumer suspicion, irritation and frustration mounted as prices continued to rise.

During the first years of fascist rule, consumers deluged the regime with complaints about the high cost of living, especially the price of food. Salaries kept pace with the cost of living throughout most of 1922 but fell behind throughout the period 1923/4. Citizens frequently wrote to Mussolini, requesting fascist action against shopkeepers and producers for charging too

much. In January 1923, for example, a citizen of Bari and ‘a true fascist in mind and heart’ asked Mussolini to do something about the food wholesalers and retailers who sold food ‘at such exaggeratedly high prices that it is enough to make you pull your hair out in despair.’¹¹ Although the Fascist Party promised swift and decisive measures to control postwar inflation, Mussolini’s regime did not differ substantially from its liberal predecessors. Although Minister of Finance Alberto De Stefani promised dramatic action to streamline the retail sector and standardize food prices throughout Italy, the regime opted instead to leave price controls and fixed prices (the *calmiere*) to municipal authorities and prefects. To some extent, fascist hesitancy reflected the regime’s own precarious status prior to its consolidation of power in the wake of the Matteotti crisis. As the regime gained confidence, the contours of a characteristically fascist food policy emerged.

A central plank of this policy was the Battle for Grain, launched by Mussolini in June 1925 with the goal of freeing Italy from the ‘slavery’ of imported grain (Mussolini 1925; Susmel and Susmel 1960: 377–78). A great deal has been written about the impact of the Battle for Grain on Italian agriculture and rural society, as well as its symbolic value for Mussolini. With regard to food supplies and consumption, the Battle for Grain distorted Italy’s productive capacities in favor of *granarizzazione*, which meant the neglect of potentially profitable export crops – such as fresh produce, citrus fruits and olives – and the livestock and dairy industries. The attention given to wheat cultivation meant less diversity in the average Italian’s diet. In terms of food affordability, domestically produced wheat was more expensive than imported wheat, given that world prices for wheat fell after 1925. Consumers had to reshuffle household budgets because wheat bread, a dietary staple, cost more under fascism.¹²

In the wake of the Battle for Grain, the Ministries of the Interior, National Economy and Agriculture launched several campaigns to influence Italian consumers in their food choices. Campaigns were conducted through official propaganda channels (fascist periodicals, press releases, public spectacles and radio transmissions) as well as indirectly via scientific and domestic economy literature. Here, the regime promoted the ideal Italian diet, which was based on carbohydrates, not animal proteins, supplemented by fresh produce, legumes, olive oil, citrus fruit and wine. Thus, officially endorsed foods were those that could be produced within Italy. Despite the fact that popular consumption levels had improved in the years before and during World War I, the regime emphasized the austere dietary habits characteristic of nineteenth-century consumers, elevating these habits as potent symbols of political allegiance and national identity. Sober consumption habits reflected the fascist way of life and softened the impact of fascism’s form of economic shock therapy. Mussolini himself saw the nation’s nutritional status as an asset to a lean economic program that eschewed consumerist abundance, as he stated in a speech to the Senate in 1928: ‘fortunately the Italian people has not yet accustomed itself to eat many times a day, and possessing a modest level of living, it feels deficiency and suffering less.’¹³

In order to keep living standards modest and to hold down imports, Mussolini and his ministers had to convince Italians of the benefits of a simple diet. Beginning in 1928, ordinary Italians were bombarded with propaganda that stressed the political utility and health benefits of consuming only domestically produced foods. Food celebrations were the most popular methods of disseminating propaganda and included the Festival of Bread, the National Festival of the Grape, the Annual Exhibition of Fruit Cultivation and a National Day for Rice Propaganda. The most heavily promoted food festivals emphasized the conservation of wheat supplies in Italy. Instituted in 1929, the *Festa del pane* enrolled local fascist confederations of bread makers to distribute free sandwiches to the public, along with pamphlets stressing the need to conserve wheat. Fascist propaganda continually emphasized the health benefits of whole-wheat bread (*pane integrale*) because it used up less wheat than white bread (*pane di lusso*) did. Mussolini, of course, ate *pane integrale*.¹⁴ Another means of conserving wheat stocks was the promotion of rice consumption, although rice propaganda ultimately failed to overcome regional differences in consumer taste. After its founding in 1928, the National Rice Board (*Ente Nazionale Risi*) worked tirelessly to bring rice to the people: special rice lorries brought free bags of rice and samples of risotto to Italians throughout the nation. These efforts met with dismal failure in the southern regions. Unaccustomed to eating rice, southern Italians associated this food either with being too poor to afford pasta or with the military rations fed to soldiers during World War I. Perhaps the most successful food promotion was devoted to grape consumption. The National Festival of the Grape, first instituted in 1929, promoted grape consumption as a healthy alternative to wine consumption. Because it picked up on the local harvest festival or *sagra*, the National Festival of the Grape was popular across Italy, although it became increasingly organized and bureaucratized with each year. By the time of Italy's invasion of Ethiopia in 1935, the Festival emphasized autarky and military preparedness rather than folkloric traditions and rural pride.¹⁵

Although food celebrations and propaganda appear to be harmless and even amusing efforts to celebrate Italian produce, they should be viewed within the context of alimentary sovereignty. Food propaganda, along with the Battle for Grain, constituted an organized effort to shape both consumer habits and national cuisine. Contemporaneous with these efforts to influence consumers was a scientific re-evaluation of popular consumption habits within Italy. Prior to World War I, Italian scientists bemoaned the inadequacy of popular diet, especially in comparison with emerging international nutritional standards. In 1928, the *Commissione per lo Studio dei Problemi dell'Alimentazione* was founded as a subcommittee of the *Consiglio Nazionale delle Ricerche* (1923). One of the guiding aims of the Food Commission, according to a press release from 1932, was to coordinate a program of propaganda on rational diet for the preservation and development of the Italian race. This program consisted of research on the nutritional value of domestic produce as well as a national dietary inquest

(encompassing 10,000 individuals in seven provinces throughout Italy, and conducted in 1929) for Italy. The results of these endeavors, published in the Commission's *Quaderni della nutrizione* or reported in popular periodicals like *Sapere*, *La cucina italiana* or *L'alimentazione italiana*, focused on the body's minimal nutritional requirements in the event food supplies should be reduced or cut off completely.¹⁶ Not surprisingly, the Commission presented Italy's alimentary status in a positive light: popular nutrition levels, although not meeting international scientific standards, had improved throughout the 1920s. Moreover, the Commission reported that dietary improvements would continue under fascism, despite the regime's insistence on autarky and austerity.¹⁷

The general contours of alimentary sovereignty were well formed by the early 1930s. While price controls convinced consumers of fascism's interest in the cost of living, agricultural policy and propaganda subordinated consumer behavior to the demands of autarky. The Ethiopian invasion and subsequent sanctions against Italy intensified existing trends, although, after 1935, fascist propaganda linked ideas about proper Italian diet more firmly with ideas about race and military might. As Italy moved closer to imperialism, an alliance with Nazi Germany and war, Mussolini's desire for a fit population within the boundaries of autarky made little sense. Rather than provide the food necessary for increased productivity or health, the fascist regime attempted to limit the amount of food available to Italians. This decision had a dramatic impact on consumer's lives, health and the choices they made.

