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BOOK REVIEW

Feeding Fascism: The Politics of Women's Food Work

by Diana Garvin, Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 2022, 292pp., $75.00 (hardback), ISBN 9781487528188

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Seven kilometres from the centre of Forlì, Emilia Romagna, lies Villa Carpena – Casa dei Ricordi. Formerly the home of Benito Mussolini, his wife Rachele, and their children, the house is now an unofficial museum of Fascism, packed with the material culture and relics of the regime and staged as though the Duce were still in residence. On entering the building, visitors are greeted by a tour guide who gives a brief introduction before directing the group to the first room of their visit: the kitchen. As he stepped over the threshold to Rachele's 'kingdom', the guide on the day I visited justified the time Rachele spent here, despite the family's status: 'She never pretended to be an emancipated woman. She always wanted to remain a woman of the people, a housewife.'

Diana Garvin's new book, *Feeding Fascism: The Politics of Women's Food Work*, looks past the gilded hearths of Fascist leaders, and transports us instead to rice paddies, factories and working-class kitchens. This important intervention in Fascism scholarship examines cooking, foraging, and labour in fields and factories to understand 'what happened *between* rebellion and consent' (p. 8) throughout the *ventennio*. Insightful analysis of the everyday is fed by a veritable smörgåsbord of sources – a metaphor that would never have made it to press in Fascist Italy given the regime's commitment to linguistic autarky, which saw foreign culinary terms banned and 'sandwich' become *traidue* (between the two, denoting the position of the filling between bread) (p. 162). Floor plans, teasets, food wrappers and advertisements, many of which are reproduced in the 81 illustrations that enrich the text, are read alongside textual sources including recipe books and almanacs, and the songs of the *mondine* working in rice paddies.

Organised thematically, but with chronological coherence, the book's opening chapter on the regime's pursuit of autarky – desirable not only for its potential to offset trade deficits – examines the ways 'propaganda framed food as an edible panacea' (p. 18), diverting nutrients to make men stronger and women more fertile. Rice was the star ingredient of the autarkic feast – indeed, the Futurist leader Marinetti 'famously blamed what he viewed as Italy's essential backwardness on its citizens' excessive pasta consumption' (p. 26) – as evidenced in Garvin's analysis of *ricettari* in chapter 2. Part food pamphlet, part cookbook, part medical manual, these texts promoted a home-grown grain like rice, oatmeal, or cornmeal as part of the regime's Battle for Grain, a campaign to make Italy's wheat production self-sufficient. Small and easily slipped into an apron, the *ricettari* 'could enter private homes to directly address women, and … modify behaviour in ways that would change the body from the inside out' (p. 61).

The third chapter takes us to a unique case study, the Perugina chocolate factory, where we find rooms for breastfeeding, onsite day-care, and milk for working mothers (to fortify their own supply). Much of this progressive infrastructure put in place by the Perugina boss Luisa Spagnoli was later adopted as policy by the regime. Here, Garvin historicises issues that feel frighteningly relevant today: pronatalism, and the state's attempts to control women's bodies. Next, chapter 4 tracks the careers of three female writers of cookbooks and housekeeping guides. Lidia Morelli, Amalia Moretti Foggia, and Ada Boni, 'the core trinity' of homemaking experts (p. 126), promoted Fascist hyper-productivity, even in the face of ingredient shortages caused by international sanctions after Italy's invasion of Ethiopia. As shelves got barer and purse-strings tightened, cookbooks moved from the hands of the working-class cook (a welcome gift from their middle-class employers) to be bestowed upon a bride by her mother-in-law. Their form evolved to appeal to this new audience, with writers adopting 'a warm, communal tone to assure women that they had not lost status by stepping into the kitchen', and incorporating literary elements and quantitative features to appeal to the middle-class beginner (p. 136).

Chapter 5 addresses the rationalisation of working-class kitchens and their diminishing size. Garvin argues that Fascist architects shrank kitchens 'not only to keep working-class women in but also to keep their families out, nudging them into different rooms of the house' (p. 166) in a concrete expression of social engineering. Garvin's astute analysis extends to the material properties of the kitchen, too, comprised of hard, shiny surfaces that celebrated cleanliness with a 'moral and … political charge' (p. 167). The decorative and utilitarian functions of innovative electric appliances and furniture design are also considered within a framework of gendered and classed ideology, as is their placement in the home. In a wonderful connection between the micro and macro, Garvin reads the gliding of drawers on runners, moving of tables on casters, and even the spinning of the cook's stool on its axis as an everyday example of acceleration and movement in Fascist Italy, reminding us 'not every social change of the Fascist period exploded into Italy' (p. 185).

Notable for its breadth, this book is, however, a call to the small. As the conclusion and 'Notes to Future Researchers' make clear, the author's focus on everyday experience is a conscious methodological approach. Garvin urges historians to look beyond large state archives, whose collections contain the voices the regime wished to preserve, to find the everyday material culture of life under Fascism that makes its tabletop politics clear.

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