At the Fascist Table: 
Cooking in Italy, 1922-1943 

by

Sarah Alexandra Krieger Dash 
Class of 2014

A thesis submitted to the 
faculty of Wesleyan University 
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the 
Degree of Bachelor of Arts 
with Departmental Honors in History and Italian Studies

Middletown, Connecticut        April, 2014
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

**ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**  
3  
**LIST OF IMAGES**  
4  

## PART I: INTRODUCTION  
6  
1.1: “AND YOU MAY ASK YOURSELF…HOW DID I GET HERE?”  
6  
1.2: “DEFINING” FASCISM AND ITS IDEOLOGIES  
13  
1.2A 1859 -1919: UNIFICATION, WORLD WAR I, AND “UNREDEEMED ITALY”  
15  
1.2B TRANS-CLASSISM  
19  
1.2C FUTURISM  
21  
1.3 ITALIANIZATION OF LANGUAGE  
25  
1.4 FASCISM IN PRACTICE  
29  
1.4A THE FASCIST MEDIA  
29  
1.4B CORPORATISM  
33  
1.5 WOMEN UNDER FASCISM  
35  

## PART II: 1935-1940  
41  
2.1 FASCIST EMPIRE  
41  
2.2 “WILL YOU BE WORTHY OF IT?”  
42  
2.3 “THE ECONOMIC SANCTIONS, IN A CERTAIN SENSE, WILL BE USEFUL TO THE ITALIAN PEOPLE.”  
46  
2.4 “ITALIANS MUST EAT ONLY ONCE A DAY, TO PRESERVE ANGER IN THEIR HEARTS.”  
55  
2.5 CONCLUSION  
68  

## PART III: 1940-1943  
72  
3.1 INTRODUCTION  
72  
3.2 THE AGE OF THE ERSATZ  
73  
3.3 “PATRIOTIC” FARE  
79  
3.4 THE DECAY OF CONSENSUS: HOARDING, RATIONING, AND TRANS-CLASSISM  
84  
3.5 CONCLUSION  
93  

## PART IV: CONCLUSION AND NOTES ON THE BIBLIOGRAPHY  
99
THANK YOU

To the Wesleyan University Davenport Grant and White Fellowship for generously funding this research abroad;

To the Biblioteca Alessandrina in Rome, the Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale in Florence, and the small but mighty Biblioteca Gastronomica at the Academia Barilla in Parma and its incredible staff; to Davide, Carmine, Olivia, Andrea and Ric for hospitality and conversation;

To my family, who aren’t afraid to push me but have my back always, who insist on good grammar and the Talking Heads. Thank you for the unconditional support in this endeavor as with all others.

To Professor Nathanael Greene, who once encountered Salvador Dali walking an ocelot on a yacht, for your inspiring preciseness, enthusiasm, and all-around good humor. My experience in your sophomore seminar was the highlight of my academic career at Wesleyan and it was an honor to work with you.

To Letizia Bellocchio, Ivan Tassi, Daniel Leisawitz, Ellen Nerenberg, and Maurizio Vito. None of this would make sense without your guidance.

Thank you Laurie Nussdorfer, for your enviable directness, and for preparing me for Italian libraries (and Italian librarians…). Your advice got me through this at every stage.

To Rita Mattioli, who named her cooking school after Petronilla, thank you for the crash source in all things alla bolognese, for lessons in strength well beyond hand-rolling pasta dough, for your hidden anarchist spark, the help finding sources in Bologna, and for the most beautiful dinners.

My friends, peers and commiserators, thank you for keeping me grounded and smiling. Isaac, Faith, and Adam, you make Wesleyan home for me; you are all my (pet) rocks. To Gabe and Jess, who know I love them and don’t let me forget why. To Shannon Welch and Isaac Silk for editing this beast. Thank you Loretta and Alfredo, my Leccese family, for taking me in, for your incredible patience, openness, charisma and understanding, for teaching me and for learning with me. Ci vediamo alle nozze…
LIST OF IMAGES

Figure 1: “ATTENTION! It is absolutely prohibited in the streets and public places of Dignano to speak or sing in the Slavic language. In business of all types ONLY THE ITALIAN LANGUAGE is to be spoken. We Blackshirts, with persuasive methods, will enforce the present order. –THE BLACKSHIRTS.  27

Figure 2: “The displaced Southerner speaks in Italian, but thinks in dialect.”  29

Figure 3: “Believe. Obey. Fight.”  32

Figure 4: PNF Headquarters, Palazzo Braschi, Rome. 1934  33

Figure 5: “The Sanctions”  46

Figure 6: “Autarky”  77

Figure 7: Mussolini’s “Prayer for Bread”  78

Figure 8: “FARMERS bring immediately all of your required grain to the ammasso. It is an act of loyalty to the Duce and of devotion to the Patria which will make you once again worthy of the recognition of the Nation.”  89

Figure 9: “The Black Thief! All will know him.”  90
“FOOD OUGHT TO BE THE HISTORIANS’ MOST IMPORTANT TOPIC, PARTLY BECAUSE IT HAS MATTERED THE MOST TO MOST PEOPLE, AND BECAUSE, OF ALL THE ELEMENTS THAT MAKE HUMAN LIFE POSSIBLE...IT IS THE ONLY ONE HUMANS CAN INFLUENCE TO THE POINT OF CONTROL.”

FELIPE FERNANDEZ-ARMESTO AND DANIEL LORD SMAIL, DEEP HISTORY: ARCHITECTURE OF PAST AND PRESENT, PG 132
Part I: Introduction

1.1: “AND YOU MAY ASK YOURSELF…HOW DID I GET HERE?”

On a gray January afternoon in 2013, I sat at the kitchen table in my apartment in Bologna, a large university town in the northern Italian region of Emilia-Romagna, and watched my roommate Loretta remove jars of horsemeat tomato sauce and small globe zucchini from a brown cardboard box filled with newspaper. Her mother had sent the package from Corigliano d’Otranto, their hometown of 5,632 near the city of Lecce, at the heel of the boot. The curious round zucchini were from the family’s garden, and Loretta’s mother had made the sauce from that season’s tomatoes. Loretta’s boyfriend Alfredo, who is from 10 kilometers south of Corigliano d’Otranto (still in the Lecce area), brought out a bottle of limoncello for me to taste, brewed by his grandfather in the family’s bathtub from the gnarled, softball-sized lemons picked from their ancient trees (this particular drink I received in return for trying the horsemeat, my [baseless] aversion to which was baffling to my Italian friends).

A few months I am at a different kitchen table, this time in an apartment in Parma, also in the Emilia-Romagna, nibbling caciocavallo cheese made in the hometown of my Calabrese host. Though this man is well into his thirties and has lived in the north for ten years, his mother still sends him monthly packages of cheese, homemade melanzane sott’olio (oil-preserved eggplant), and fresh or jarred peppers from Calabria, the “toe” of the Italian boot. Though caciocavallo, limoncello, eggplant
in oil and horsemeat sauce are today readily available in the average supermarkets of Northern Italy, southern families with members *fuori della sede* (literally, “away from the seat,” meaning “displaced”) continue to send food, including fresh produce and cheese, from their region or hometown through the Italian mail. Southern produce, according to these sources (to whom my surprise at the practice of sending zucchini through the mail was naïve and demonstrated that I had *clearly never tasted a Calabrese pepper*) was inherently superior to the produce in stores, which had been grown in the south but transported, and not by one’s mother, to the north through (scoff!) industrial shipping and corporate agriculture. Privileging a mother’s sauce over store-bought is nothing new to our preconception of Italian cuisine, but the staunch preference for the foods of one’s hometown that are otherwise widely available and inexpensive is a curious characteristic of Italian eating habits.

In Loretta’s household, jarring sauces and canning, or otherwise preserving, peak-season produce (*sott’olio* or *sott’aceto*, in vinegar) is a family affair. It takes her nuclear family of four, plus two aunts and their five children, to fully realize their annual preservation efforts, which are then distributed to the extended family in and around Corigliano d’Otranto and mailed away to Loretta and her sister Gloria, a student of economics at the University of Milan. Alfredo’s father and cousins collect clams, sea urchin, and mussels—including a small type that is only found in Salentine waters—to preserve in vinegar, oil, or tomato sauce for the seasons when such delicacies are not so easily collected in hand held nets from the piercingly blue shallows. All that remains to be done is to buy semolina pasta (made from just
semolina flour and water), boil the pasta and zucchini and heat up the sauce for a meal that is literally just like home.

Further exploration into the oddities of the Italian obsession with regional cuisines led me to an old-money upper bourgeois Bolognese matriarch named Rita, who teaches tourists and American students like myself the culinary style of Bologna “il grosso” (“the fat”), so called for its rich cuisine of egg pastas like *tagliatelle* and *tortelloni* with meat sauces like *ragù* and gnocchi in gorgonzola cream sauce. Rita’s concerns over her weight (and the insistence of her Sicilian husband Gianni, who grew up poor and thus was raised on a vegetable- and semolina pasta-based diet) have led her to explore more about “healthy” cooking within the Bolognese paradigm to which she is unfailingly faithful. To eat more healthfully, she eats the same kind of protein for lunch and dinner (she excused herself from the *ragù* we made on her *tagliatelle*, which contain eggs, which were her source of protein that day after a lunch of *frittata*, baked omelet), whole grain breads (but not whole wheat pasta, *never* whole wheat pasta) and more raw verge, especially those grown locally with “good vitamins” like fennel, radicchio, and *lots* of parsley (“it has more vitamin C than an orange!”) dressed, maybe, in lemon juice and extra virgin olive oil, or just salt. A weight-loss plan that relies on rich, white-flour egg pasta with cheese (but no sauce) and fistfuls of parsley will indubitably seem strange to our carbohydrate-averse diet culture of yogurt and grilled skinless chicken breasts.

But this is Italy, where an almost snobbish particularity about food is part of eating culture. Alfredo and Loretta were baffled by my apples with peanut butter (“…but why wouldn’t you just eat Nutella?”) and altogether disgusted by eggs for
breakfast. Though Alfredo has been to China and enjoys Chinese food once in awhile (but only _spaghetti cinese_ [lo mein] and _gnocchi tipici cinesi_ [soup dumplings]) Loretta is not unlike a picky toddler about new foods and refuses to try foreign cuisines. Culinary xenophobia is not uncommon; even a run-of-the-mill pizzeria that was coincidentally staffed by Arab immigrants was regularly written off as “the Pakistani pizza.” “American food” is sold at McDonald’s (and it’s so salty that it makes Loretta ill).

Because of the pride Italians take in their native dishes or in homemade sauces and preserves, an Italian culinary “nationalism” of a sort exists today. These firsthand experiences were my introduction to a deep-seated set of ideas about “Italian cuisine” today amongst Italians of both the north and south, though these predispositions about national cuisine are contemporaneously very regional in nature. That is to say, Leccese, Bolognese, Calabrese food may well be “the real Italian cuisine” to someone from Lecce, Bologna or Calabria, respectively. These regional food identities have surely been reinforced by the homogenization of Italian cuisine resulting from its dispersal across the globe.\(^1\)

The binary Italian identity of region and nation informs a preference for peppers sent by one’s mother through the civilian postal service to peppers from the same province that are grown commercially, transported by corporate shipping, and sold in the supermarket. Even a bruised supermarket pepper from Lecce would be preferable, though, to eating the locally grown fennel of the Emilia-Romagna, which Loretta decried as stringy and flavorless compared to her prized Salentinian bulbs. The

\(^1\) Rita refers to this process as “pepperoni pizza-fication.” _Peperoni_ in Italian refers to peppers, not spicy sausage.
sharp, chewy caciocavallo cheese my host in Parma was kind enough to share with me was the same kind you can find in the neighborhood formaggeria (cheese shop) these days, but that would have been imported and by heaven-knows-who and therefore of suspect quality. It should come as no surprise that Italy mothered the Slow Food movement, which focuses on local ingredients, cooked at home with time and care (the movement was formed originally in protest to the controversial presence of fast food outlets like McDonald’s in Italian cities).