Autarky as a way of life

Italian consumers survived the Ethiopian invasion and sanctions with only minor price increases and temporary shortages, but the conflict ultimately drained the national budget and military reserve. Moreover, the regime failed to use Ethiopia as a kind of 'practice' for surviving a more devastating conflict. Despite all of the propaganda devoted to autarky and an austere lifestyle, Italians were ill prepared to survive the deprivations of World War II. Government delays and bungling only exacerbated wartime hardships. However, the Ethiopian invasion and sanctions reinforced autarky as Italy's destiny. Autarky had become more than a propaganda campaign; it became a way of life for many Italians.

In the days prior to and during the Ethiopian invasion, the regime continued to rely on price controls as their initial line of defense in terms of food policy. Inter-syndical Price Committees established maximum price lists for twenty-one staple foods, while Party Secretary Achille Starace instructed prefects to enforce these lists, which they did.¹⁸ Once again, the liberal policy of controlling prices worked well for the fascist regime, but failed to solve the problem of food shortages after 1935. As a result of the war, Tuesdays and Wednesdays became meatless days: no oxen, pork or poultry were sold in

markets or shops. More significantly, a decade of *granarizzazione* had taken its toll on agricultural production and the availability of certain foods. According to statistician Benedetto Barberi, in the decade 1925–35, the production and availability of fresh vegetables, fresh and dried fruit, citrus fruits, tomatoes, and livestock decreased (Barberi 1948: 5). A concrete example of the impact of declining food availability would be the decline of per capita meat consumption, from an average of 18.8 kg per year during the period 1926–30 to 14.5 kg in the year 1937. Not surprisingly, consumers purchased more fish, chicken and offal and limited their consumption of more expensive meats like beef and pork (Visco 1938: 4).

In the wake of the Ethiopian conquest, the next logical step for the regime to take in order to make autarky ‘work’ for Italian consumers would have been a more intensive agricultural development of the colonies. Initially, members of the CNR’s Food Commission and Agricultural Committee maintained high hopes to turn colonial holdings into Italy’s breadbasket. Experiments in growing crops like corn, wheat, rice, coffee and tobacco were successful, but CNR experts found themselves continually frustrated by the lack of funds to extend these experiments. Agricultural experts dispatched to Ethiopia, Eritrea and Somalia judged much of the native produce to be inedible according to Italian tastes, although a few crops like bananas, peanuts and sesame seeds were imported to Italy.¹⁹ Experts’ plans to develop the colonies went nowhere, and Italian settlers who attempted to farm the land in the colonies received little support from colonial governments and were even reduced to begging from local populations.²⁰

Ethiopia did not deal a devastating blow to Italian consumers, but increasing numbers of them found it difficult to make ends meet in the latter half of the 1930s. The regime attempted to fill the gap between consumer expectations and a declining living standard with efforts to extend charity and exhortations to scrimp and save. For example, food distributions to the poor and to children became more common during fascist food celebrations, supporting Simona Colarizi’s contention that fascist charity functioned more successfully as a public relations maneuver than as an effort to alleviate the economic woes of the population (Colarizi 1991: 91). By the late 1930s, the CNR’s Food Commission recommended as few as 2,500 calories per day for a worker engaged in 8–10 hours of moderate labor (in contrast to the British Medical Association’s Nutrition Committee, which recommended 3,400 calories per day for moderate labor in the 1930s). Less official propaganda channels also reflected austerity as a way of life. The period between the Ethiopian invasion and World War II witnessed the publication of cookbooks with titles like *Le massaie contro le sanzioni* (1935), *Per mangiar bene . . . e spender poco* (1936) and *Economia in cucina senza sacrificio a tavola* (1939), to name a few examples.²¹ Recipes from these books hardly comprised the stuff of *haute cuisine*: polenta, puddings, rice molds, offal and the ubiquitous *minestra*. On the eve of World War II, the American economist Henry Miller summed up the failure of the fascist regime

to provide consumers with an affordable diet when he observed that, by January 1938:

eggs were selling at 41 cents a dozen, cheese at 32 cents per pound, butter at 40 cents per pound, olive oil at 40 cents per liter and milk at 6.4 cents per liter. These are not low prices for a country with an average industrial wage of 11 cents per hour.

(Miller 1938: 140)

In the years between the Ethiopian invasion and World War II, food's symbolic value shifted away from representing the regime's benevolence toward representing the strength and unity of the Italian population in the face of international sanctions. Individual consumers were advised not to waste even a crumb of food: 'because a mouthful of bread . . . or a drop of oil, multiplied a million times, constitutes an incredible amount' (Alferazzi Benedettini 1936: 1).²² Thus, individual consumer behavior was linked to the destiny of the Italian nation, as fascist propagandists like Ferruccio Lantini emphasized how food imports would be unnecessary if each consumer saved 10 g of fat or 5 g of meat per day. Accompanying the exhortations to scrimp and save were admonitions for Italian consumers to be proud of Italian food and cooking. Fascist propaganda, scientific papers, recipes and celebrations like the National Festival of the Grape defined what was characteristic about Italian cuisine by emphasizing which foods *should* or *should not* be eaten and why. Although some scientists and doctors worried that popular diet was becoming less varied or nutritious, these concerns were ignored by the regime.²³ Moreover, any doubts about the nutritional quality of the Italian diet under fascism were subsumed by fascist propaganda emphasizing the positive attributes of Italian food habits and cooking styles and linking them to Italy's resistance to external influences and threats.

