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How Fascism Ruled Women: Italy, 1922-1945 by Victoria De Grazia

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the scholarly literature about socialism, the post-World War I political crisis, the fascist years, resistance, and the rebuilding of Italy from 1944 to 1950.

The picture Magnani draws is of an intelligent, principled man, endowed by his upbringing and education with a social conscience and a firm belief in the possibility of progress. Montemartini was always in the reformist branch of the Socialist Party, yet consistently accepted party discipline and the party line even when in the dissenting minority. Magnani finds his interpretations in the realm of ideas and attitudes: he sees a large shift of intellectuals from the rationalist positivism of late-nineteenth-century socialism, which Montemartini shared, to the nationalist idealist irrationality of protofascists and fascists. At the same time he shows that Montemartini, like other socialists, was passive too long about the fascist threat while his party pursued an independent course of opposition and split over the possibility of revolution. This too he sees as a matter of attitudes, remarking that the revolutionary mentality that captured the majority of the Socialist Party was "foreign to the culture of Pavese society" (p. 156), and that Montemartini continued to preach education to prepare citizens for political participation as the moment for a vigorous democratic coalition against fascism passed (p. 164). Although his faith in the programs and ideas of the 1890s lost Montemartini his seat in parliament and led to threats and harassment, he nevertheless was appointed to the University of Palermo and passed the next ten years in his laboratory and library. Returning to the Pavese as the war started, he lived quietly until the Germans retreated, when he was recalled to public office by popular acclaim, becoming provisional mayor of Mont Beccaria and later a member of the Constituent Assembly and a senator. Montemartini lived long enough to see the democratic front that emerged from the resistance split, the Christian Democratic Party begin its long hegemony in Italy, and the ideas he fought for again supported only by a minority. Magnani's scholarly study is well-written and informative but modest in its interpretive ambitions.

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VICTORIA DE GRAZIA. *How Fascism Ruled Women: Italy, 1922–1945*. (A Centennial Book.) Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press. 1992. Pp. xiii, 350. \$29.95.

Many of us in Italian history have long awaited a study like Victoria De Grazia's book. Outside of a few excellent articles, little has been available in English on the experience of Italian women between the two world wars for use by scholars or in the classroom. This gap has been especially glaring in light of the wealth of writing on German women in the same period, from Jill Stephenson's *Women in Nazi Society*,

published as far back as 1975, to Claudia Koonz's recent *Mother in the Fatherland* (1987). De Grazia's book provides an excellent foundation for further inquiry into this chapter of Italian women's history by daring to offer a broad panorama of diverse topics such as sex, work, family, popular culture, and politics. In all cases, it shows that women's lives, at least in the twentieth century, have not been private and unchanging, but heavily influenced by policies of the state.

De Grazia contends that it was not until the interwar era that the Italian state sought to "nationalize" women, as it had men in the nineteenth century (p. 6). In contrast to the liberal monarchy, which had ignored women, Benito Mussolini realized he could not build a successful fascist state without them. While I believe the Italian state did intervene before World War I to control directly certain groups of "dangerous" women like prostitutes and unwed mothers, the author is correct in pointing to the 1920s and 1930s as the first era of massive legislation targeting all classes of women. Such legislation sought to restrict women to their "natural" role of motherhood in order to encourage the population growth necessary for Italy's imperialist dreams. Combining repression with welfare incentives, a series of fascist laws discouraged female education, excluded women from certain jobs, made birth control and abortion crimes against the state and race, established social services for pregnant women and babies, and gave economic incentives to parents of large families.

Although such measures seemed simply to reinforce women's traditional status, fascist policy toward women was shot through with contradictions. It extolled the family, yet replaced mothers with fascist youth organizations as the inculcators of values for children. It preached the national duty of women to have many children, yet created such a low-wage economy that an increasing number of married women sought abortions rather than have children they could not afford. According to De Grazia, fascism pulled women in two directions because it wanted them both to modernize by actively supporting state-building and at the same time to return to a past characterized by submission to traditional authority.

The book is perhaps most innovative in its reconstruction of the experience of girls growing up in Italy in the 1920s and 1930s. Despite official propaganda that painted the ideal young woman as a plump, healthy farm lass with horizons no broader than her village, many girls were attracted to the modern, urban fashions and lifestyles portrayed in foreign, often American, magazines and films. In fact, the new cinemas became a female space of entertainment as young women, no longer content to stay at home, sought an alternative to the male cafés. This discussion of popular culture—based on a rich variety of sources including novels, magazines, films, and photographs—shows that Italy was not cut off

from foreign influences during the interwar period. Despite ideological bludgeoning, Italian girls, like their foreign sisters, aspired to become “new women” enjoying more freedom before marriage and companionship within marriage.