The introductory anecdotes are from months of research across Italy into the food culture of the Fascist ventennio (twenty-year period). It was these kitchen-table experiences that aroused my curiosity about an elusive “Italian cuisine” that is in reality very far from the automatic, Americanized images of pepperoni pizza, spaghetti and meatballs, and baked ziti. In reality, today “Italian cuisine” is plural. It means something different to different Italians. To Loretta it means a yearly tradition with her family jarring melanzane sott’olio from the garden and horsemeat sauce, but to Alfredo, who lives only ten kilometers away, it means mussels the size of a euro coin and pale, bumpy lemons. An eight hour train ride to Rita’s Bolognese kitchen would give us an entirely different definition of “Italian” cuisine, of lasagna, tortellini, gnocchi and mortadella, a diet based on wheat flour, meat, and eggs (and don’t forget the parsley for health!).

Beyond the characteristic cuisines just of these individual regions, the cooking of Northern Italy is generally very distinct from Southern cooking. And so are their gross domestic products (GDP): in 2011 Northern Italy (the division is conveniently placed at Rome) had an average, per capita GDP of around 123% of the European
Union average (around 31,200 euros to around 31,700 euros based on regional averages), while Southern and insular Italy had an average per capita GDP at just 67.5% of the EU average (17,200-17,500 euros).² While the postwar “economic miracle” of the 1950s and 1960s has certainly exacerbated the Italian progress gap, the disparity between northern industry and southern agriculture and economic stagnancy is a historical phenomenon.

How did these regional culinary disparities interact with the so-called “ultranationalism” of Italian fascism?⁴ Can one really characterize Italian fascism as ultranationalistic, and what nationalism did it utilize, or invent entirely? The purpose of this work is to address this and other questions of Fascist ideology in practice through the relationship of the regime to the women responsible for cooking, buying, and growing food. For the purposes of this thesis the term “nationalism” refers to a conception of common heritage based on the shared history of “the boot,” and the resultant construct of Italianità, or Italian-ness.

The issue at hand was complicated immensely when Mussolini declared Italy self-sufficient (“autarkic”) in response to League of Nations sanctions in 1935, and the regime set about directing Italian agriculture and industry for an independent state. This is the focus of Part II. Part III concerns World War II, which caused scarcity, rationing, and more intense controls over production. With many male heads of

---

households and businesses at war from 1935 to 1943, women took on a new economic and productive role that was subject to more intense regime control, in order to create a certain type of eating and cooking that fit with fascist economic and ideological priorities. Part I addresses the framing issues—Italian nationalism and history, a broad overview of Italian fascist ideology, corporatism, and the role of women and the countryside in regime rhetoric and policy. For the sake of brevity the early years of fascism, from 1922 to the mid-1930s, will be addressed here only as needed for background; cooking and eating are most useful to a discussion of how certain political and economic realities from 1935 onward challenged fascist ideologies.

Because (most) Italians ate every day, the kitchen table was an important locus of fascist myth, rhetoric, and policy. After 1935 in particular women were enlisted in the service of the state. Their battlefields were kitchens, gardens, and farms. Italian home cooks and those responsible for growing food in the self-sufficient economy were subject to heightened attention from the regime and accordingly were delegated a greater role in preserving it. The negative attitude towards women that characterized early Italian fascist rhetoric (the origins of which are discussed in section 1.3 below) clashed with the need to harness their traditional social roles as mothers and cooks in hard times. This tension is highly visible in the under-utilized women’s literature of the period—recipes, domestic economy, anti-waste propaganda, and journalism outlining a woman’s role under fascism. Studying the cooking of this epoch closely can thus illuminate the sticky “nationalizing” tendencies of fascism in Italy, for

---

5 Articles from the newspaper Giornale della donna/ La donna fascista, of the Fasci femminili, or women’s sections of the Fascist Party, frequently utilized the rhetoric of women going to the trenches of the fields, etc. For more, see Part II.
cooking is central to the perceived misogyny of fascist rhetoric and in the new experiences and responsibilities delegated to women in this period; furthermore, despite an outward appearance of cultural homogenization, regional peasant cuisines were more “autarkic” and thus, perversely, played a role in developing unity— the strength of the State.

1.2: “DEFINING” FASCISM AND ITS IDEOLOGIES

As an introduction, this chapter offers a breakdown of fascist ideology and praxis, with a focus on food consumption and production. This strategy may seem uncreative, but there are many complicated and interrelated issues that, for the sake of brevity and preciseness, must be outlined here for a cohesive understanding of the issues discussed in the body of this essay. Topics like the fascist-controlled media and summer or after-work recreation programs may not seem immediately relevant to cooking and eating but are in fact essential to understanding the regime’s relationship with Italian people and private life.

First it is important to understand that a definition of “fascism” as a cut-and-dry political ideology cannot and does not exist. Though Antonio Gramsci, a fascist-era Marxist scholar and politician whose writings are very influential to this work, has admitted that a fascist ideology did exist before his death in 1937, nationalism plays too heavily into the manifestation of fascist movements for a universal type to be useful in describing Italian fascism on its own. The passage of time has watered down

---

6 The fascists in Italy did succeed at homogenizing Italy in some ways, most notably in standardizing the Italian language. See subsection IV below.
our conception of what fascism means as a practice of government. In scholarship and
the media today the term is used too generally to have retained its original
significance. The term fascism is Italian in origin (fascismo) and refers to the fasces,
rods carried in a sheath by ancient Roman lictors, used by bodyguards of the Roman
magistrates to inflict physical punishment. Fasces were a symbol of authority and
unity that connected Italian fascism with the mighty Roman Empire. The term fascio
(plural fasci) means “league” and was used after World War I to refer to groups like
Mussolini’s Milan fascio which became national organizations of “combattants,”
commonly referred to as the Blackshirts (fasci di combattimento, Arditi [literally,
“daring ones”]) and from this paramilitary association sprung the Italian Fascist Party
(PNF, Partito Nazionale Fascista).

Amongst the finer contemporary scholars of fascism, Emilio Gentile’s 2005
preface to the English edition of his 1996 classic The Origins of Fascist Ideology has
provided the most refined generalization of fascist ideology, as a mass movement and
not exclusively political theory. Gramsci, and others who followed him, influenced
Gentile in refusing to define fascism as an exclusively intellectual construct. It is
instead an expression of

“A nationalist and revolutionary, anti-liberal and anti-Marxist political movement with a social base within the
middle class, organized as a “party-militia;” having a
totalitarian vision of politics and of the State, and an
ideology based on myth, virilistic and anti-hedonist,
sacralized as a political religion affirming the primacy of
the nation seen as an ethnically homogeneous organic
community, that is organized hierarchically into a
corporative State; belligerently advocating a policy of
grandeur, power, and conquest aimed at creating a new order and a new supranational civilization.”

This definition, however, does little to introduce the discrepancies between ideology and practice that characterized Italian fascism. It serves nicely as a framework for understanding the fascist restructuring of civil society, not for any enhanced liberty, but for its activation through myths, cult of the Duce and ideographs of empire. Fascism denied democracy, Marxism and liberalism, while espousing a trans-class rhetoric that redefined social utility in relation to fulfillment of a determined role (for our purposes, based on gender) within the sacralized State.

1.2 A: 1859-1919: UNIFICATION, WORLD WAR I AND “UNREDEEMED ITALY”: PRECURSORS TO FASCIST IDEOLOGY

Italian fascist ideology derived much from the spirit of the Risorgimento, the name given to the late-19th century movement of Italian unification. Compared to the rest of Western Europe, Italy is an infant country; it was only sixty years old upon the rise of fascism. Unification of the three largest sovereign states on the Italian peninsula, the Piedmontese kingdom of Sardinia (under the House of Savoy and its prime minister, Count Camillo Cavour), “The Kingdom of the Two Sicilies” (all of southern Italy below the papal states, including the island of Sicily) and the Papal States (including Rome) was not completed until 1870. Prior to the mid-19th century,

---

Italy was ruled piecemeal by Austro-Hungarian, Spanish, French, and provincial monarchs (kings of Piedmont or Naples, for example, but no king “of Italy”) with a smattering of historic regional republics. The peninsula had not shared a sovereign or a unified culture since the fall of the Roman Empire. Finally, in the 19th century, Northern Italy was liberated and unified by Cavour and the Piedmontese King Victor Emmanuele II. The charismatic, folkloric Giuseppe Garibaldi and his loyal “red shirt” volunteer soldiers were responsible for unifying the South. The narrative of the risorgimento is complicated and fascinating but outside the purview of this research. It suffices to say that unification was facilitated by foreign powers and largely possible due to the leadership of the “fathers of the Fatherland” (padri della Patria; Cavour, King Victor Emmanuel, Garibaldi, and the intellectual, politician and activist Giuseppe Mazzini). It was not a popular revolution.

The attempt to “redeem” Italian speaking areas outside of the peninsula bridges the unification narrative and the emergence of fascism around World War I. Garibaldi himself was from an “unredeemed” territory, Nice (Nizza), which had been ceded to Napoleon III by the Piedmontese monarchy in return for assistance against Austria during unification. “Unredeemed Italy” (Italia irredenta), areas where Italian was spoken outside of the Italian peninsula—Austro-Hungarian (native Croat and Yugoslav) territories in Dalmatia, the Alpine border territories of Trentino and Friuli (Trieste), and French Corsica and Nice—were the bane of post-unification nationalism. The desire to acquire these territories led the formally neutral Italy into World War I. This open letter “to the American Nation” from the commander-in-chief
of the Italian Navy, Admiral Thaon di Revel, explains the nationalist motive to abandon neutrality despite opposition by a majority of the Italian parliament:

“Italy, after centuries of servitude, has been able to gather together most of the scattered fragments of her territory, to wrest them by successive bloody wars from foreign usurpers. But Italy is not yet fully united, nor can she ever be, or ever feel secure at home, as long as her doors remain open, as long as she is unable to lead back to their cradle those of her sons who still groan under foreign yoke.

We are one of the oldest nations of the earth. After having lived in the splendid age of Rome, we have endured slavery for centuries. We have learned to suffer, but not to bow beneath the yoke. And today we are fighting to complete our union, to retake what belongs to us. Should we not obtain it we are doomed to humiliation; but rather than submit we prefer to die. Trent and Trieste are the doors of our home; they are the front rooms of our house, and, at both Trent and Trieste, a stranger has intruded upon us and prevents us from closing these doors. From our very threshold he sends his armed minions to rob us and impose his will on us. If we do not liberate our land now we shall never liberate it; we shall be forced to humiliation in order to live. But we will not do that; we cannot do it. As long as there are Italians to be freed and as long as there are Italians to do the fighting we will fight; we will fight as long as we are not the owners of our own property.”

Italy thus abandoned the Triple Alliance with Austria-Hungary and Germany to sign the Pact of London with the Entente powers in 1915. The Pact promised Italy Tyrol, Trieste, Zara, the Dodecanese Islands, an Albanian protectorate and even parts of German colonial holdings in Asia pending an Entente victory. The 1919 peace treaty granted Italy Tryol and Trieste, but only the territories in Dalmatia with an Italian majority. Much of “unredeemed Italy” remained that way, leaving the goal of

---

entrance into war—further unification—unfulfilled. Irredentist spirit caused Mussolini to be kicked out of the Italian Socialist Party (PSI, Partita Socialista Italiana). His interventionism was too far from the socialist party line of neutrality. Mussolini’s writings from this period, Admiral Thaon di Revel’s open letter, and Gabriele D’Annunzio’s famous occupation and corporatist dictatorship of “unredeemed” Fiume in 1919 demonstrate that intervention was a watershed in Italian nationalism. However constructed the regime’s idea of an “Italian” identity was, interventionism influenced fascist ideology because it was an assertion of nationhood that was ultimately disgruntled.