Prior to the fascist era, much of the published writing about Italian food was in the context of crisis, not pleasure; social science monographs that emphasized austere living conditions overshadowed the literature of culinary arts for much of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.²⁴ The fascist era, however, witnessed a minor boom in writing about Italian food-as-cuisine. Culinary magazines like *La cucina italiana*, cookbooks, histories of Italian cuisine and restaurant guides instructed middle-class readers to be proud of the country's regional diversity of cooking styles. These writings also told the history of characteristically Italian foods (wine, olive oil, pasta, bread, citrus fruits, legumes). Fascist-era gourmands frequently expressed the fear that Italian cuisine might lose its distinctiveness under the pernicious influence of Americanization or Anglicization: dishes like *bagna cauda*, *cannelloni ripieni* or *spaghetti all'amatriciana* might be replaced with insipid white bread, frozen beef and boiled chicken.²⁵ While pre-fascist Italian cookbooks and culinary literature already defined Italian cuisine (Pellegrino Artusi's *Scienza in cucina e l'arte di mangiar bene* (1891) is frequently referred to as the handbook of an Italian 'national' cuisine), fascist propaganda reinforced the notion that Italian cuisine

was national patrimony worth defending. More importantly, culinary literature of the fascist era encouraged readers to think about the survival and resistance of Italy when purchasing and preparing food. The link between food choice and national survival was firmly established during the Ethiopian invasion, when consumers were mobilized with military metaphors. 'Women of Italy,' screamed the headlines of the culinary periodical *La cucina italiana*, 'in your kitchens!' Italian consumers were revered for their sober habits and frugality, traits that stood in marked contrast to those of the American and British consumers who were accustomed to gorging themselves on fresh meat, liquor, fancy desserts and other rich foods (Simonetta 1935).

On the level of popular literature, food habits became a point of national pride and a source of resistance to external threats to fascism. The link was a highly symbolic one that elevated sobriety and moderation as defining characteristics of Italian cuisine. The link between food and national resistance was also meant literally, given that food availability became associated with Italy's ability to survive a trade embargo or war. For scientists and statisticians affiliated with *Istituto Centrale di Statistica* (ISTAT) and the *Consiglio Nazionale delle Ricerche* (CNR), the Ethiopian invasion and subsequent sanctions called into question Italy's ability to survive with import restrictions. The task at hand for the scientific community, then, was to calculate the population's minimal nutritional needs so that the government could manage the nation's food supply in the event of war.

Such calculations entailed a scientific re-evaluation of food availability and popular nutritional standards. For example, scientists from fascist-sponsored organizations like ISTAT and CNR had to determine the nutritional status and anticipated needs of the population as a whole. Prior to fascism, there were very few national studies of food-consumption habits. Nineteenth-century social scientists and reformers tended to focus on the habits of a single family or neighborhood. Although parliamentary inquests covered more regions and individuals, they often documented food habits as only part of a larger picture of life conditions. Ethiopia and the possibility of a more protracted military conflict fed the fascist desire for statistics; experts determined the minimal nutritional requirements for individuals as well as national food needs and availability.²⁶ Lorenzo Spina and Benedetto Barberi, both of ISTAT, compiled the most comprehensive surveys of food availability for the fascist period. Spina's work compared consumption levels of pre-war years (1910–14) to those of the early fascist period (1926–30) and the years of the worldwide economic depression (1928–32). His work concluded that the total volume of food consumed increased little in this period, but the proportions of food consumed had changed over time. Italians consumed more fresh vegetables, meat and fish in the 1920s than they did during the years prior to the war. Barberi's work, which charted the availability of basic foods between 1910 and 1942, confirmed Spina's findings. Barberi found increases in the consumption of wheat, milk, sugar and meat over a thirty-year span. Both Spina and Barberi found

nutritional levels to be adequate for the 1920s and early 1930s and both were cautiously optimistic about Italy's continued progress in the area of food consumption (Spina 1934).²⁷

In addition to charting changes in consumption patterns, Spina and Barberi also determined average caloric availability, per person, based on the availability of food in Italy. Spina was generous in his estimates: caloric availability, per person, rose from 3,080 calories during the war to 3,340 in the immediate postwar years, 3,477 in 1925–30 and 3,690 during the period of sanctions. Barberi's (1939b) study of the fascist years offered a slightly more conservative estimate, rising from 3,177 calories in 1922 to a high of 3,554 calories in 1926 then declining slowly to a low of 2,977 calories by 1936. Other scientists used this formula for calculating national food availability in order to determine how well Italians would fare nutritionally during a major conflict. For example, Sabato Visco (member of the CNR, editor of the journal *Autarchia alimentare*, and director of the Physiological Institute at the University of Rome) determined during the Ethiopian war that Italians would have 3,000 calories, 100 g of protein, and 70 g of fat per person daily. On the eve of World War II, Visco held to these same numbers, although he worried that the amount of protein available to Italians would decline if the war dragged on. Caloric levels and protein intake could not be reduced further, Visco warned, without a loss to the population's productivity and health (Lorenzo Spina's estimates are cited in Marescalchi 1942; Barberi 1939b; Visco 1935, 1938: 6).

The estimates of Visco and others were optimistic because they were based on the CNR's 1929 national inquest into dietary habits and nutritional standards. The 1929 inquest relied upon average man coefficients and nationally determined statistics – differences in habit and nutritional levels between regions and social classes were ignored. Moreover, the inquest was conducted before the onset of the economic difficulties of the 1930s. Differences in consumption habits between regions and classes were critical to earlier generations of social scientists who analyzed Italy's social problems through inequalities in food consumption levels. These differences still existed under fascism, but the trend toward establishing a 'national' picture of consumer habits predominated in much of the scientific and social scientific writing of the era. Thus, experts charged with the task of allocating food to the various populations within Italy had a difficult time when it came to determining who should eat what, and how much, food in the event of war.

During the Ethiopian war, Carlo Foà, director of the University of Milan's Physiological Institute, was asked by the Provincial Fascist Federation of Milan to make nutritional recommendations for Italians during economic sanctions. Foà recommended that adults engaged in moderate labor consume at least 3,000 calories per day, including 100 g of protein. His recommendations, he noted, could not be furnished based on Italy's domestic agricultural production and limited imports. Foà then recommended that Italians raise chickens and rabbits in their backyards; that farmers plant more soy, peanut and sesame crops to

supply additional protein; and, as a last resort, that the upper classes voluntarily reduce their fat and protein consumption so that laborers could get their fill (Foá 1935, 1936). Foá's recommendations indicate that there was a substantial gap between expert recommendations and the reality of fascism's policy of alimentary sovereignty. At the outbreak of World War II, the CNR's *Istituto Nazionale di Biologia* was charged with devising a plan of action to supply and distribute Italy's food during wartime. In their report, the Institute's members noted that even in the prosperous 1920s, industrial and agricultural workers in several provinces (based on the results of CNR's 1929 inquest) did not receive their own recommended 3,000 calories per day for workers engaged in moderate labor. Therefore, the Institute recommended supplementary rations of milk and meat for workers during wartime. Yet the regime was far from realizing a plan like this in 1939. Thus, Institute members suggested ways the statistical data could be manipulated (calories received from wine could be factored into the daily caloric intake, for example) so as to ensure, on record, that Italian workers received at least an adequate amount of calories per day.²⁸