Older women who sought activities outside the home, many of whom had been suffragists before World War I, found their opportunities severely restricted by the dictatorship’s prohibition on women’s political activity. Excluded from a party hierarchy that no longer permitted discussion of equal rights, women had to content themselves with promoting culture and charity. Rather than fighting the regime, most activist women—like Teresa Labriola, one of the first female lawyers in Italy—theorized a new “Latin feminism” that rejected Anglo-American individualism and emphasized the devotion of women to improving the family and race (p. 236). Whether this movement really fits anywhere on the spectrum of historical feminism is a question that should inspire future research.

Like all surveys, this book neglects certain topics. Lower-class women receive much shorter shrift than middle-class and aristocratic women, many of whom are painted in lively vignettes. Despite the chapter on work, the reader comes away with little sense of the everyday life of women employed in factories, farming, and housework. Probably the paucity of current research on lower-class women in Italy and the difficulty of reconstructing their attitudes and experiences explains this weakness. But De Grazia intelligently succeeds in her aim of introducing a host of new issues into the historiography of fascist Italy.

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ROY PALMER DOMENICO. *Italian Fascists on Trial, 1943–1948*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press. 1991. Pp. xvii, 295. \$39.95.

The cleansing of nations at the end of World War II, or defascistization, involved two activities: first, the purge of an indeterminate “political class”; and second, trials of those who had committed allegedly “criminal” acts. Both sets of “sanctions” as applied in Italy comprise the subject of Roy Palmer Domenico’s book.

The principal question Domenico asks is why, with fascism totally discredited between 1943 and 1945, sanctions were so limited and ineffectual. The answer is no great revelation. The Allies left the Italians largely to execute their own sanctions (although the American Charles Poletti’s administration in Palermo, Naples, and Rome was an exception), and the Italian Center-Right coalition, most of which had supported Mussolini during the *ventennio* (1922–43), retained sufficient influence to attenuate punishment. The defascistization process began with Pietro Badoglio’s government in the *Regno del Sud* in 1943 and

concluded with the ascendancy of Alcide de Gasperi’s Christian Democrats in 1946. Surprisingly, the Center-Right found an ally in the Communist Party, whose motives for hindering sanctions are still conjectural.

The legislative decree of July 27, 1944, the centerpiece of the antifascist program, tried a pragmatic approach by using September 8, 1943, the date royal Italy switched sides in the war, to distinguish between fascists of the *ventennio* and those of Salò. But the divide was too arbitrary and unworkable, if only because liberation of the Italian peninsula proceeded so slowly. In spite of the appointment of such luminaries as Carlo Sforza and Pietro Nenni to head the High Commission for Sanctions against Fascism, both purge and trials encountered mounting skepticism and opposition with the passage of time. Ultimately, sanctions were overwhelmed by the institutional question. King Victor Emmanuel III’s collaboration with the fascist regime was emblematic of Italy’s power structure at large; thus, the republican victory in the 1946 referendum constituted a surrogate for effective sanctions. Domenico does refer to “the passing of the highly visible monarchy . . . adding to the notion that sanctions had been resolved” (p. 206), but he might have expounded further on this fundamental truth.

At the final count, Rome reported that of 394,041 bureaucrats investigated, 1,580 were dismissed (728 in the top grades), 531 retired early, and 8,803 had a reprimand placed in their dossiers. Trials of *gerarchi* and blackshirts in 1945 yielded a number of judicial executions (as opposed to thousands of killings by partisans) and some lengthy prison sentences. But in 1946 an amnesty, prompted partly by an attempt to extend sanctions to business collaborators with fascism, commuted all death sentences and canceled or drastically reduced prison terms. At the same time, the Italian state used force to quash vigilante justice. The strongest proponents of sanctions were, of course, the antifascist resistance fighters who nurtured the dream of a purified new Italy. The failure of sanctions coincided with the exhaustion of this revolutionary “wind from the north.” Domenico is at pains to stress that sanctions “were not directed at the state’s machinery but rather at its members.” In other words, “the program would never be the first assault in a truly revolutionary restructuring of Italian relationships between power, wealth, and class” (p. 228). The same could be said of *épuration* in France and even denazification in Germany.

This book is a thoroughly competent monograph, well grounded in the archival materials of both Italy and the Allies. There is a certain amount of repetitiveness, necessary perhaps to keep in view the links between details and the larger picture. The book is valuable not least because no other English-language treatment of the topic exists, and it compares well