Italians who fought in the war, Mussolini and D’Annunzio included, were frustrated by the failure of the Entente powers to deliver on the promises of the Pact of London after so many Italian lives, and the political reputations of interventionists, were sacrificed in the trenches. The disillusionment of the arditi—“the daring ones,” the name adopted by the Italian Army’s shock troop division—galvanized support for the fasci di combattimento and the popular paramilitarism that would become squadrismo. Squadrismo was a volunteer “militia-party” initially composed of disillusioned veterans, many disgruntled by the failure of the war effort to save “unredeemed” Italy. The group expanded into a movement of political violence. Disillusioned urban dwellers went to the countryside, with the approval of traditional elites and owners of capital there, to influence elections, disrupt organized labor, and terrorize “subversives” who threatened the values and structures of traditional order.9

1.2 B: TRANS-CLASSISM

The political and paramilitary origins of fascist ideology are of neither right nor left on the contemporary political spectrum, nor of any neatly generalized social class. The traditional categories of Liberal, Center, Conservative, Bourgeois, Popular, Elite, etc. do not apply because fascism sought to replace them all with the State. Though the traditional bourgeoisie and holders of capital were the earliest and most important social bases for Italian fascism, in particular when it came to violence against labor organizing by the Blackshirts, fascist ideology claimed to stand for all classes. It claimed to replace class tensions with collaboration in the name of the State—what Mussolini and Giovanni Gentile (“the philosopher of fascism”) defined in the article on “Fascism” in the 1932 Enciclopedia Italiana as “the unity of classes established in one economic and moral reality in the State.”

Hierarchy, in the best interest of the State, served everyone’s interests; “Fascism reaffirms the State as the true reality of the individual.” Though fascism affirmed and legitimized class differences as “the irremediable, fruitful and beneficent inequality of men,” fascist society was “collectivist” for the well being of the State and thus turned traditional structures into a new, active conception of public life and work. In this sense the appeal of fascism was not based in class identity. It succeeded thus in mobilizing people in a way that the class-based political ideologies which fascism defeated (socialism, most notably) could not.

11 Ibid.
This “trans-classism” of fascist ideology also illuminates the curiosity of fascist nationalism. As Mussolini wrote, “the class struggle is a vain formula, without effect and consequence wherever one finds a people that has not integrated itself into its proper linguistic and racial confines—where the national problem has not been definitely resolved.” The weakness of the Italian national conception blocked a successful socialist revolution in Italy, and ironically helped to bring about a regime in 1922 that the historical record has deemed “ultra-nationalist.” The regime itself was clearly doubtful that a natural nationalism, an answer to “the national problem,” existed in Italy at that time.

The regime in reality created a type of “nationalism” uniquely suited to its goals. It was not strictly “national” in the sense that nationalism usually derives from shared history, culture, and language. Gentile and Mussolini elaborate: “It is not the nation that generates the State, as according to the old naturalistic concept which served as the basis of the political theories of the national States of the nineteenth century. Rather the nation is created by the State, which gives to the people, conscious of its own moral unity, a will and therefore an effective existence.” Class struggle was replaced with participation in the PNF as the measure of social utility, and thus class can be said to have a secondary role in the organization of the fascist State.

---


14 Gentile and Mussolini, "Fascismo."
1.2 C: “FOR TOO LONG HAS ITALY BEEN A DEALER IN SECOND-HAND CLOTHES”: FUTURIST AESTHETICS IN FASCIST IDEOLOGY

The Futurists, an early 20th century artistic movement, were a fundamental aesthetic influence on the fascist conception of life. Though Italian fascism bore a “superficial” relationship to Futurist metaphysics once in power, the aesthetics that the movement promoted—a total rejection the past; a glorification of war, violence, technology, forward movement; “contempt for woman” and to-the-streets political rabble rousing— were very influential on the early formation of Italian fascist ideology and early fascist political intervention.\(^\text{15}\) By 1920, though, the *squadrismo* violence that ultimately allowed fascism to take hold bore little resemblance to the Futurist brand of political violence. Even the founder of the movement, millionaire Milanese poet and jetsetter Filippo Tommaso Marinetti, who met Mussolini in 1915 at a pro-interventionist rally and was a part of the party’s foundational executive committee, created his own Futurist party and political dogma in 1918. Though technically loyal to the regime until his death in 1944, Marinetti, who abhorred the past, could not stomach the regime’s collaboration with the Italian monarchy and other traditional structures of power. It was Marinetti, however, who initially brought Mussolini together with the *arditi* veterans who would later become the blackshirt *squadristi*, for his apartment was a kind of salon for veterans seeking to escape the

\(^{15}\) Filippo Tomasso Marinetti, "The Founding and Manifesto of Futurism," *Le Figaro*(1909), http://www.italianfuturism.org/manifestos/foundingmanifesto/. See in particular point 9: “We will glorify war—the world’s only hygiene—militarism, patriotism, the destructive gesture of freedom-bringers, beautiful ideas worth dying for, and scorn for woman.”
stagnant, inglorious liberalism of postwar politics and society for something more active.

Futurism is notable here not necessarily for its influence on what Mussolini did once in power, but for how Futurism’s total aesthetics—a program for life, not exclusively art— influenced the fascist totalization of the State to create a new conception of being and belonging. The “Fascist century” was to be a renewed experience of life itself, not merely a political movement. Though the Futurist glorification of war (“the world’s only hygiene”) certainly fits with the regime’s campaign for African empire (see Part II) the more fruitful connection between the two movements, for the purposes of this paper, is twofold. First, the Futurist rejection of history provides insight into the question of “ultra-nationalism.” As Futurism abhorred “eternal and futile worship of the past, from which you emerge fatally exhausted, shrunken, beaten down,” fascism found Italian history a poor font of national pride and solidarity. Fascist nationalism was appropriately based on future generations, on the “fascist century.” Second, Marinetti and other Futurists wrote a cookbook in 1932 (Futurist Cuisine, based on a 1930 manifesto of cooking and a Futurist meal/ art piece in 1931), an important text for understanding the Italian relationship with food under the regime as seen by the avant-garde intellectual elite.

The Futurist rejection of the artistic and intellectual past—“We will destroy the libraries, the academies…the numberless museums that cover [Italy] like so many graveyards!”—was a post-unification self-assertion of the Italian avant-garde. A truly future-oriented movement, the Futurists declared that “Time and Space died

---

16 Ibid.
yesterday,” so the fragmented, non-national past of Italy should be abandoned entirely. In this way Futurism is not incomparable to a teenage rebellion of aesthetics and philosophy. Futurist artists and writers were a movement of the new century (what Mussolini called “the Fascist century”) wherein history was a “cemetery” for spiritual renewal of the nation, and particularly the historical tropes of ancient Rome, the Renaissance, and the Church-patronized high Baroque represented in “the numberless museums.” This history—of the peninsula, not “Italy”, for “Italy” did not exist until 1870—was one of defeat and conquest by stronger foreign powers. The Futurist Manifesto decried Italian history, saying that “For too long Italy has been a dealer in second-hand clothes,” with localities adopting the languages and cultures of their colonial overlords. This is a certain type of nationalism embedded in unification ideographs that, perhaps perversely, rejected the history of the peninsula as the font of national character.

Because no actively national awareness had formed in Italy since the fall of the Roman Empire, Marinetti, Mussolini and other intellectuals using radical aesthetics of belligerence, speed, dynamism and action could freely construct Italianità. The idea that “Time and Space died yesterday” was even more important after the earliest Italian nationalism that centered on “unredeemed Italy” was frustrated in the settlement of World War I. Fascism would enthusiastically appropriate this irreverence for the past in creating its particular Italianità, for the history of the peninsula was full of impotence. Historical domination by foreign powers had created many regional identities and Italian fascism, inspired by its Futurist precursor, rejected this past.

17 Ibid.
18 Ibid. “Museums: cemeteries!”
altogether. The anti-historical spiritual renewal of Futurist aesthetics was adopted by
the fascists to create a nation fit for “the fascist century.”

Many of the original sources used below are recipe collections or other
domestic literature, but *Futurist Cuisine* is an aesthetic treatise first and foremost,
born, as it were, from a manifesto. It does not focus at all on practicality, economy,
reducing waste, or propagandizing autarkic eating and the woman’s proper sphere, as
most of the others do. It is a rather anti-rational reinvigoration of the entire concept of
cuisine, introducing scents, movement, poetry and multisensory experiences beyond
pure taste to meals—essentially the dinner *was* the show. *Futurist Cuisine* approaches
absurdity with outlandishly erotic dishes like the “aroused pork” (*porco eccittato*),
which featured baked salami plated vertically, surrounded with a creamy sauce of
coffee and eau de cologne.¹⁹

The Futurist cookbook’s aim was to “to modify radically the cuisine of our
race, thus strengthening it”²⁰ for “one thinks, dreams, and acts according to what they
eat and drink.”²¹ The Futurist answer to Italian cuisine was rejection of the traditional,
“mediocre daily customs” [emphasis mine] including, controversially, eating pasta.
The Futurists, who are routinely labeled nationalist intellectuals and artists, though of
an anti-historical type,²² wanted to eliminate an Italian staple food from the national

---

¹⁹ “Therefore, anti-practically, we Futurists rebuke precedent and traditional wisdom
to invent at whatever cost a *new*, completely absurdist standard.” Filippo Tomasso
Marinetti and Fillia (Luigi Colombo), *La Cucina Futurista* (Milan: Sonzogno, 1932),
26.
²⁰ Ibid., 5.
²¹ Ibid., 27.
²² The work of the anti-fascist Benedetto Croce, a more fortunate contemporary of
Gramsci, famously makes this point about Futurism and fascism.
diet because it weighed people down instead of making them more adapted to a world of speed and mechanics. Instead it made them “doubtful, lazy, and pessimistic.”  

The aesthetics and ideas of Italianità in Futurist Cuisine serve to show why food and cooking are useful tools for understanding that, to the early fascist intellectual elite, nationalism had very little to do with an Italian shared history. This nationalism quickly influenced the political, social, and cultural writings of Mussolini and his followers that became the ideology of Italian fascism. Cooking will generally be examined in the subsequent sections as an invasion of the private sphere by regime ideas; a locus for propaganda that addresses fascist ideology (versus fascist practice), Italianità, economic exigency and women’s role in the “Fascist Century” simultaneously.

1.3: ITALIANIZATION OF LANGUAGE

As Victoria de Grazia has emphasized, the modus operandi of fascism in Italy was to subordinate the individual to the public (“the State” with a capital S), effectively eradictating the private sphere entirely. Today there is no word in Italian for “privacy.” Italians have come to use the English term to refer to this (alien) concept, and the Italian disinterest towards privacy may well be a phenomenon that pre-dates the fascist ventennio. Considering, however, Mussolini’s campaign to

———

Marinetti and Colombo), La Cucina Futurista, 24.
“Italianicize” the lexicon of everyday people which had taken on influences and even wholesale terms from French and English, we can assume that the notion of “privacy” was not in common usage in Italy from 1922 to 1943, or that the legacy of fascism has prevented an Italian synonym from emerging.

Figure 1: “ATTENTION! It is absolutely prohibited in the streets and public places of Dignano to speak or sing in the Slavic language. In businesses of all types ONLY THE ITALIAN LANGUAGE is to be spoken. We Blackshirts, with persuasive methods, will enforce the present order. –THE BLACKSHIRTS.”

The “Italianization” of speech under Mussolini is a useful example of how fascist ideology came to influence everyday habits. Standard Italian was imposed over foreign languages and hybrid dialects in the Austro-Hungarian territories acquired at

---

24 Image from Wikimedia Commons. http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/8/8f/Fascist_italianization.jpg
the 1920 Treaty of Rapallo, like Dignano (Croatian: Vodnjan). Even singing in a Slavic dialect was forbidden and punishable by organized Blackshirt intimidation (so-called *metodici persuasivi*, “persuasive methods”). On the peninsula, Italianization in the form of replacing words like “sandwich” with “traidue” (literally, “between the two” pieces of bread) or “tramezzina” (a term still used to describe sandwiches on three slices of thin white bread) and “cocktail” with “polibibite” (“mixed drink”) is symptomatic of the same homogenizing policies carried out in native Slav, Croat and Germanic pockets of Italy but within the microcosm of the corner café. Nor was the family sitting room under the regime’s Italianizing radar. A 1935 guide to domestic economy for Italian housewives “abolishes” card games of risk with Anglicanized names, like poker and bridge, from Italian homes, for they represent a “deplorable mania of exoticism.”

