

Reviews

Feeding Fascism: The Politics of Women's Food Work

Diana Garvin

Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2022

292 pp. Illustrations. \$36.95 CAD (paper); (eBook)

This splendid book explores how the fascist Italian state used food to expand its power and regulate women as well as how women responded through their management of food as agricultural laborers, factory workers, entrepreneurs, cookbook authors, and custodians of domestic kitchens. The book focuses on the *ventennio fascista* (1922–1943) in north central Italy, principally in the regions of Lombardy, Piedmont, and Emilia-Romagna, but it has broad relevance to the interplay between the state and women everywhere and to the ways women enact and resist political imperatives in their quotidian food labor. Garvin's analysis of this process harks back to Anne Allison's (1991) groundbreaking paper on Japanese mothers' perpetuation of the ideological state apparatus through their labor to produce appealing lunch boxes for their children.

Feeding Fascism is full of fascinating details resulting from exhaustive and meticulous historical research. It makes a major contribution by focusing on food material culture, discovering and mining a treasure trove of culinary ephemera from underexplored small regional museums and archives. The book features eighty-one striking illustrations including advertisements for Perugia chocolate and Nestlé's infant formula; covers of women's magazines, cookbooks, and recipe pamphlets; kitchen architectural drawings, appliances, and furniture; photos of women rice-workers, model kitchens, and the Perugia factory nursery; and many more. Garvin shows that culinary ephemera make great data as they reveal both the public face of fascism and women's intimate experiences of it.

Garvin explores fascist Italy's construction of women's domestic roles, particularly birthing and nurturing virile men to support the regime. In response to the League of Nations' sanctions against fascist Italy, the state pushed for alimentary

autarky by reducing food imports and increasing domestic production, exhorting women to cook homegrown rice and oats instead of pasta made of imported wheat. The fascist *Massaie Rurali* (country housewives) trained female teachers to travel the countryside "to lead evening classes and weekend workshops, instructing rural women in party-approved methods for cooking, gardening, and farmyard animal raising" (p. 31). Simultaneously the state urged women to propagate, breastfeed, and raise many children.

Garvin explores women's agricultural labor under fascism, which was exalted in propaganda but paid only 60 percent of men's work. She delves into popular country almanacs that in the 1930s increasingly targeted farmwomen to join the pursuit of autarky, for example, by raising rabbits and poultry. She examines female rice-workers called *mondine* and their efforts through strikes and protest songs to resist the hunger they suffered due to inadequate rations and the devaluation of their labor. Garvin also explores women at the Perugia chocolate factory — both its norm-busting founder Luisa Spagnoli and the female workers she employed. At the factory, Spagnoli established breastfeeding rooms, nurseries, and a cafeteria with inexpensive and nutritious food — combining "social welfare with social control" (p. 13) and providing a model that the fascist state later extended to other workplaces.

Garvin's research will be of particular interest to *Gastronomica* readers, for she shows how cookbooks and kitchen design were direct political tools of fascism rather than merely reflections of its ideology. Garvin draws out the influence of three female authors — Amalia Moretti Foggia ("Petronilla"), Lidia Morelli, and Ada Boni — who established professional careers by writing cookbooks that translated Fascist food policies of autarky and rationing into home cooking. Garvin likewise focuses on seemingly innocuous kitchen design, particularly drawing on "model Fascist kitchens to illustrate how apparently apolitical spaces enacted policy through design" (p. 13). She examines how architecture journals designed rationalist kitchens for the new public housing projects to maximize hygiene and women's domestic productivity. They

promoted labor-saving design and appliances and autarkic materials (e.g., Italian aluminum) with the goal of governing working-class women's behaviors and bodies in support of the fascist agenda.

The book demonstrates the continuing influence of fascism on Italian foodways, an influence richly described by Carol Helstosky (2004) and visible in the presence of vegetables, grains, and legumes in the diet and in the still largely uncontested association of women with domestic labor and nurturing the family. *Feeding Fascism* contributes to scholarship on food politics, on Italian history and culture, and on fascism's specific quotidian penetration of Italian women's lives, extending the path-breaking work of Victoria de Grazia (1993). Its detailed study of the Perugina factory's institutionalization of breastfeeding rooms and nurseries contributes to Elizabeth Dixon Whitaker's (2000) careful study of fascism's control of women through medicalization of reproduction. *Feeding Fascism* adds significantly to the field of feminist food studies by focusing on the class and occupational diversity of women's food work and interrogating both women's oppression and resistance. The book also contributes significantly to food studies methodology by showing the value of "archives that are small, isolated, and difficult to find" (p. 222). Scholars have given such archives little attention, yet Garvin found that they often "hold the types of regional, everyday culinary ephemera of women's lives" (p. 222) capable of illuminating their food work in insightful ways.

The book is packed with interesting data and is gracefully written and clear. Garvin performs an important service by consistently giving the original Italian along with exact English translations, enhancing the book's value to Italianists and its accessibility to all readers. The book is suitable for undergraduate and graduate students in food studies, gender, politics, and Italian history. It makes a particular contribution in revealing both the interplay between state-level politics and women's daily lives and the value of historical methodology based on analyzing culinary ephemera. Moreover, it is a fascinating read.

—Carole Counihan, Millersville University

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Smothered and Covered: Waffle House and the Southern Imaginary

Ty Matejowsky

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232 pp. Illustrations. \$39.95 (hardcover); eBook

The preface of *Smothered and Covered: Waffle House and the Southern Imaginary* begins not with a studious observation but with the inspiration for the book: an amusing anecdote of author Ty Matejowsky's unforgettable experience eating a pre-dawn breakfast at the popular restaurant with his family while traveling one holiday season. In the United States, this twenty-four-hour eatery has developed an unflattering reputation for drawing after-hours pandemonium ranging from unconventional behavior to criminal activity. Predictably, Matejowsky's recollection involved an intoxicated customer who slept, snored, and even flirted with Matejowsky's wife. In serving up this engaging story, the author skillfully leverages the reader's expectations about Waffle House to segue into a critical analysis that ultimately reveals there is more to this greasy spoon than southern breakfast fare and a seedy reputation.

In this first scholarly monograph dedicated to studying the popular restaurant Waffle House, Matejowsky (an anthropologist and fast food scholar) explores the chain's place in the American South as both a product and symbol of the region it represents. The work is organized thematically into five chapters that examine the restaurant's precursors (namely, early diners and lunch counters), the chain's history from its mid-twentieth-century founding to the COVID-19 pandemic of the 2020s, Waffle House's apparent reputation for attracting nocturnal mayhem, the restaurant's disturbing legacy concerning racial discrimination, and the brand's place in American popular culture.

As varied as these topics are, *Smothered and Covered* employs the concept of the "southern imaginary" to thread them into a cohesive study. This theoretical approach examines the paradoxical complexities and often exaggerated perceptions and expressions of southern identity. More than a diner known for serving regional classics like sweet tea, grits, biscuits, pork chops, and pecan pie, Matejowsky demonstrates that Waffle House serves as an insightful microcosm for understanding the contemporary American South as a whole. The "Waffle House and Race" chapter is particularly instructive. Despite touting itself as "America's place to eat" and promoting longtime beloved African American employee Lucy Shelton as the face of the diner, the chain's well-documented history of racial discrimination mirrors the southeastern United States' conflicting heritage of profusive hospitality