Throughout the 1930s, experts like Foá and the members of the *Istituto Nazionale di Biologia* worried that the nation's health and productivity would suffer unless Italians received more protein and more food generally. Yet nutritional experts found it difficult to find a platform to voice their concerns to the regime. Filippo Botazzi, the president of CNR's Food Commission, continually requested assistance from ISTAT's Corrado Gini in order to study food consumption in relation to Italy's demographic problem. Gini, however, was not terribly interested in the social and economic factors leading to poor nutrition.²⁹ Instead, demography in fascist Italy became linked to concerns with the Italian race. Moreover, given that Mussolini's aim was to encourage the reproduction of more Italians while reducing food imports, it seemed unlikely that nutritional experts who advocated dietary improvement would have found a sympathetic ear. Several experts attempted to link food consumption with the issue of racial degeneration, but the published studies were unconvincing. The periodical *L'alimentazione italiana* published articles linking food and national character, and several pieces linked the consumption of certain foods with certain races (see, e.g., 'Il pane e la razza' 1938). Perhaps the best-known scientist who explored the connection between food and race was Giuseppe Tallarico, Parliamentary Deputy and member of the CNR's Food Commission. Tallarico published extensively on the connection between wheat bread and fertility, postulating that the wheat germ found in whole-wheat bread somehow aided human fertility. Because his work so enthusiastically supported the consumption of whole-wheat bread, Tallarico's publications were often cited in fascist propaganda on autarky and alimentary sovereignty (e.g. Tallarico 1930, 1933, 1934, 1936, 1941).

By the outbreak of World War II, autarky had become a way of life for many Italians, while scientists fully immersed themselves in the enterprise of determining the minimal standards of nutrition needed for national survival.

Everywhere, food became linked with national survival, not merely as a point of political pride or prestige, as was the case with Mussolini's Battle for Grain, but because the availability of certain foods decreased and the prospects for further decline appeared a strong possibility, given Mussolini's budding alliance with Adolf Hitler. As defined by domestic literature, scientific publications and government documents, food habits were defined by the *limits* and *restraints* placed on consumption levels by the policy of alimentary sovereignty. For the most part, Italians endured higher prices and decreased availability without major incident. However, citizens had little understanding of what was to come. During the war and especially during the German occupation, Italian civilians would suffer tremendous hardship as the 'worst-case' scenarios of scientists came true. Food or the lack thereof became a focal point of civilian discontent and resistance to fascism, whereas for the regime food became a key resource in fighting with, and against, Nazi Germany.

From alimentary sovereignty to alimentary exploitation

Statisticians and physiologists were keenly interested in food availability; Mussolini and his cabinet also were interested in these issues, especially when Italy entered World War II. Early on during the war, Mussolini was apprised of crop yields while the Ministry of Agriculture kept a census for harvests of potatoes, legumes and vegetables. Farmers of these crops could retain a small amount for personal use before selling the rest. However, it was clear from figures after 1941 that either farmers were hoarding or production had declined.³⁰ By 1941, Italy's wheat imports (coming mostly from Romania) were reduced dramatically from the previous two years. Mussolini's alliance with Hitler meant that Italy had even fewer options for importing food than it did during the period of sanctions. Italy's economic and military situation made the nation ever more dependent on Germany for war material, but what could Italy offer in return? Food and labor were the most obvious answers. After all, the population was Italy's most valuable resource in Mussolini's eyes. The fascist regime attempted to manage the two resources carefully but ceded control over both of them to Germany. Consequently, the Nazi regime took full advantage of Italy's economic and military situation by exploiting its ally.³¹

Even before the Nazi occupation of Italy in 1943, an increasing number of Italians and Italian food were exported to Germany. Before Italy entered the war, Italians were recruited to work in German industry and agriculture. By June 1942, an estimated 300,000 Italians were working in Germany, although by May 1943, this number fell to 230,000 at the request of Mussolini, who wanted laborers to return home to work for Italy's benefit. Italy had to pay for the repatriation of these workers, but after Mussolini's fall in July 1943 the repatriation process stopped altogether. Some Italian civilians were sent by the SS to Germany to work and Italian soldiers interned in Germany were put to work, while private firms continued to advertise for help in the Italian press.

The actual numbers of Italians who worked in Germany fell far short of German expectations of 1.5 million by 1944. However, as Italy's military and economic status declined, so did the value of its population (Duff 1954; Mantelli 1992).³² One of the most visceral manifestations of the population's declining value was the lack of adequate food supplies for the Italian population.

Italy's alliance with Germany had very real effects on the health and well-being of the population. Italian workers in Germany received meager rations consisting mostly of cabbage, carrots and potatoes and, in rare cases, supplemental rations of wine, tomato conserves and *parmigiano* cheese. The quality of the food left much to be desired and the quantity was considerably less than promised. Italian miners, for example, were assured a daily *minestra*, although miners complained about chronic shortages of pasta, oil and cheese. In addition, workers received 40 g of butter and a half-kilogram of bread per day, 1 kg of meat per week and 900 g of sugar a month. These paltry amounts, miners reasoned, were not enough for them to do their jobs adequately (Mantelli 1992: 317). During the German occupation of Italy, all Italians who worked for the German *Wehrmacht* were granted extra rations. Workers received special cards that enabled them to purchase items like an extra kilogram of sugar in certain stores, depending of course on availability.³³ This practice did little to lessen the impact of the black market, and oftentimes shopkeepers simply did not accept the preferential cards. Throughout Italy, Italian workers found it difficult to make ends meet: inflation, official price hikes and the black market cancelled the impact of salary increases. Thus, when workers went on strike in Milan and Turin in the fall and winter of 1943, they protested food shortages, the cost of living and the lack of supplementary rations (Klinkhammer 1993: 184, 200–26). Workers also protested against the distribution of food to German occupiers and the export of goods to Germany. Letters to Mussolini expressed disbelief and outrage that the government and merchants would even consider provisioning Germans. One letter to Mussolini from an anonymous Roman worker (dated 27 April 1944), questioned why butchers in Rome favored Germans by giving them pork and other choice cuts of meat, leaving nothing for their fellow countrymen.³⁴

Even prior to the war, in 1939–40, almost half of Italian exports were sent to Germany. In exchange for primary materials such as coal, 10 per cent of Italy's annual wheat yield (6,500,000 quintals) was exported to Germany in 1942 and this amount increased throughout the war (Gallerano *et al.* 1974; see also Raspin 1986). As a result of the Pact of Steel, Italy supplied Germany with rice, tobacco, cheese, fruits and vegetables, while Germany provided very little food in return. During the war, citizens dutifully noted the frequency of 'unofficial' exports of food from Italy to Germany. A teacher from Abruzzi, for example, complained that the German occupation force

intercepted everything and sent it to Germany while avoiding the law. They have sent back egg yolks in large bottles (they probably threw away the egg

whites). In Abruzzi, someone found an entire ham (prosciutto) in the pack of a fallen German soldier. The population is irritated by the exportation of goods to Germany, 'they are eating away at Italy' (they say).³⁵