While Italianized textbooks, grammars and fascist reforms in education did create a more literate society, they served practically to propagandize and politicize the classroom. This is particularly evident in the initial education program of Giovanni Gentile (1922-4) and the reforms of 1929. The name of the game in fascist education reforms was “indoctrination.” By 1930 the regime was licensed to authorize all textbooks; compliance with the regime was placed on par with fidelity to God in official pedagogy, and all teachers were required to take an oath of loyalty to fascism. More important to the ideological goals of the regime was to create a unified societal fabric. In Italy language was a major hurdle to such a project. It has

---

been reported that at the time of Unification as few as 2.5% of people on the peninsula spoke standard Italian, which is “textbook” Italian rooted in the Renaissance developments of Tuscan dialect in the areas around Florence. The vast majority of people spoke to each other in local dialects. Loretta’s great-grandmother would not have been able to communicate with Rita’s grandmother though they were technically compatriots. A popular internet meme in the present day serves to show the continuing prevalence of dialects, in particular amongst Southerners:

Figure 2

Referring to southern and insular Italians studying and working in the North, it translates to “the displaced southerner speaks in Italian [Standard], but thinks in dialect.”

Unification created a geographical whole without a nation. Fascism brought a State-centric energy to a country that hardly knew its official language and still today...
prefers an essentially regional way of communicating. This is not to suggest that Italian communication has not changed since the ventennio. But the continued prevalence of local rather than national modes of identification seems to challenge Emilio Gentile and other’s definitions of fascism as primarily and essentially “ultra-nationalistic.” Idiosyncrasies like this characterize the tenuousness of the nationalism that fascism relied on for the myths that allowed it to maintain power. The fascist regime created a particular Italianità, Italian-ness, derived from the fascist conception of life under the State. Did the regime go the next step in creating a true (albeit fascist) national culture or its edible counterpart, a national cuisine?

1.4. ITALIAN FASCISM IN PRACTICE

1.4 A: The fascist media

The importance of the state-controlled press in Fascist Italy cannot be understated. Newspaper, radio, and televisual communications that were sympathetic to the regime were subsidized in the early years of the ventennio. By 1935 circulating any form of media required government approval, and content was meticulously controlled by the Ministry for Popular Culture (Ministero per la cultura popolare), commonly abbreviated MinCulPop; the fascist press bureau was previously known as the Press Office (Ufficio stampa) and Undersecretariat for the Press (Sottosegretariato per la stampa). The elevation of the media office to a Ministry around the middle of the ventennio was a result of the increased importance of disseminating fascist
propaganda around the invasion of Ethiopia and subsequent sanctions by the League of Nations (see Part II) because these matters of foreign policy were entrenched within fascist rhetorical tropes of empire and reclaiming the Italian “place in the sun.” Furthermore the war required more from Italian people, particularly after the League of Nations sanctions and the resulting declaration of self-sufficiency by the regime.

The media, and newspapers especially, carried fascist ideology to people who could probably read but were perhaps far from the visual nuclei of fascist power (for example, see PNF party headquarters in Rome below). Press dispatches called veline rigidly controlled speech under Mussolini. They were quite literally carbon-copy instructions on what subjects should or could not be discussed by the media.\(^{29}\) Veline were dispatched many times a day and would cover topics from the abolition of foreign languages to sports news to not reporting on the bad weather. When food was rationed during World War II the veline were used to simultaneously direct a certain kind of eating while banning negative press on the long lines outside of ration distribution centers or the scarcity of white flour.

Il Giornale della Donna

Message of the DUCE to the Blackshirts at the XII annual of the Revolution

Blackshirts of all Italy!

They came to Firenze to accompany the Temple of the glories of Italy, the thirty-six cadets of the Padovano Folks.

The name and memory of these Camerini of the vigilance were and will remain in the minds of men. In difficult times they had adopted the motto: BELIEVE, OBEY, FIGHT. They believed, they obeyed, and they fought.

Message of the DUCE to the Blackshirts at the XII annual of the Revolution

Fasci femminili

Gruppi Giovani Fasci

30 Giornale della donna, November 1, 1934. Pg 1
The power the regime exercised over the dissemination of information established what is called the culture of consensus, utilizing print and audiovisual means to adapt fascist ideology to every vicissitude. Contradictions between fascist ideology and fascist practice, as in the treatment of women (who were disdained in early fascist rhetoric, but were later valued and solicited for their role as mothers, producers, and consumers; see subsection III below and Parts II and III), are laid out clearly in the veline, which are as direct a link that exists between regime and the literate masses.

Figure 4: “YES;” relief of the Duce. PNF Headquarters, Palazzo Braschi, Rome. 1934.31

1.4 B: Corporatism

Fascist political economy, called corporatism, was essentially modeled on a guild system, wherein syndicates of productive interests collaborated with the state to direct the economy. Though the importance of hierarchy was recognized and maintained, the collaboration of management, labor, and State was meant to mollify class tensions. Gramsci saw corporatism as merely another instrument of fascist control of labor, an attempt to create an economic structure that reinforced the sacrifice of individual needs and desires for the collective good of the state:

…the corporative trend did not originate from the need for changes in the technical conditions of industry, or even from that of a new economic policy, but rather from the need for economic policing, a need which was aggravated by the 1929 crisis that is still going on. [emphasis mine] 32

Much scholarly ink has been used to suggest “in reality corporatism was a sham, disguising fascism’s taming of the workers and its collaboration with the managerial elite.”33 Corporatism’s claim of equalizing the influence of labor with that of traditional economic elites served to reinforce that the State was the only conduit for a fair economy, while the managers and holders of capital continued a relationship of mutual assistance and benefit with the regime.34 Gramsci saw a type of Italian

---

32 Gramsci, Selections from the Prison Notebooks of Antonio Gramsci, 292.
34 Capitalists, the upper bourgeoisie, landowners, and financiers tended to support the monarchy, which may have well influenced the regime’s decision to maintain a
dual-identity embedded within fascist corporatism, citing the “economic function which the state has always had in Italy because of the diffident attitude of the small savers towards industrialists.” Though one cannot claim that “small savers” and “industrialists” are representative of a country-city or north-south division, this was another form of micro-identity—new money from urban industry versus the traditional life of poverty associated with, but not exclusive to, the countryside—which the regime sought to minimize by adopting corporatism.

Corporatism also legitimized the fascist intervention into the private sphere at large:

“There are no economic matters which only affect private or individual interests. From the day when man resigned or adapted himself to life in common with his fellow beings, not a single one of his actions begins, develops, or is concluded in him alone, but has repercussions that go beyond his person.”

That corporatism centered the invasion into individual lives on economic matters suggests that the regime needed to “police” consumption and production of certain products in order to create an economic structure sympathetic to the collectivity at the expense of individual autonomy.

---


1.5: WOMEN UNDER THE REGIME

Much recent scholarship of Italian fascism has turned towards the roles of women under the regime and their relationship with fascist ideology. This may stem from the sticky contradictions of early fascist rhetoric and the need for women of all classes to contribute to the Italian empire in Africa and war efforts of 1935 to 1943. The demographic campaign known as the “Battle for Births” granted mothers and rural women (who were understood to have more children) a type of citizenship as mother, wife, and homemaker. A good *fascista* was valued by the State for her fecundity and as a “moral” counterpart to the working husband and, importantly, as a teacher of her young children. The pedagogic function inherent to mothers inspired a lot of propaganda on what good mothers should teach their children before they entered school. As both producers and consumers of food, the sanctions and later autarky gave a challenging, though not ultimately empowering, new responsibility to women. Victoria de Grazia and Perry R. Willson have written works covering the women’s experience under the regime, from state-subsidized after-work programs (*dopolavoro*) to the *Giornata della fede*, translatable as either “day of faith” or “day of the wedding ring,” where women were asked to donate their wedding bands to be melted down for the war effort. This symbolic marriage to the state is a prime example of how fascism’s invasions into the private sphere directly involved women. The wedding ring collections took place in World War I memorial sites, suggesting that the renewed mother-soldiers of the home front could “fix” the embarrassing
legacy of World War I by giving up their rings, effectively equating loyalty to the regime with a strong future for Italy—one which women could be a part of.

The question of women’s participation in the fasci femminili (FF), the women’s sector of the PNF, has been treated by Perry Willson based on figures published in the La donna fascista, known prior to 1935 as Giornale della donna, the FF’s newspaper.\textsuperscript{37} It does not serve this paper to delve into the complexities of women’s actual rate of participation in the fascist party because Willson does it very well, though her reliance on official figures seems to contradict her critique of the regime’s extensive control over publically disseminated information and the underestimation of official statistics as relates to women in agriculture.\textsuperscript{38} Victoria de Grazia’s seminal How Fascism Controlled Women brings the issue of the public and private sphere to the forefront. She suggests that, despite what Marxist and liberal historians of the 1970s and 1980s have argued, the ventennio did not advance many women or allow them to access “modernity,” in the sense of the workforce, civil liberties, and a move towards social equality.

The women who probably benefitted from involvement in the women’s section of the Fascist Party (PNF) were the upper bourgeoisie and upper class women. The fasci femminili were often concerned with urban welfare and propaganda. After 1934 many FF women participated also in the National Federation of massaie rurali (FNFMR), a type of labor union for peasant women that was transferred to the FF in

\textsuperscript{38} Perry R. Willson, Peasant Women and Politics in Fascist Italy : The Massaie Rurali (London; New York: Routledge, 2002).
1934.\textsuperscript{39} FNFMR leadership often consisted of local schoolteachers and FF higher-ups;\textsuperscript{40} as maestre rurali (rural teachers) and visitatrici fasciste (fascist “home visitors”) party women were responsible for spreading fascist anti-sanctions and autarkic propaganda to villages and individual homes to ensure the complicity of the rural poor in the regime’s economic priorities.\textsuperscript{41} Often these priorities required increased production on farms, but women were not granted any official recognition as the new heads of household during the war in Ethiopia or World War II when many patriarchs left home and business for the front, for these wars were expected to be short.\textsuperscript{42} Complicity was the only route towards emancipation from traditional gender roles but complicity was itself loyalty to a traditional femininity of motherhood and housewivery. Contraception was banned; to enhance the regime’s ties to the Church and encourage order, “modernizing” rhetoric was limited to men.

After the Battles for Births and Wheat, which cemented the civic role of women as mothers and domestic consumers, fascism entrusted them with “the ruralization of Italy, the Duce’s will.”\textsuperscript{43} In directing the massaie rurali subsection (FNFMR) of the FF, provincial agrarian schools, and raising awareness of autarkic ingredients and techniques, women brought fascist ideology to the historically apolitical country home:

“The importance of this organization, particularly from a political point of view, is obvious. With the massaie rurali

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{39} Ibid., 77.
\item \textsuperscript{40} Ibid., 61-62.
\item \textsuperscript{41} See "Empire, Gender and the Home Front in Fascist Italy," \textit{Women's History Review} 16, no. 4 (2007).
\item \textsuperscript{42} Ibid.
\end{itemize}
sections, even in the countryside we can achieve a capillary network, which will enable us to reach into every farmhouse and cottage.”

While much of the fascist relationship with women centered on production and economics, the relatively privileged urban women of the FF were clearly important political actors. Their political participation, however, cost the undervalued women of the countryside their autonomy. Thus the role of women under the regime served to reinforce regional differences between urban and rural people, a direct block to the formation of a cohesive fascist nationalism. The “well-heeled” ladies of the FF must have seemed rather ridiculous teaching the historical Italian peasantry anything about agriculture and home cooking—surely many of the “rural teachers” from cities relied on maids and cooks themselves from the countryside. The FNFMR automatically distributed a technical newspaper, *L’azione della massaia rurale*, to its members. Cheap headscarves embroidered with the word “Duce” were, at 3,70 lira, one of the cheapest fascist uniforms of the *ventennio*, making it easy for the poorest provincial women to look like good fascists. But the influence of the well-to-do ladies of the FF on the peasant-oriented FNFMR ultimately reinforced class hierarchies, refuting fascism’s claims to “trans-classism.”

