

Diana Garvin. Feeding Fascism: The Politics of Women's Food Work

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Diana Garvin. *Feeding Fascism: The Politics of Women's Food Work*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2022. Pp. xv + 276. ISBN 9781487528188.

This volume brings an important addition to the canon, particularly for scholars of Fascism, of foodways, and of women's history. In her crisp and clear prose, Diana Garvin offers an overview of the tensions between Fascism as political ideology and the ineluctable realities that Italian women confronted as they prepared their increasingly meagre meals during the *ventennio fascista*.

The book is deceptively brief; supported by a variety of illustrations and photographs, it explores comprehensively the world of Italian foodways during the years of Fascist government, including the effects beyond. Envisaging Fascism not as a parenthesis, as Benedetto Croce had declared, but as a magnifying glass (6), the author gives us three standpoints: first, a wide-ranging theoretical perspective of women's history through thematic approaches (7); second, the confirmation that food production and consumption imply participation at individual, regional, and national levels (7); and third, that women's subjectivity in the matter of Fascist food policies brings to the fore the ontological space between consent and rebellion against the intrusion of the Italian state into the private space of the kitchen (8). Garvin's study is shaped by the work of Arjun Appadurai and Michel de Certeau. Since she also employs the methodological considerations of Jean Bellemin-Noël's *critique génétique*, the volume is the felicitous result of numerous and detailed research stops in many archives and museums, in Italy and in the United States where Garvin has explored the marginalized histories of Fascist Italy.

Chapter 1, "Towards an Autarkic Italy," provides background information about post-First World War food practices that set the stage for the legally instantiated regulations of Fascism. Garvin describes how after the Battle for Grain launched in 1925, bread, the most basic of all foods, competed with the push to make rice the more desirable grain. Rice was versatile and plentiful, but the Italians did not want it. Here begins what Garvin calls the rhetoric of battle in foodways (46), aimed at making the population (especially women) strong and healthy. Robust rural women were pitted against the thin and urban crisis-women as the government pushed to raise the status of autarkic foods. Garvin perceptively notes that many of these practices were actually already in line with existing Italian foodways, but it was the political imposition that was new. Analyzing advertisements and artifacts, she convincingly demonstrates how Fascism worked to "reform the body, ultimately creating new definitions of nationality" (46).

Of additional interest in this chapter are her observations on Fascist attitudes to breastfeeding.

Chapter 2, "Agricultural Labour and the Fight for Taste," continues the focus on the "ruralizzazione" of Italy. Here Garvin points specifically to rice production and how it affected the *mondine* (the female rice workers) in the strenuous forty-day period of the summer weeding season. She outlines women's revolts against the regime, first by the *mondine* whose dissatisfaction began in their songs and ended in strikes (82). The *mondine* "proved themselves to be anything but willing soldiers" (83) in the battle for autarkic foodways and sought ingenious ways including artwork and song to manifest that they did not consent to or concur with official propaganda campaigns. Chapter 3, "Raising Children on the Factory Line," moves to the urban environment of women employed in factories. Women did indeed work outside the home, belying Mussolini's contention that doing so was physically dangerous to women and could cause infertility (88). The chapter concentrates on the efforts of Luisa Spagnoli, founder of the Perugina chocolate factory and of the Spagnoli fashion house, who while not a supporter of the Duce, did meet him. Years before, she had already initiated practices (like breastfeeding rooms, daycare, hot lunches) later appropriated by Fascism. Clearly the fact that the company had espoused "rationalized production" and Taylorist attitudes of time management and highly controlled work environments to ensure efficient output, appealed to the Fascist agenda. Ironically, chocolate was a luxury considered autarkic by the regime and the factory was allowed to continue production (103).

Spagnoli was an exceptional example of female entrepreneurship in Fascist times. Other enterprising women found outlets for promoting government food policies through their prolific recipe book publications, as described in chapter 4, "Recipes for Exceptional Times." Among these were Dr. Amalia Foggia's and Ada Boni's works, volumes complementing the increased appearances of recipes and household advice in newspapers and magazines, all intent on compelling women to do more with far less, especially as rationing became a necessity after 1940. Garvin emphasizes that while "wartime pushed women to negotiate the boundaries of Italian cuisine to the outer limits of taste and edibility [...] this does not mean that [women] engaged in such projects willingly" (151). This chapter also studies the work of designer Lidia Morelli on the physical space of the Fascist kitchen and how it came to embody an enforced ideology for the Fascist-conforming housewife. Chapter 5, "Model Fascist Kitchens," elaborates further

with a study of designs published in *Domus* and in Morelli's *Dalla cucina al salotto*; these are spaces whose diminished sizes purportedly addressed Fascist desiderata that promoted "alloggio minimo" lifestyles (165) such as efficiency, cleanliness and hygiene, ergonomics and techno-modernism but whose shiny tiles, gleaming electric appliances, and white floors destroyed the heart and soul of the traditional family kitchen.

Garvin is clearly highly passionate about her work on Fascism and Italian foodways.

Following the brief concluding pages, and before a rich and relevant bibliography, she offers her readers an extra gift of mentorship by guiding them through the many possible archives and libraries where they might continue their own explorations. Unabashedly promoting the often overlooked historiography of Italian women during Fascism and their kitchens, she suggests that future researchers give serious consideration to cookbooks and the spaces in which women worked. She advocates a holistic study and convincingly promulgates "the power of the small" (223).

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