Citizens also complained that German soldiers bought up baskets and cartons of food at local marketplaces, procured the whitest bread and the finest pasta and did not seem at all deprived or hungry. Numerous letters sent to Mussolini described the indignities of German occupation with incredulity, as one letter from a group of Milanese war veterans described:

In Milan the life of a worker's or public servant's family is very difficult because of food shortages and high prices. After the German occupation, all the food that Milan normally receives has disappeared . . . the citizens have never, ever thought that the German people, friends and allies, would treat Italians in the same manner that they treat their enemies . . . why are the Germans allowed to requisition everything to our detriment?³⁶

As food disappeared across the Italian border, the population faced increasingly severe shortages. Although it is difficult to determine with any degree of certainty how much Italians consumed, given the lack of statistical studies during the war, ISTAT figures confirm that in the years prior to the war (1936–9), the availability of food declined consistently. Italy lagged behind other European nations (Great Britain, France, Germany, Holland, Spain, Yugoslavia and Bulgaria) in terms of caloric intake and the consumption of fats, oils and milk. In terms of caloric availability, ISTAT traced a decline from an average of 2,652 calories per day, in 1936, to 1,733 calories per day in 1945.³⁷ Rationing was implemented late and covered only a few foods. Coffee and sugar were rationed at the beginning of the war in 1939; oils, fats, rice and pasta were added by the end of 1940; and bread was added in 1941. Italian consumers faced chronic shortages while transportation problems and the proliferation of the black market meant that Italians received as little as one-third of their nutritional needs with rationed foods, provided, of course, that they could obtain them.³⁸

By 1944, in Nazi-occupied Italy, bread was unavailable for days in many cities and fat rations had dropped to 20 g *per month* in some rural areas. Civilians suffered the most, as the head of the province of Milan reported in February 1945:

The availability of goods is totally insufficient because of transportation problems. The small quantities of food that have arrived are enough for the armed forces, and for worker's cafeterias and cooperatives. There is almost nothing left over for any civilian who does not frequent one of these cafeterias or cooperatives.³⁹

Edoardo Moroni, who was the RSI's Minister of Agriculture, repeatedly voiced these concerns to Mussolini throughout 1944 and 1945, begging him to request at least a half-million quintals of cereal and 300 transport trucks from Germany

so that cities could be adequately provisioned for the year 1944. The tone of Moroni's correspondence clearly demonstrates that he was bitter about Italy's subordinate position to Germany. He complained that, every time Italy received only a small amount of cereal from Germany or Hungary, the nation had to send rice, corn, cheese or sugar to Germany. Meanwhile, he reminded Mussolini, German soldiers received a generous meat ration of 750 g per week.⁴⁰

Given that Mussolini failed to act on his requests, Moroni became increasingly frustrated in his job as the Minister of Agriculture and the Director of Provisioning. Moroni also complained to Mussolini about German demands on his ministry in the midst of war, specifically, German requests for data and information throughout the summer of 1944. Germans dictated their own rationing rules to Moroni, stipulating extra rations for categories such as workers who refused to strike and doctors who treated a certain number of patients per month. All of this struck Moroni as ridiculous, given that most cities had bread available for only twenty-four hours. Moreover, Moroni wondered, how could Germans believe that '50 grams of bread here and there would silence the political demands of workers?' Moroni found the German distrust of Italians and their lack of good faith to be humiliating and frustrating, given that initially, Italians were promised German assistance with provisioning.⁴¹ Indeed, Italians were in a difficult situation. Trade between the two countries was clearly advantageous to Germany and the Nazi occupation forces worked to direct the Italian economy to ensure continued access to Italian supplies. However, German exports, especially coal, were crucial to Italy's survival.

A combination of policy failures and German exploitation spelled disaster for Italian consumers. In the years 1942–3, an average of 970 calories was available through rationed goods, provided of course that Italians could obtain their intended rations.⁴² Italians were more likely to obtain food through the black market, through bartering or by stealing produce from the surrounding countryside.⁴³ Ultimately, what was available to Italians during the war fell far below the estimations of ISTAT experts prior to the war. Based on these figures, it would seem that fascist Italy was treated more like an occupied territory than a political ally of Nazi Germany. Certainly, German occupiers had little but contempt for Italians during the war. Germans in charge of conscripted Italian labor repeatedly noted that Italian workers were not as useful as workers from other countries, especially southern Italians, who appeared to have no work discipline (Mantelli 1992: 343, 377–80). Josef Goebbels asserted that Italy never wanted to be a great power: 'Old Hindenburg was right when he said of Mussolini that even he would never be able to make anything but Italians out of Italians' (Goebbels, cited in Deakin 1962: 557). Mussolini himself shared this contempt. Certainly by the late 1930s, his much hoped-for transformation of the Italian population had not transpired. Mussolini was disappointed in Italy's military performance in Ethiopia and he despised the intellectual and middle classes at home, who were rotten with 'cowardice, laziness (and) love of the quiet life' (Mussolini quoted in Knox 1982: 13). During the brief life of the

Italian Social Republic, Mussolini became even more determined to re-ignite the fascist revolution, to transform what he called the ‘inferior category . . . physically and mentally below par, blind, lame, toothless, feeble-minded, shirkers, people lacking in some quality.’⁴⁴

Thus, over the course of a decade, from 1935 to 1945, the civilian population suffered tremendous hardship, Italian Jews were rounded up and killed during the German occupation, and Italian soldiers sacrificed their lives on the battlefield. The lives of many Italians were sacrificed so that Mussolini could pursue his military objectives in the Mediterranean. These tragedies were the most obvious results of fascist ambitions. The key to understanding the particular nature of fascist authoritarianism, however, lies with the situation endured by the civilian population every day. Italians were deprived of the means to maintain even a minimal standard of living, those who could not afford to purchase sufficient food on the black market suffered from weight loss and ill health.⁴⁵ The regime’s policy of alimentary sovereignty made it clear that Mussolini saw the Italian population as both a valuable strategic asset and as an expendable resource. The regime’s preoccupation with food availability certainly enables us to see how control over life processes facilitated a way of thinking about Italians that might be termed racist or populationist.⁴⁶ It is perhaps difficult to characterize this behavior as racist, given the current meanings attached to race and race hatreds. Racism, however, seems a more apt label than populationism because of its historical contingency. Although the ultimate goal of fascist policies and ideas was to control and manipulate the population, words like *razza* and *stirpe* were used as purposeful scientific terms. These words implied the cultivation or improvement of the Italian population from *within*. Yet the policies to improve Italian racial stock failed. When the Italian population did not meet Mussolini’s expectations, it became an expendable resource for military gain through an alliance with Hitler. The developing lines of food policy confirm this new direction in population policy: the regime’s policy of alimentary sovereignty trumped all other plans for improving the health of the population through improved consumption practice.