The next chapter will discuss imperial war in Ethiopia, which brought more propaganda attention to women from lower social classes and how they prepared food. For example, the *visitatrici fasciste*, middle and upper class women who would enter the country homes of dead soldiers to assist widows and families with fulfilling

---

45 *Peasant Women and Politics in Fascist Italy: The Massae Rurali*, 90-91.
their patriotic sacrifice to the State—losing their father or husband in the name of imperial Italy was, apparently, not sacrifice enough. For the visitatrici and other party women with free time to spare, war in Africa brought new opportunities for involvement in the party, which was equivalent to involvement in public life while still serving the State. Their access to empowerment of this kind was predicated on the subordination of other women, for the job of the massaie rurali subsection of the fasci femminili was to keep rural women (without time to participate in the party) in line with fascist economic and social priorities.


Morelli, Lidia. "Le Massaie Contro Le Sanzioni (Housewives against the Sanctions)." Torino: S. Lattes & C., 1935.


Part II:  
1935-1940

2.1 FASCIST EMPIRE

At 5:00am on October 3rd, 1935, General Emilio De Bono, commander-in-chief of the considerable Italian armed forces in East Africa (Africa Orientale Italiana), crossed the Mareb River into Ethiopia. De Bono invaded then-called Abyssinia without a declaration of war. Italian estimates suggest that the Ethiopian force under Emperor Haile Selassie had somewhere between 350,000-760,000 fighters, of which as many as 500,000 had not yet seen battle, let alone against tanks and airplanes. The Italian force, in contrast, had about 620,000 troops already stationed in Eritrea and Italian Somaliland, which were joined by another 680,000 trained soldiers and, notably, 200 journalists. 400,000 antiquated rifles, bows and spears, World War I era tanks and a handful of anti-aircraft guns faced off against the might of the state-subsidized Northern Italian military-industrial complex. The Italian force had at least 9,300 machine guns, over 2,000 pieces of artillery, 795 tanks, and 595 aircraft. 46 By December Britain and France proposed a secret pact, called the Hoare-Laval Pact after the statesmen responsible, to grant Mussolini the most desirable portions of Ethiopia. When the details of the pact were leaked on December 13, however, public disapproval was so great that both Hoare and Laval were forced to resign.

The Hoare-Laval pact exposed the weakness of the international response to a flagrant violation of Article X of the League of Nations Covenant. The League of Nations itself had imposed sanctions on Italy in November, but overall international condemnation needed to be weak in order to avoid pushing Italy into the arms of Nazi Germany. By the end of April 1936, the now-famous Maresciallo d’Italia Pietro Badoglio (Marshal of Italy, one of the highest military ranks of the Ventennio) began his “March of the Iron Will” from Dessie to the capital, Addis Adaba. Haile Selassie fled to Britain in self-imposed exile on the second of May. It was over, even without a formal surrender. By the first weekend of May 1936, Fascist Italy had officially achieved its empire. Mussolini was greeted from the balcony of the Palazzo Venezia in Rome by ecstatic crowds singing the “Inno del’Impero” (Hymn of Empire). There would be an emperor in Rome for the first time in 1,460 years.

2.2 "THE ITALIAN PEOPLE HAVE CREATED AN EMPIRE WITH THEIR BLOOD. THEY WILL FERTILIZE IT WITH THEIR WORK. THEY WILL DEFEND IT AGAINST ANYONE WITH THEIR WEAPONS. WILL YOU BE WORTHY OF IT?"—Benito Mussolini, June 1936

Between 1935 and 1940, Fascist Italy would fight for Empire, be blacklisted by the League of Nations, join Britain and France in opposing German rearmament, achieve their Empire, make nice with the League, sign a Pact of Steel with Germany, and create a largely self-sufficient wartime economy.

Somewhat erratic foreign relations aside, these five years were arguably the most productive of the ventennio. Hegemonic conceptions of duty to the wartime
empire allowed the creation of an ideal relationship between actors of production, especially women of the agricultural sector, and the regime.

Domestically, Fascist foreign policy solidified the Regime’s close relationship with sacrifice and rendered it a necessary attribute of good Italians in service of the state. With armies to feed, controlling food resources and the labor that produced them was paramount. After Mussolini declared Italy’s economy self-sufficient in response to League of Nations sanctions in October 1935, controlling the output of individual smallholder farm families and their expectations for their own eating and cooking would become part and parcel of fascist economic policy and of the relationship between the regime and the most basic social unit, the family. Navigating the “autarkic” economy at home demonstrated the ideological flexibility of the regime, so that it could control the direction of certain productive sectors while keeping them ideologically and practically inferior. “Certain productive sectors” is an umbrella term for smallholder agriculture and domestic industry – the domain of the massaie rurali.

The pressures placed on rural women in this period represent a re-dimensioning of the relationship between the regime and the economy brought on, at first, by League of Nations sanctions in response to empire-building in Ethiopia. To fully understand how the sanctions were used as an ideological intervention to control the flow of resources, we must first examine what the sanctions were and were not, and how they overlapped with the program of autarky that was Mussolini’s choice after the League of Nations sanctions were lifted in July 1936.
First, the sanctions imposed a ban on the sale of arms to Italy and Ethiopia. Secondly, the sanctions “asked States to render impossible all loans to or for the Italian Government, banking or other credits to or for that Government or any public authority, person, or corporation in Italian territory, and all issues of shares or other capital flotations in Italian territory or elsewhere, made directly or indirectly for the Italian Government or for other public authorities…”\(^{47}\) Lastly, “the prohibition of importation into the territory of State Members of all goods (other than gold or silver bullion and coin) consigned from Italy or Italian possessions” and the prohibition of “the exportation or re-exportation to Italy and her colonies of a certain number of articles…necessary for the prosecution of war…[and] mainly exported by States Members of the League.”\(^{48}\) Importantly, pig iron, crude oil, coal, and steel were not sanctioned; even if they had been regulated, Italy could have gotten oil, their most essential war matériel,\(^ {49}\) from the United States.\(^ {50}\) In any event, the sanctions were lifted on July 4, 1936, only eight months after they had been levied against Mussolini’s would-be empire.

The formation of the empire marked the height of Mussolini’s popularity at home—the crowning jewel of the so-called “age of consensus,” the zenith of international non-commitment on fascism generally—and fascist rhetoric of this period was rosy-cheeked with empire, glory, and the peninsula’s long-awaited

\(^{48}\) Ibid.
“Destiny.” The sanctions were inefficient, if not totally deficient, at curbing Italian designs in Africa, but their reception at home would be manipulated by the Regime. The recently-minted MinCulPop (Ministero della Cultura Popolare; Ministry of Popular Culture, based off the German Ministry of Public Enlightenment and Propaganda) used the sanctions as a call to arms for the entire nation. Products like wheat could come from Nazi Germany (which left the League of Nations in October 1933) but the sanctions did necessitate a greater degree of domestic production, particularly of food products. Therein lay the possibility of controlling and directing networks of Italian labor and resources.

Mussolini’s public response to the sanctions was twofold. They were publically decried as “le inique sanzioni” (“the unjust sanctions”) in newspapers and in written and visual propaganda. A popular image of the epoch is of a young boy urinating on the word “sanzioni” (“sanctions”). When the sanctions were lifted in the summer of 1936, Mussolini decided to use them as a launching board for a self-sufficient or autarkic economic policy that had been part of the Fascist economic discourse since the 1920s. Only coupled with the sanctions, however, could autarky be most successfully utilized as an ideological locus, to direct the character of Italians in service of the state.
2.3 “THE ECONOMIC SANCTIONS, IN A CERTAIN SENSE, WILL BE USEFUL TO THE ITALIAN PEOPLE.” - Benito Mussolini, speech of 1 December 1935, to the mothers and widows of fallen soldiers of the East African front.\(^{52}\)

The sanctions pitted the Italian nation against a foreign, multinational other (the sheer vagueness of the term “League of Nations” surely bolstered this view in the mind of the average Italian).\(^{53}\) Considering the intensely regional character of the peninsula before and after unification in 1871, creating the ethos, albeit a negative or

\(^{51}\) Photo by author. Popular propaganda from 1935-1939.
\(^{52}\) Luisella Ceretta and Mauro Minola, *Le Donne E La Cucina Nel Ventennio (Women and Cuisine under Italian Fascism)* (Torino: Susalibri, 2009), 105.
\(^{53}\) Illiteracy was high, particularly amongst women and in the rural South. See footnote 54.
retroactive one, of an Italian unity was crucial to the success of the regime due to the “ultra-nationalistic” charge of fascism.

The Italian sources framed the sanctions as an attempted international stifling of the Italian destiny. The East African empire was portrayed as the logical continuation of the ancient Roman Empire, which in turn represented the most profound elaboration of the possibilities of the fascist century. The sanctions, therefore, were the product of the weak, liberal-Democratic League of Nations. Autarky was demanding on national resources and labor—a direct call upon the strength of Italians and their civic duty—in the service of Italy. Though autarky was presented in national media as a way to make Italy stronger, it also necessitated that some groups of people would eat less, as they had under the “unjust sanctions.” The availability of certain favored products—meat, white flour, coffee, and others—would decline, as resources were diverted to armies in Africa and later, Albania and the theaters of World War II. Thus sacrifice became all the more firmly rooted in the vocabulary of fascist ideograms.

The burning question here is why Mussolini would decide to maintain such a program with no explicit restrictions on foreign imports. As his speech (quoted in the section 2.3 heading) of December 1, 1935 suggests, the sanctions, and their de facto continuation in the policy of autarky that followed, benefitted “the Italian people.” Why was an attitude of sacrifice necessary or otherwise desirable?

An understanding of the audience of these remarks, the mothers and widows of fallen soldiers on the African front, is crucial to confronting these questions. A book called Le massaie contro le sanzioni (Housewives Against the Sanctions) from
November 1935 outlines just how crucial women were in navigating the sanctions and the autarkic policies that followed, because food and other domestic products (textiles, for example)\(^5^4\) would be the most obviously effected by either of the self-sufficient policies.\(^5^5\)

Women, like the mothers and widows of the December 1\(^{st}\) speech, were furthermore responsible, as we see in literature disseminated for them like *Massaie contro le sanzioni* by the regime-controlled media, for countering the influx of “foreignism” in Italy. As early as 1930, women across the country were called upon for

“the valorization of our national products and the greatest development of our agricultural products, of small rural industry that constitutes individual prosperity and the wealth of the Nation. No foreign machines in terms of cars, radios, sewing machines; we have ourselves an optimal productive enterprise that we must encourage, develop, and foster to sustain foreign competition. Everyone must feel within them the soul of a soldier that fights a righteous, sacred battle, and everyone must contribute their due, small or great though it may be, for the hard-won victory.”\(^5^6\)

Women became “soldiers” of the regime *before* sanctions or autarky were official motors of economic policy. They served as disseminators of fascist ideology—here, spurning foreign products and valorizing Italian ones in order to give a physical manifestation to the “ultra-nationalism” Fascism depended on. The sanctions, and later autarky, would necessitate that many of the products housewives

\(^{5^4}\) For more, see Morelli, "Le Massaie Contro Le Sanzioni (Housewives against the Sanctions)," 14-17.

\(^{5^5}\) Ibid, 63-83.

depended on for their domestic duties came exclusively from Italy, which suited very well the need to “create Italians” where there had formerly been a patchwork of Piedmontese, Neapolitans, Sicilians, et cetera. The importance of Italian products to the “Italianization” of the peninsula during the ventennio is present in many of the periodical and pamphlet sources aimed at women, especially rural women, of the period of 1935 to 1940. As Part I mentioned, Le massaie contro le sanzioni (Housewives against the sanctions) goes as far as to forbid foreign influence even in the form of card games and gambling: “first poker, recently bridge, have infiltrated every house: for few as entertainment, but for many it is the putting on of airs…and worse, a speculation: always the deplorable hand of exoticism. If so many people were to give bridge it’s modest Italian name of ponte, it would be scorned as an almost plebeian game of cards.”

Of course, for “ultra-nationalism” to be best utilized by the regime to ensure it’s own continuation, the real struggle to was to embed Italianità within ideologies of obedience and the sacrifice of individual will to the communal good of the State. Despite their contentious and subordinate role in early fascist and Futurist rhetoric, women were essential to this process of Italianization and fascitzation of the peninsula, as exemplified by the previously cited snippet from the Giornale della donna (Women’s Journal). The images of war and a “righteous, sacred battle” even prior to empire building in Africa are evidence of the militarization of the home, and of the private sphere more generally. As has been discussed, the private sphere was minimized so that it might be merged totally with the public realm. This was the

57 Morelli, "Le Massaie Contro Le Sanzioni (Housewives against the Sanctions)," 23.
58 See footnote 42.
modus operandi of fascism’s control over citizens during the ventennio in Italy and elsewhere. The blurring of the private sphere would be tangled with a discourse of militant nationalism marked by an emphasis on Italian goods. The need to control citizens was synonymous with the need to create a nationalistic attitude that would, within fascist ideology, entrench the people within the regime’s structures of economy and society.

Women were thus at the front line of mediating the nascent regionalism of Italy before fascism (but it is this author’s opinion that this regionalism has very much persisted in the decades since the fall of Mussolini and until today), which posed a most extreme threat to the nationalist ideologies and conceptions of national unity that were used by the regime to manipulate national resources throughout the ventennio. Ultimately, when there were armies to be fed and a dearth of foreign grain to feed them with, a militant nationalist rejection of “exoticism” would render essential the sacrifices of women. This was especially true of rural women (refuting Stanley Payne’s baseless assertion that “Fascism in fact tended to neglect the countryside”59), because these actresses were responsible for feeding their Fascist households with food products that, especially after 1935, would be doctrinally all’Italiana. This attitude towards food was routinely militarized in rhetoric and propaganda to highlight an “Italianized,” “fascitized” consumption of food as the woman’s duty to the state: “And also the woman, to contribute her pebble to the granite construction of internal resistance [to foreign pressures], must fight her daily

battle for the diet of her family. [...] Modest is our battle: it’s that of the stove! Autarky picked up where the sanctions left off—it was a necessary evil to ensure the independence of the regime against oppressive foreign influences and power, and women were at the forefront of this battle:

Here advised is the necessity to re-educate ourselves, all of us, under the imperative of a precise social solidarity, of a communal compliance with the autarkic imperative, that must assure us and our children, apart from the full political and economic independence of the Fatherland, also a greater spirit of popular life, a more just allocation of the national wealth. (emphasis mine)

The role of the fascist woman in maintaining the “full political and economic independence of the Fatherland” is somewhat bizarre given the attitude of fascism towards women. The above citation from the pamphlet “Autarkic Spirit,” again geared towards housewives, suggests that the “precise social solidarity” and “communal compliance” were the key characteristics of the woman’s role in maintaining the regime. In reality, however, notoriously militaristic and chauvinistic Italian fascism was faced, from 1935 on, with the need to call upon women to mediate an economic policy that was both crucial to maintaining the nationalist precedent for fascism and the viability of that nationalism in practice.

The complex and often contradictory place of women within Italian fascism becomes rather messy when we consider the challenges that beset the application of fascist metaphysics (that is, socially defined states of being, such as of gender roles)

---

60 Lunella de Seta, *La Cucina Del Tempo Di Guerra : Manuale Pratico Per Le Famiglie* (Firenze: A. Salani, 1942), 5.
between 1935 and 1940. With the application of League of Nations sanctions and the subsequent adoption of autarkic policies, these challenges became increasingly economic in nature. With this framework in place, we can now return to the questions that opened this section—why continue the restrictive autarkic policy after the sanctions, and how would they be, in the Duce’s words, “useful to the Italian people”? The role of women in mediating these policies seems to suggest several interrelated answers.

First, to redefine the civic duty of the woman as the defender of Italian products is extremely significant. It allowed the development of native industries. Autarky, in redirecting an economy based on capitalist fundamentals for a “communal” purpose, weakened further the conception of a private sphere or of private enterprise:

“There are no economic matters which only affect private or individual interests. From the day when man resigned or adapted himself to life in common with his fellow beings, not a single one of his actions begins, develops, or is concluded in him alone, but has repercussions that go beyond his person.”

Autarky rallied a class of citizens blocked from the fascist conception of “modernity” in support of the structures which oppressed them—small cottage industry, agriculture, and a systematic positioning of womanhood within the traditional spheres of motherhood and “Queen of the House.” “From the social point of view, the woman’s place is in the domestic sphere,” a newspaper article titled “The

State, the Family, and Woman” told the women of the *fasci femminili* in June 1933.\(^{63}\) A few lines later, the woman’s domestic role was refined in relation to the state: “Everything to the State. Individuals and groups, professions and organizations. Everything…just so long as it is within the State, within that equilibrium of interests, that conciliation of every friction.”\(^{64}\) This call for the harnessing of all Italian “individuals and groups, professions and organizations” was repeated frequently, if not succinctly, in women’s periodical literature of this period as well as in propaganda pamphlets like “Autarkic Spirit;” it served to rally the private sphere in service of the public, contributing further to the dissolution of the boundary between home and State. The “service” to which women were called had many forms throughout the regime, from the Battle for Births and the Battle for Wheat to the late-1930s push for self-sufficiency. Autarky manifested itself in the need for everyday people, which in this body of evidence largely refers to rural women, to buy and cook certain food products in certain ways, in order to subvert a vague international menace that had tried to strangle the Empire with sanctions. Of course, if we are to read the propaganda from 1935 to 1939 at face value, the entrepreneurial Italian people had managed, under the sage direction of Mussolini, to turn this struggle on its head, making self-sufficiency the bastion of national strength.

Here I suggest an alternative interpretation of Mussolini’s decision to maintain an autarkic economic policy in the later 1930s. Given the rhetorical devices of sacrifice, empire, and national political and economic independence and that autarky

\(^{63}\) D. Bartoli, "Lo Stato, La Famiglia, La Donna (the State, the Family, and Woman)," *Giornale della Donna (Women's Journal)* (1933).

\(^{64}\) Ibid.
provided, and the prominent role of women in navigating the self-sufficient domestic economy in its most restrictive manifestations, it seems that the decision to maintain autarky was as much socially motivated as economically. More precisely, autarky allowed the regime to direct the economy through actors (better yet, actresses) that it had otherwise undervalued previously, by restricting women’s access to modernity and resigning them to the domestic and maternal spheres. Thus, women were co-opted into the act of supporting a policy and a regime that ultimately sought to oppress them. In this act of ideological hegemony—for these purposes, an act by which dominant ideologies of a political elite, here the fascist regime, were disseminated as norms and truths in order to maintain that same regime—the social agency of women was manipulated to control the economy as per the ideological and practical concerns of that political elite.

Maintaining autarky as the nation’s economic motor allowed Mussolini to embed ideologies of sacrifice in nationalist solidarity for future generations. By controlling the consumption and production of women, Fascism further restricted their independence in the twentieth century, and in the process Italian women become pawns of their own subordination. Though women, especially rural women, were the target of a media onslaught during the sanctions and in autarky years that would direct consumers towards exclusively Italian products, the endgame here was apparently not the women themselves but the children they fed at the dinner table. What these women were told to buy and cook was ideologically loaded with the sentiments of sacrifice and solidarity expressed above. So although the Italian nation was not, strictly speaking, alone in the world and dependent on the sacrifices of its
hardy population, the idea behind embedding food with ideological meanings was to instill these attitudes in the next generation, the banner-holders of the “fascist century”, three times a day. The politicization of the kitchen table under Mussolini took advantage of the existing rapport between Italian mothers and their children—and the Italian cult of motherloving (mammoni, the Italian answer to “mamma’s boys”) persists until today, perhaps stronger than ever—to embed the private sphere with political attitudes that would support the maintenance of the Fascist regime in Italy.

2.4: “ITALIANS MUST EAT JUST ONCE A DAY, TO CONSERVE ANGER IN THEIR HEARTS.” – Benito Mussolini

“Anger in [Italian] hearts” against the imposed sanctions supported the development of a nationalist solidarity. Cultivating an ideology of sacrifice at the dining table, as part of a woman’s social responsibility to family and state, served moreover to entrench women as producers, however small, of essential foods, the supply and distribution of which were disrupted by Mussolini’s wars, which privileged resources to armies spread over two continents.

The literature of the ventennio directed at women suggests that such a policy was more than just political. Yes, autarky in the second half of the 1930s sought to control a conception of state and a code of patriotic consumption, but as access for women to political participation was blocked in the 1920s and early 1930s, fascist interventions in home life had an overwhelmingly economic and productive motive.
Women’s role in the domestic economy of rural areas was no small matter. They grew gardens of produce and raised livestock for meat, skin, and milk. This kind of “auto-consumption”, or production and consumption of products by a family without their entering the market, constituted 30% of national production efforts.\(^65\) Though the Battle for Grain increased the amount of domestically produced wheat and rye,\(^66\) going completely self-sufficient after 1935 required the massaie rurali to navigate their domestic economies through scarcities of products like coffee and meat, stocks of which were diverted to serve Italian imperial armies in Africa, Albania, and later, the stages of World War II. Though the Battle for Grain’s price guarantee on wheat may have bolstered smallholder profits in the short term, market prices of cereal products rose substantially in this period and kept going up until the fall of the regime and the end of the war,\(^67\) rendering profit moot in the long term.

This redirection of resources to the military must be considered in light of the erosion of consensus around Mussolini’s foreign policy in the later 1930s. It has been suggested by historian Philip Morgan that Mussolini continued his aggressive foreign policy in Africa and elsewhere despite domestic disapproval\(^68\) in order to condense

\(^{66}\) Hildebrand, *Growth and Structure in the Economy of Modern Italy*, 284. See also: Ceretta and Minola, *Le Donne E La Cucina Nel Ventennio (Women and Cuisine under Italian Fascism)* 97.
\(^{68}\) If this reads contradictory to the earlier assertion that empire marked the high noon of the “age of consensus,” consider the premise of this work, which contends that contemporary scholars have not satisfactorily assessed the impact of the sanctions on Italians.
his own power, as international tension toward authoritarianism mounted in the wake of the Spanish Civil War. Access to food was sacrificed to stabilize the hegemon. Within the sector of disenfranchised rural women, the economic policy of autarky achieved several important goals of consolidating the regime’s dominance over social and economic spheres:

First, making “every Italian home a fortress of resistance” recast scarcity as a rallying cry for agricultural families behind the regime because the cause of their struggle—the “unjust sanctions”—was systematically externalized to the League of Nations. This is particularly clear in the visual propaganda in contemporary women’s literature—and that it is visual propaganda is important, considering that many people outside of cities were, optimistically, semi-literate. Later, broad “foreignism”, “snobbism”, and “Americanism” were declared adverse to national unity and consensus. The massaie rurali and their families became the front line against what was portrayed as international oppression of Italy’s political freedom.

Second, and as a result of this first point, the extension of nationalizing rhetoric to sparsely literate and extremely rooted rural communities allowed the

---


70 Average illiteracy in 1931 was 24% for women and 20.9% for men. The averages obscure regional inequalities, for illiteracy was as high as 56% for women in the southern region of Calabria, while as low as 5% in the northern province of Lombardy. Percentages from Jürgen Charnitzky, *Fascismo E Scuola: La Politica Scolastica Del Regime (1922-1943)* (Scandicci (FI): La nuova Italia, 1996), 499. See also: V. Capelli, "Immagine E Presenza Pubblica Della Donna in Calabria," in *Le Donne Nelle Campagne Italiane Del Novecento*, ed. Paola Corti (Bologna: Il mulino, 1992), 177-91.
regime to harness their productive power in agriculture. These resources were then distributed to the Italian armed forces, leaving the producing sectors to suffer from unavailability and extreme price hikes of staple foods like bread, sugar, coffee, and meat.