Conclusion

Months before the collapse of the Italian Social Republic, the mayor of Monza wrote to the head of the province of Milan, questioning the many directives and instructions to instill fascist loyalties among his citizens:

I understand that creating a ‘republic within the Republic’ is an arbitrary act, but with a hungry population, it is not worth pursuing. Collectivist principles are magnificent ideals – bread for our brains – but the stomach does not have ideals: either it is conservative – if it is full – or it is anarchist – if it is empty.⁴⁷

The new directives of the RSI, toward collectivism and nationalization, were

too little, too late. As the mayor pointed out, no political regime will work or gain support if it cannot provide for the people by filling their stomachs. This seems to be a fairly obvious point, hearkening back to early modern politics when the stability of rulers depended upon their ability to deliver food to the people. Although the fascist regime promoted and engendered myriad discussions about food and everyday life, its ultimate success turned on this question of whether or not the regime could satisfy consumer demands and needs.

Fascist food policy failed for a number of reasons. The most obvious reason was the regime's relative neglect of agricultural production while pursuing a policy of restricted imports. Moreover, the regime failed to protect Italian consumers despite numerous policies that were supposed to satisfy them. For example, early wartime policies favored the control of retail food distribution with the express intent of appeasing consumer anxiety. By the end of the war, however, the regime refused to adopt emergency political prices for food staples and could not provide even minimal sustenance through rationing. Efforts to satisfy consumers, then, did not automatically lead to a well-provisioned population. German occupiers saw the glaring deficiencies of fascist policy very clearly. German Ambassador Rudolf Von Rahn commented in correspondence of April 1944 that Italian salaries and prices were completely out of step with those throughout the rest of Europe. Moreover, Italians failed to see that autarky 'has become an absolutely impossible economic structure'.⁴⁸ Under fascism, food and its consumption were supposed to tie individuals firmly to the destiny of the nation. Here the regime succeeded admirably, given that near starvation followed in the wake of fascism's political and military defeat.

There is no doubt that fascism had an impact on Italian living standards; the dramatic decline in the standard of living, particularly during the last decade of fascist rule, devastated the population. Despite allied relief efforts and the institution of a democratic republic after World War II, many Italians wondered if living conditions would ever improve. Dreams of plenty were deferred until well into Italy's economic reconstruction. By the late 1950s, Italy's participation in the world market flooded the country with goods while the nation's 'economic miracle' provided consumers with full employment and growing discretionary incomes. At last, the average number of calories and nutrients consumed, per person, exceeded international scientific minimum standards. Surprisingly, such dramatic improvements in living standards did not lead automatically to dramatic changes in the types of foods consumed. Rather, Italian consumers chose to eat more of the foods they had always consumed. The most dramatic changes in consumption habits occurred during and after the late 1950s and reflected the steady improvement in living standards. Italians increased their consumption of tomatoes, citrus fruits, beef, veal and poultry, all of which were consumed in lesser amounts prior to World War II. Italians also purchased more coffee and sugar; these foods were less common prior to the war and thus were relatively 'new' foods introduced to the Italian diet (Zamagni 1998: 189).

Initially Italians experimented with their newfound consumer freedoms. Cocktails, thick steaks and complicated desserts were all the rage in Italian restaurants throughout the 1950s and '60s. Consumption habits flexed to incorporate this new prosperity but ultimately, they changed little in terms of the kinds of foods consumed and food habits. Cookbooks still advised housewives that a simple and hearty *minestra* satisfied the family and provided maximum nutrition. The Italian food industry reinforced existing habits by concentrating on producing and marketing the foods characteristic of the Mediterranean diet: pasta, olive oil, tomatoes, wine and bread. Despite the dramatic economic transformation for the nation, the general contours of Italian cuisine changed little. Renunciation and thrift were upheld as national values even in the midst of abundance. Regional differences in food preparation were still considered integral to understanding the nation's cuisine. And despite trade liberalization and the threat of Americanization, Italian food habits remained largely impervious to outside influences.⁴⁹ Certainly, old habits learned during periods of scarcity throughout fascist rule partially explain these phenomena. It is worth considering the possibility that economic changes alone do not explain Italian food habits; political and cultural influences continued to shape the contemporary Italian diet as a social practice even after the economy had improved dramatically. Despite its failure to provide for the Italian population, the fascist regime shaped popular habits and attitudes towards food and food choices.

Fascism also had a substantial impact on redefining the place of food consumption in national life. In the early years of fascist rule, food represented a beneficent leader, it represented a healthier population and improved living standards, and it engendered nationalist pride in Italian produce. From the dietary inquests of the *Consiglio Nazionale delle Ricerche* to the wartime studies of food availability, food was linked to the nation in ways that were distinct from those of the previous liberal era. That is, under liberal regimes, an adequate diet represented a healthy population, economic progress and hope for future generations. Under fascism, food symbolized certain national goals, but these became fascist goals, emphasizing limits and resistance rather than progress and health. It is not surprising, then, that the years in which food became so closely associated with the nation (and one's national allegiance) were also years during which the contours of the Italian diet and culinary tradition were solidly defined. Thus, while fascist associations made between nation and food had mostly a negative impact on popular health and consumer expectations, these associations laid the foundations for a specifically Italian path toward mass consumption and influenced a characteristically Italian form of cuisine.