Cookbooks, domestic media and recipe collections specifically designed to mediate self-sufficiency sprang up through the publications of the *fasci femminili* newspaper, *Giornale della donna*. The FNFMR, was charged with the fascistization of rural women through domestic schools, the dissemination of agricultural techniques developed by regime-subsidized research and development in cities, the *visitatrici fasciste* and cultivation ceremonies of important products. The leadership of the newspaper changed from its owner and director of 12 years, Paola Benedettini Alferazzi, to PNF national secretary Augosto Turati, charged with the moral revitalization of print and audiovisual entertainment. Content after 1930 was increasingly bucolic even as the political and ideological language of some articles became overt. The *Festa dell’uva*, Festival of Grapes, was a celebration of local grape harvests; pictures and reports from each region were published seasonally in two-page centerfold spreads, showing solemn peasant women surrounded by the bounty of their province, the centermost *masssaia rurale* holding a large framed headshot of Mussolini. The fascist press was explicitly directed by the government through *veline*, carbon-copy dispatches from the regime’s media ministry, which molded public opinion on topics like coffee rationing, banned coverage of bad weather, and even
forbade the publication of advertisement which misused the fascistized concept of “Empire.”

The *fasci femminili* were the arm of the regime in the farthest-flung pockets of provincial Italy with a particular focus on “subaltern” rural women and children. Their newspaper was perhaps, for the purposes of this work, the most explicit locus of regime policy towards these groups. The strategies laid out to the *fasci femminili* in dealing with these groups reflects much about the complex relationship of fascist ideology and womanhood as fascist economic policy necessitated their capacity as large “producer” families, and called upon the “Teachers, the secretaries of the *fasci femminili*, and all fascist and Italian women” to

> “valorize our national products and intensify the development of our agricultural product and small rural industries that form the prosperity of individuals and the wealth of the Nation…Each person must feel within themselves the spirit of a soldier who fights a good battle, a sacred battle, and each must contribute, as great or small an effort as it may be, to the hard-won victory.”

Despite the economic and productive charge to the duties of the FF after 1930 and particularly from 1935-1943—as we see from articles like “Propaganda, assistance, collaboration in economic and social problems—These are the duties fascism assigns women,” cited above— the journal was outlining a woman’s role

---


73 Ibid., 80.

along the lines of fascist gender ideology as early as 1930. This journal therefore traces the changing concepts of femininity, maternity, and good citizenship for women through a turbulent political period where the early misogynistic rhetoric of fascism needed to soften and stretch to address important issues of economic policy:

“The Agrarian School is a sign of the marvelous power that the word of the Duce has in reinvigorating Fascist Italy. “Ruralize Italy” is His will: and here come together from every region the maestre rurali (rural schoolmistresses), schoolmistresses which had been considered until a few years ago the neglected, the lowest; for their obscure mission compelled them to live with the most humble, alone, and undefended, through dangers of every type and very painful sacrifices.”

This report on the Agrarian Schools run by the fasci femminili dates from January 15, 1930 and exposes several changing fascist myths of women’s roles as workers. The “Ruralize Italy” campaign was far removed from fascism’s roots as movement that responded to the increased urbanization and industrialization of the Italian city, and the regime continued to privilege industrial labor and management when it could afford to. Rural women were comparatively “humble” and unprotected; they needed the support of the middle class maestre, armed with the energizing rhetoric of the “fascist century.” The content from this period of Giornale della donna ("Women’s Journal,” the newspaper of the FF) is also fascinating because it outlines the civic responsibility of both middle-class maestre and the poorest farmwomen whom the FF was meant to teach and direct. Though the FF and the FNFMR were highly successful as mobilizing tools, the regime did respond by granting women

---

75 Anonymous, "La Scuola Femminile Fascista Di Agricoltura in S. Alessio."
more political power. Rather women’s participation in the public sphere was systematically repackaged by conservative sectors as a bastion against the spread of socialism and other progressivisms in the countryside, which was feared to threaten the balance of Italian economy. Women became important producers of goods in the countryside—the “small rural industries” and “development of [Italian] agricultural products…that form the prosperity of individuals and the wealth of the Nation;” to ensure the loyalty of this class of laborers and consumers, economic and social relevance for different types of women was defined for the first time.

The content of the journal from 1930 to 1935 signaled a retooling of fascist nationalism and civic responsibility to reach women on farms. By creating a civic duty that was part of their traditional work as farmhands and mothers, the Regime systematically denied them access to the protections of urban laborers (like maternity leave, nursing breaks, and day care for infants after 1934) while maintaining a low-wage labor force in the countryside that could also support large numbers of children without burdening welfare programs. A woman’s destiny outside of the traditional agricultural sphere, where women made an average of 50% of the male wage (as opposed to in urban industry, where she made 60-70% and earned benefits) was further limited by laws of 1934 and 1938 which systematically denied women access to the workforce. The Decree-law of 1938 #1514 placed a 10% maximum on female employees in medium and large sized private enterprise and barred them entirely from offices and small businesses.

77 Ibid., 184-5.
In order to create a system of agricultural production that would support the concentration of Mussolini’s power through Empire in Africa (despite the stranglehold autarky placed on average Italians), women were denied access to modernity— to the “fascist century.” In fact, fascist “modernity” for women was a simple rebrand of their traditional roles as mother, housewife, and auto-consumption producer. Autarky would later “exploit the vast machinery of political and social control that had made [fascism] possible in the first place to shift the burden of economic growth to the least advantaged members of society.”

Shouldering the peasantry and women with the burdens of autarky was known as turning the household into a “fortress of resistance.” How was sacrifice re-packaged as internal resistance, and what were rural people, particularly women, actually resisting after the sanctions were lifted, and autarky became a voluntary policy?

Autarky was an internal crusade against a vague, if not fabricated, foreign antagonist, because economic independence was inseparable from political independence in fascist ideology. In light of international tensions mounting around the military totalitarianism of Francisco Franco and the ‘Catholic Corporatism’ of António de Oliveira Salazar flaring west of the Pyrenees, autarky was as much an insurance policy against possible future economic action by liberal-democratic powers. The failure of the 1935-1936 League of Nations sanctions proved that a stronger hand would be needed to curb imperial aggressions in young authoritarianisms. Autarky preempted further economic responses on behalf of the international community to Mussolini’s empire.

---

78 Ibid., 5.
79 Mussolini, "Il Piano Regolatore Della Nuova Economia Italiana."
The metaphysic of sacrifice imbued in Italian nationalism during this period allowed the necessary portions of Italian society to contribute at their own expense to these hegemonic priority of solidarity against foreign oppression, although they were low on the list to receive the purported benefits of political independence. The question of autarky, as a program adapted from international sanctions and then adopted voluntarily (despite the scarcities it produced for the least-advantaged sectors of society) is thus fundamentally one of the Fascist relationship with agricultural labor and accompanying social structures.

In his speech to the Chamber on corporatist economic reforms, Mussolini declared labor the measure of social relevance:

“Under the fascist regime labor, in its manifold forms, becomes the gauge for the social and national utility of individuals and groups….The economic changes I have described, and this innovation in the political constitutional field, will realize in full the fundamental postulates acclaimed by the fascist revolution 17 years ago…”

Society was thus restructured along lines that reflected the socialist roots of much early fascist economic ideology. In practice, corporatist policies favored captains of industry and other urban magnates, and the regime granted them special privileges to work alongside the government in directing the economy. It is no small matter that autarky served as a boon to Italian big business while rural producer families bore the weight of feeding Italians and the fascist imperial forces at the expense of the own auto-consumption on which many relied.

Exemplified in Mussolini’s “Regulatory Plan for the New Italian Economy” is the sentiment that a woman’s citizenship and her duty to serve the nation are bound in

80 Ibid.
her productive capacity for food and children (the next generation of good Fascists, born within and raised by the regime) as well as her “political role, […] the moral resurrection of Man.” Of course, provincial sectors and the peasantry, particularly women who were considered predisposed to sacrifice for the benefit of their family, made the sacrifices that accompanied self-sufficiency. Though the urban poor suffered greatly, at times more than their rural counterparts, the rhetoric of the Regime focused on the sacrifices of women when delegating this heavy responsibility:

“The fascist Regime counts also on mothers, on Italian women, on educators, on the women of the people to whom much state energy is entrusted, because they are a people prepared for great sacrifices and noble passions, if the woman will know how to maintain them in high spirits, and if the State continues to emanate the sage laws that protect their life and their intellectual and moral work.”

The fasci femminili leaders of the FNFMR were used as an arm of regime control over other women in their localities, and the FF was one of the few ways that women could participate in social organization and in civic life. With the vote denied to them, proactively political women of the middle and upper classes had the sole option of participating in state organizations like the fasci femminili, which had effectively replaced pre-existing women’s (though not doctrinally feminist) groups like the Union of Country Housewives (UMC).

The role of the massaie themselves, however, “was always fairly passive.” They could rise to become a “Nucleus leader,” responsible for “day-to-day work of the organization”: “propaganda and welfare work in the smallest rural

villages...bring[ing] newspapers and orders to the members...collect[ing] rabbit skins,” 82 and this constituted the lowest rung of the power ladder within the fasci femminili. By taking over and assimilating women’s groups (in the countryside and elsewhere) that predated fascism, “the regime sought to exploit family networks to contain mass consumption and to reduce demand on public services” which were reserved for urban dwellers with few children, as opposed to the characteristically large rural family which had been encouraged in the Battle for Births. 83 Here we see the emergence of a gender policy that, in De Grazia’s words, “walked the thin line between modernity and emancipation.” 84 Of course, we can hardly consider the provincial woman (or any other social actor, perhaps; this question is very much in vogue amongst contemporary historians of fascism) to have been “modernized” by fascism, considering that the most rural people were barely touched by new urban fashions and modes of living before 1930.

Policies like the Battle for Births 85 encouraged women to continue traditional modes of living and identifying. Many sources reference the need to stem the tide of urbanization in the countryside. This careful delineation of urban and rural spheres was protected. Though rhetorically antithetical to goals of national unity, the maintenance of two distinct (I hesitate to use the word equal) ‘Italys’ would root the need for a flexible Fascist ideology that has been the interest of so many scholars seeking the intersection of fascism and praxis. These ideological gymnastics duly noted, this thesis aims to examine how control of resources played into the distinction

---

84 Ibid., 9.
85 See Part I, pg 28
of urban and rural spheres and the corporatist economic landscape. This, in turn, calls into question the “ultra-nationalist” label many scholars are quick to ascribe to fascism.

Corporatism, “To Mussolini, whatever its normative rationale… [was] essentially an instrument of management and control.” 86 Corporatism was a particularly fitting model for organizing agriculture in rooted peasant societies because it was based on a very traditional, almost tribal form of economic organization rooted in structures of the family and clan. A corporatist state was also the will of the Roman Catholic Church— and cohesion with the papacy was indispensable to control through consensus in conservative areas. 87

Victoria De Grazia argues that the corporatist management of resources in provincial Italy necessitated the “[exploitation] of family networks to contain mass consumption and to reduce demand on public services” 88 in cities, maintaining traditional rural structures of gender and work. The proximity of ideographs of maternity, rural lifestyle, and sacrifice in newspapers, women’s almanacs, and materials from local fascist organizations point to the sense of sacrifice perceived in mothers and housewives in rural societies. Gender politics thus slithered into politico-economic structures; it was an indispensable factor in fascist interventions that reached the bowls and plates of rural people. Despite early rhetoric that “favored men at the expense of women in the family structure, the labor market, the political system,

and society at large,” “the least advantaged members of society” shouldered the weight of empire and became essential actors to ensure the survival of the state.

That sacrificing at the table could become the manifestation of a woman’s civic duty lies in the fascist prerogative of blurring the public and private spheres. To subordinate the familial sphere to the state was to control important resources for self-sufficiency after 1935. But these controls were also relevant much earlier, when the need to augment the population and increase food stocks for imperial armies legitimized Fascist interventions in gender constructs, national cuisine, and the duties of motherhood:

Because the Duce wants the field worker to love their land and remain firmly attached to it and loyal, the woman can cooperate in this, the “housewife” that the Duce has recalled to her true function of mother and homemaker. Because her family will be the font of well-being, this is the best way for women to collaborate in the fortunes of the Patria.