Notes

- 1 This article is part of a larger work on the history of food consumption in Italy, to be published as *Garlic and Oil: Politics and Food in Italy* (Oxford: Berg, 2004). My research has been funded by the National Endowment for the Humanities (through

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- 2 Histories of European food policies make it clear that the first half of the twentieth century was a critical period for state intervention in controlling the distribution and supply of food, but much work remains to be done before we can understand more thoroughly the social and political ramifications of these interventions. For an overview of state intervention in the areas of food production and consumption, see Burnett and Oddy (1994).
- 3 There are numerous studies on the related topics of mass consumption and agriculture under fascism, while more general histories of Italian food consumption cover the fascist period in some detail. Recent works devoted to the history of food consumption in modern Italy include: Capatti *et al.* (1998), Capatti and Montanari (1999), La Cecla (1998) and Sorcinelli (1992). Books dealing with food consumption in the periods before and after the fascist era are Ceccarelli (2000) and Dentoni (1995).
- 4 In a recent article about Mussolini's racial state, Victoria de Grazia (2000) rightly observes that we have yet to answer some of the basic questions about the uniqueness of life under fascist rule, despite social histories that emphasize the miserable standard of living under fascism and cultural analyses that highlight the symbolic inventiveness of the regime. Historians have also neglected the legacy of fascism to the post-fascist state.
- 5 Fascist food policies were distinct from the Nazi's management of food supplies in that Hitler made a concerted effort to supply Germans with guns *and* butter, even if the *Wehrmacht* had to plunder occupied territories in order to do so.
- 6 For much of the nineteenth century and in the first decade of the twentieth, the bulk of popular diet comprised bread, pasta or polenta, accompanied by fresh produce, dried fish, olive oil or wine, depending on what consumers could afford.
- 7 Historians and contemporary observers agree that state intervention improved popular diet through the mechanisms I have mentioned. Although there were pockets of scarcity and shortages, levels of food consumption, as measured by the amount and nutritional content of the foods consumed, improved over the course of the war. See Dentoni (1995) for a detailed study of food provisioning during the war. Contemporary accounts that speak to the issues of food policy and public health include Bachi (1926) and Mortara (1925).
- 8 Bachi (1926) provides a detailed contemporary account of the postwar unrest regarding food supplies. Documents regarding the 1919 riots can be found in the Archivio Centrale dello Stato (ACS), Pubblica Sicurezza 1919, busta 153: 'Agitazione Caroviveri'.
- 9 An excellent political analysis of liberal Italy's postwar dilemma is Forsyth (1993).
- 10 Notiziario, June 18, 1921, 'Contro il caro vita – Movimento Fascista', ACS Pubblica Sicurezza 1921, b. 61, f. 4: 'Approvvigionamento'.
- 11 Letter from Giuseppe Di Cagno to Mussolini, dated 18 January 1923. ACS Comuni 1922–24, b. 1636, f. 7/15100.50 'Bari'. Merchants also wrote to Mussolini, or posted open letters to citizens in their community, defending the prices they charged and reminding citizens that merchants had not grown wealthy on account of the war or its aftermath. Prefects wrote in to the Ministry of Interior, apprising them of the local situation and merchant compliance. This correspondence can be found in ACS, Comuni 1922–24, bb. 1636, 1637.

- 12 Contemporary accounts of the impact of the Battle for Grain on consumption habits include Bandini (1937), Messadaglia (1932), Schmidt (1938) and numerous articles published in *Agricoltura fascista* (which began publication in 1929) and *La voce del consumatore* (which began publication in 1930).
- 13 Benito Mussolini, speech to the Italian Senate, Rome, 18 December 1928, 'Concerning the Economic Policy of the Regime', reprinted in *Speeches of Benito Mussolini* (1932: 129).
- 14 Accompanying the promotion of whole-wheat bread was a campaign against the consumption of white bread, made from more expensive and refined white flour. The campaign against white bread started in 1925, in response to the poor wheat harvest of 1924. The Ministry of National Economy refused to subsidize a political price for bread, urging instead the production of whole-wheat bread and declaring a milling tax so that consumers who desired refined white bread had to pay more for it. Bakers continued to produce mostly white bread, precisely because it cost more and consumers were willing to pay for it.
- 15 On the early Festival of the Grape celebrations, prefects reported local activities to the Ministry of Interior, ACS, *Pubblica Sicurezza* 1930–31, b. 307, s.f. 14, 'Celebrazione giornata uva'. By 1937, the Festival was organized by the Ministero dell'Agricoltura e Foreste (Comitato Centrale Organizzatore della Festa Nazionale dell'Uva) and media coverage stressed the ties between grape consumption, autarky and military preparedness. For example, coverage of the 1935 festival stressed Italy's military preparedness by highlighting exhibits and parade floats that used soldiers, blackshirts, cannons and other weapons to showcase the production and consumption of grapes. For example, the prize-winning float for the 1935 parade in Rome was a group of cannons festooned with grapes. See 'Vibrante entusiasmo popolare' (1935).
- 16 Documents on the founding of the Food Commission can be found in ACS, *Consiglio Nazionale delle Ricerche* (CNR), b. 232. In addition, the Food Commission published the *Quaderni della nutrizione*, which began publication in 1934. The CNR Commission undertook massive studies of popular diet from 1929 onward, assessing the population according to average man coefficients and emphasizing the total number of calories consumed throughout the nation. This was in distinct contrast to pre-fascist monographs and studies that examined regional and class differences in dietary habits as well as detailed information about nutrient (fats, proteins and carbohydrates) intake. The CNR Commission also calculated the availability (*disponibilità*) of calories for the entire nation. The link between the Commission's work on food habits and Italy's survival of a trade embargo became obvious with the Ethiopian invasion, when CNR experts assured the Italian public the nation could survive on very little (see, for example, interview with Sabato Visco (1935), director of National Institute of Physiology at the University of Rome).
- 17 Favorable reports on the CNR inquest include Galeotti (1934) and 'Notizie' (1934/1935).
- 18 Prefects reported little or no trouble implementing price reductions. ACS, Comuni, 1934–36, b. 2454.
- 19 ACS, CNR, Comitato Agricoltura, bb. 144, 146, 148. On colonial agricultural campaigns, see Confederazione Fascista degli Italiani (1939), Ferrari (1937), Visco (1936) and Taschdjian (1936). Numerous articles on the nutritional value of Ethiopian food were published in the *Quaderni della nutrizione*. On the marketing of products from Ethiopia, see Pinkus (1995).
- 20 On agricultural policies in the colonies, see Larebo (1994).
- 21 Domestic economy literature boomed under fascism, including writing about the

- culinary arts and Italy's household rationalization movement. A concise summary of this literature can be found in Moroni Salvatori (1998).
- 22 On the link between individual consumer habits and national resistance, see Lantini (1936a, b).
 - 23 For example, in the fall of 1937, at an international conference on the status of nutritional research held in Rome, Filippo Botazzi (President of the CNR Food Commission) publicly questioned the wisdom of declining nutrition levels, in particular, levels of protein consumption (Botazzi 1938).
 - 24 One exception is of course Pellegrino Artusi's *La scienza in cucina e l'arte di mangiar bene* (1891), which compiled a list of characteristically Italian foods and dishes, examined regional culinary diversity as a positive aspect of Italian cuisine, and instructed the fledgling middle classes in the ways of hygiene and nutrition.
 - 25 Explorations of national and regional foods include Rivetta (1938), Touring Club Italiano (1931) and Federazione Nazionale Fascista Pubblici Esercizi (1938). Fascist-era food histories include Ducceschi (1936) and Marescalchi (1942). A contemporary analysis of food consumption and Italian identity is Pugliese (1937).
 - 26 In 1885, the Ministry of Interior, in collaboration with the General Office of Statistics, surveyed foodstuffs available for consumption, but did so without distinguishing between the use of foods for human consumption and for other reasons, like for use in animal fodder. The same General Office of Statistics kept track of several basic food items during World War I. The government sponsored several national inquests, beginning with the *Inchiesta Granaria* of 1914–15; also, the General Office of Statistics and the Ministry of Interior solicited reports from prefects and chambers of commerce regarding food availability throughout the war (see Barberi 1939a: 8).
 - 27 See also Guido Galeotti's (1934) summary of Spina's work; and Barberi (1939a, 1948).
 - 28 *Istituto Nazionale di Biologia*, CNR, undated report from 1939, 'Breve relazione sulla esigenze alimentari della popolazione civile,' 18 pages. ACS, Ministero Agricoltura e Foreste, Direzione Generale Alimentazione, b. 62, s.f. 31: 'Fabbisogni'.
 - 29 On relations between Gini and other scientific experts, see Israel and Nastasi (1998: 106–48). On demography under fascism, see Ipsen (1996).
 - 30 See 'Appunto per il Duce', Ministero dell'Agricoltura e Foreste, 15 November 1941, in ACS Ministero Agricoltura e Foreste, D.G. Alimentazione, Serie V, 1939–57, b. 23, s.f. IV/12: 'Varie, 1941'.
 - 31 The Rome–Berlin axis led to the adoption of anti-Semitic legislation in Italy in November 1938, but the alliance also sanctioned the Nazi racial classification of Italians, ranked somewhere below the rest of western Europe but somewhere above eastern Europe and the Soviet Union.
 - 32 Spanish workers contracted to work in Germany experienced similar discrimination in terms of work conditions and food rations (see Bowen 2000: 187).
 - 33 Letter from Il Comandante Germanico di Roma, Esercito Tedesco in Italia, to Ministero dell'Interno, Rome, dated 23 February 1944. ACS, Repubblica Sociale Italiana, Ministero dell'Interno, Direzione Generale Pubblica Sicurezza, Capo della Polizia RSI–Chierici (1943–45), b. 35, f. 56: 'Trattamento preferenziale circa generi alimentari, ai lavoratori e famiglie'.
 - 34 Letter dated 27 April 1944, from 'Un'Italiano dela [sic] povera affamata Roma' to Mussolini, ACS, RSI, Segretaria Particolare del Duce, Carteggio Riservato (1943–45), b. 18, s.f. 1: 'Situazione locale, varia'.
 - 35 Interview with a citizen from Abruzzi, published in Luzzatto-Fegiz (1948: 85); see also the interview excerpts printed on p. 101.

- 36 Letter, from 'Gruppo di ex-combattenti, 1915–1918' to Mussolini, dated 7 April 1944. ACS, RSI, SPD, Carteggio Riservato (1943–45), b. 17, f. 92, s.f. 7.
- 37 According to statistics compiled by the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) after the war. See Cavazzoli (1989: 53–5).
- 38 There was constant bickering among fascist bureaucrats over the amount of food rations certain populations should receive. Each time a food was placed on the rationing list, fascist organizations would write in to the Direzione Generale dell'Alimentazione (General Office of Food Provisioning) requesting additional food supplies for their constituencies. These requests can be found in ACS, Ministero dell'Agricoltura e Foreste, *Direzione Generale Alimentazione*, b. 43, s.f. 'Richieste di nuovi riconoscimenti'.
- 39 Capo della Provincia, Milano, 'Appunto per il Duce: Relazioni mensili comunali mese di dicembre', dated 19 February 1945. ACS, RSI, SPD, Carteggio Riservato (1943–45), b. 17, f. 92, s.f. 1.
- 40 Ministero dell'Agricoltura e delle Foreste, Report on food availability, 1944, 35 pp.; 'Situazione Alimentare, Appunto per il Duce,' 28 July 1944; and 'Importazioni dalla Germania, Appunto per il Duce,' 24 October 1944. ACS, RSI, SPD, Carteggio Riservato (1943–45), b. 82, f. 653.
- 41 Ministero dell'Agricoltura e delle Foreste, 'Limiti e carattere dell'ingerenza germanica, nei suoi eccessi: Appunto per il Duce', 27 May 1944. ACS, RSI, SPD, Carteggio Riservato (1943–45), b. 82, f. 653.
- 42 Per capita rationing levels in Italy were among the lowest in all of Europe, comparable to occupied Poland's during the war (see Table 1).
- 43 See for example the oral testimonies compiled by Sandra Lotti (1986) regarding life conditions in Pesaro during the war.
- 44 Mussolini's speech of 17 April 1943, cited in Deakin (1962: 319).
- 45 See Luzzatto-Fegiz (1946, 1948) for a study of food and living conditions in Trieste during the war.
- 46 On this issue see Victoria de Grazia's (2000) article on the radicalization of population policy under fascism, 'Die Radikalisierung der Bevölkerungspolitik im Faschistischen Italien: Mussolini's "Rassenstaat"'.
- 47 Capo della Provincia di Milano, 'Appunto per il Duce: Relazioni mensili comunali mese di dicembre', dated 19 February 1945, p. 8. ACS, RSI, SPD, Carteggio Riservato (1943–45), b. 17, f. 92, s.f. 1.
- 48 Letter from Ambassador Rahn to Mussolini, 19 April 1944. ACS, RSI, SPD, Carteggio Riservato (1943–45), b. 23, f. 164.
- 49 For example, Italy has had fewer supermarkets per capita than France or Germany: in 1970, Italy had one supermarket for every 122,461 inhabitants, compared with one for every 34,357 inhabitants in France and one for every 31,326 inhabitants in West Germany. The majority of purchases throughout the 1960s and '70s were made in small stores, not supermarkets (Vercelloni 1998: 958). Italy has also resisted the siren call of American-style fast food restaurants like McDonald's more successfully than its European counterparts. There are approximately 300 McDonald's restaurants in Italy employing 10,000 workers, compared with France where McDonald's boasts 900 restaurants and 35,000 employees. Numbers are from the McDonald's websites: www.mcdonalds.com and www.mcdonalds.it.

Table 1 Calories available, per capita, through rationed foods

	1941	1942	1943	1944
Italy	1010	950	990	1065
Germany	1990	1750	1980	1930
Poland	850	1070	855	1200

Source: Clough (1964: 278).

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