A man ‘attached to the land’ meant another big farm family to grow wheat or tomatoes for the soldiers in Ethiopia and one less family in line for bread handouts in the city. Rural women, otherwise irrelevant to the strength of the State, helped to root the provincial family in traditional structures, reducing competition for industrial and office jobs and preserve a social sector responsible for producing food while ameliorating demographic decline.

---

89 Ibid., 5.
90 Ernesta Brizi-Orsenigo, Il Libro Della Massaia (the Housewife's Book) (Roma: Ramo editoriale degli agricoltori, 1938).
2.5: CONCLUSION

The State prescribed roles of the rural woman under Italian fascism were the moral rejuvenation of rural men, the proliferation of children, the careful navigation of the sanctioned, autarkic, and wartime economies, and the production of resources that allowed normal food supply chains to be redirected towards the privileged army class. Ultimately these roles served to create social and gender structures that were conducive to the material and functional controls that allowed the Regime to go about its daily business of eradicating the private realm.

Mothers, particularly those with families in the countryside far from schools and other State-sponsored educational resources, had another responsibility that was exploited by the regime—their role as educator of their children. Though they were frequently called upon in articles on domestic economy and fascist cookery for their capacities as auto-consumption producers and proliferators of small domestic industry—which were, as has been demonstrated, crucial resources to the imperial economy after 1935—the evidence does not fully explain woman’s productive role. Rather it is more illuminating when we consider that a woman was also responsible for educating and feeding her children several times a day, every day, until they were into their twenties and even beyond (I cite again contemporary mammoni, who live at home well beyond their twenties, even until they marry in their late forties, as an extreme example of how Italians, even contemporary and urban Italians, are firmly rooted in their childhood home and retain very close mother-child relationships well into adulthood). Considering the heavy-handed propaganda of women’s literature of this time, explaining it solely in terms of directing food production may be simplistic.
Rather, it is important to consider all the dimensions of femaleness and motherhood that were exploited by the regime to ensure its own continuation.

“The extent of the power of future citizens and a large part of the possibilities for the development of the fortune of the Patria depends upon the ‘preparation’ of children. The daily action of woman in the home is in strict correlation with the military interest group, impregnable strength of the fascist State.” (emphasis mine)

Militarizing the private sphere of home and family gave women a perverse sense of national belonging and responsibility to the war effort, for they were not rewarded with access to the “fascist century” of modernity. Rather, their traditional status as mothers, producers, and homemakers was maintained. Good fascist citizenship was obedience to fascist economic priorities, and the regime sought thus to exploit women’s influence over cooking, agriculture, domestic industry, household consumption, and the rearing of children into good fascists, without elevating their status in society.

Bartoli, D. "Lo Stato, La Famiglia, La Donna (the State, the Family, and Woman)." *Giornale della Donna (Women's Journal)* (06/01/1933 1933).


Morelli, Lidia. "Le Massaie Contro Le Sanzioni (Housewives against the Sanctions)." Torino: S. Lattes & C., 1935.


Part III:
1939-1943

3.1: INTRODUCTION

With 6,000,000 Italian men off at the Ethiopian front, the regime concentrated their attention on farm matriarchs (reggitrici) to direct the production and consumption of food in the years of World War II. The propaganda disseminated through the National Fascist Federation of massaie rurali (FNFM) intensified, especially against black market activities that sought to undermine increasingly rigid rationing policies. The rural household was more political than ever, and farms were simultaneously lauded for their self-sufficiency and condemned for hoarding, thus exacerbating already high prices and increasing hunger-induced panic.\(^1\) As wartime scarcities tightened the noose around the urban middle classes, the farm family’s ability to produce food for itself was an unexpected new privilege, and an unwelcome one for urban consumer families.

During World War II visual and written regime propaganda (like recipes, domestic manuals, and cookbooks) served to confine cooking and eating. In this period the confrontation of fascist nationalism and historical Italian regionalism, heretofore a largely rhetorical discourse, was realized during the most challenging hour of the fascist ventennio. Rationing was the last crank of the jack-in-the-box for the fascists, because food policy and wartime insecurity brought

\(^1\) See Morgan, *The Fall of Mussolini : Italy, the Italians, and the Second World War.*
underlying contradictions of fascist anti-class ideology and productive policy to the surface, quite literally, at the increasingly bare Italian table. Those Italians that were undervalued by fascist rhetoric—the agricultural sector and women especially—became among the most essential actors in the successful redirection of food and restructuring of other agricultural resources for wartime mobilization. Even as battalions of Blackshirts provided necessary support to the underwhelming Royal Italian Army (technically loyal to the King, not Mussolini), hunger at home, especially in the regime’s urban social strongholds, led ultimately to the dissolution of consensus around Mussolini’s government and bitter civil war.

3.2: THE AGE OF THE ERSATZ

The scarcities of the 1930s and the World War II era ushered in the age of ersatz in Italian kitchens. Recipes and domestic journalism of the regional *fasci femminili* and their rural *massaie rurali* subsections initially sought the voluntary (“patriotic”) sacrifice of meat and fats during the sanctions. Though centuries-old conditions of poverty and poor land had surely equipped many rural Italian families to navigate hunger and dearth, this kind of cooking manual became a crucial tool for navigating the unavailability of certain foods, like fats and eventually wheat during wartime rationing. The preponderance of these substitution cookbooks and of autarkic or “resistance” cooking in women’s publications under MinCulPop shows that the housewives of Italy shouldered a great burden on top of their already considerable wartime responsibility over small farms, local businesses, and broods of young fascists in the absence of male heads of household.
The Mantovan Amalia Moretti Foggia, third female doctor in Italy, is today better known by her pseudonym Petronilla. She was a prolific journalist of domestic economy, nutrition and cooking in hard times for the widely-distributed Corriere della sera, Giornale della donna and other women’s journals. The popularity of her columns eventually led to a slew of published recipe collections, and the name Petronilla is still synonymous with making-do and resourcefulness amongst contemporary historians of Italian women. Certainly Petronilla is significant in her complicity with the regime’s productive norms that were disproportionately dependent upon women. By working within the regime’s policies, she implicitly condoned them. She is perhaps all the more notable as a wealthy, highly educated northerner who challenged accepted concepts of a woman’s destiny by occupying a highly technical field which was prei exclusive to men. Her articles and recipes are often subtly critical of the regime’s inability to properly feed its citizens by bemoaning the necessity of substitution foods and autarkic or “resistance” dishes. Petronilla is illustrative of the contradictory trends in a woman’s destiny under fascism. “Traditionalizing” tendencies (supporting and reinforcing regime policies towards the home that sought to hem in a woman’s access to the city, workforce, social services, and broad civil liberties) were, counter-intuitively perhaps, the routes available for women who sought to be more “modern,” and to acquire more political and social space for themselves. Such was Italian fascism, a movement that was both anti-conservative and anti-woman, and riddled with rhetorical contradictions. From the Battle for Births to the assumption of agricultural production during the war, “modernity” as applied to women under fascism in Italy thus sought to ensure a
woman’s conformity to the social roles of mother and *reggitrice* that would continue production of food in the countryside and responsible “autarkic” eating also in urban households, for food insecurity during the war was far from a rural phenomenon.

Petronilla and other authors cited in this thesis rose to prominence by creating classic Italian peasant recipes (*cucina povera*) with substitutions for scarce products. An “autarkic cookbook” from Modena outlines modes of making broth without meat using vegetables, herbs, bullion, the ominously-labeled “meat extracts” or simply lard, and finished, for “the most fortunate,” with a little cheese or a nub of butter. Gnocchi, a northern Italian dumpling, were particularly well adapted to the scarcity of wheat because the dough uses potatoes to stretch the flour. In the Modenese cookbook the flour is eliminated completely and substituted with polenta a form of corn grit. The resulting dumplings are like stones compared to the prized lightness of proper gnocchi made from white wheat flour and potatoes. Gnocchi made with the cornmeal sunk to the bottom of the pan and stuck; unsticking them ruined an hour’s worth of meticulous hand-cutting, portioning, and shaping of the gnocchi with sauce-catching ridges from the tines of a fork. Autarkic cooking may well have served to firm up the “correct” preparation of certain foods in the minds of Italians, creating a more rigidly defined vocabulary of Italian dishes and less of the culinary dynamism that could have created a truly national cuisine.

---

92 Consider also that Italian cuisines are characteristically wary of change, especially as concerns homestyle dishes like the ones in this cookbook. Recall that Rita refuses to eat whole-wheat pasta as part of her diet, but *will* eat whole wheat bread. One can only imagine the many wrinkled Modenese noses at the dense polenta gnocchi.
What ingredients and preparations were encouraged by the regime in this period, and what can these details tell us about the larger problem of implementing fascist ideology and creating *Italianità*? The PNF recipes distributed by the *fasci femminili* of Modena read like a list of approved wartime (or autarkic) preparations: rabbit “alla campagnola” (country style, with vegetables and tomatoes, and the liver saved for another use), frittatas with vegetables, rice and legume dishes, kidneys, tripe, lungs, sardines, and chestnuts; a recommended Sunday supper of “meatballs without fat,” carrots with a little Marsala wine, and a soup of beets and rice.\(^93\) The prevalence of vegetables, tomatoes, eggs, rice, and aromatic herbs (which, depending on where one lived, could be grown out of an apartment window, in a small garden, or foraged wild) is common in other local and national publications on kitchen economy and responsible wartime eating, because these products were relatively inexpensive and easy to find on the white market. For women in the countryside, vegetable gardens could provide the produce, particularly tomatoes, eggplants, herbs and lettuces, that provided the bulk and flavor of many autarkic and wartime meals. Rabbits and chickens could be raised on very little land and provide a significant return on investment with quick reproduction, fur, meat, and eggs. A sanction-era article from *La donna fascista* titled simply “Autarkia” (autarky) made rabbits the symbol of patriotic eating, featuring a furry-eared mascot:

---

\(^{93}\) Bellei, "Ricettario Autarchico. La Cucina Nel Ventennio: Quando Eravamo Poveri Davvero," 127.
Tomatoes were also lauded particularly for their optimal nutritional value and “Italian-ness.” Leaving aside that tomatoes are not a crop native to Italy— that is, before the 15th century exploration brought New World foods to Europe, tomatoes were not part of the Italian culinary vocabulary at all— under fascism the pomodoro was a symbol for Italian particularity, in cuisine and otherwise, and encouraging tomato consumption was beneficial to corporative larges-scale agriculture and to the regime’s nationalistic endeavors, by labeling “patriotic” those recipes and diets that featured primarily vegetables (and were thus more autarkic than those reliant on meat and wheat).

The Almanacco della donna (Women’s Almanac) of 1940 and 1941 encouraged the consumption of rice as an essential element of “modern” cuisine for

---

94 Photo by author. From Donna fascista, June 31 1939.
its healthy qualities and quick cooking time. While this of course bolstered the weak National Rice Authority (*Ente nazionale riso*) and the *mondine* (seasonal, female rice workers), the scarcity of wheat—especially the white wheat considered the staple of bread baking—concentrated propaganda on rice consumption. Even when substitutes like rye, corn, and barley flours were available for bread, the product produced was considered of low quality and fundamentally unappetizing. The civic religion of bread that had been institutionalized in the Italian consciousness by the Battle for Grain and Mussolini’s “Prayer for Bread” (see below) in schools and popular media was placed under extreme strain. In Sicily the local dialect refers to bread as ‘*u luvuru*, livelihood, and a common proverb goes even farther: “Who takes the bread takes also life.” It is not a far stretch to connect the dissolution of consensus around the regime with the unfamiliar flavors, colors, and textures of “autarkic” breads.

![Figure 7](image)

*Figure 7:* “Italians! Love bread, heart of the home, fragrance of the board, joy of the hearth. Respect bread, sweat of the brow, pride of work, poetry of sacrifice. Honor bread, glory of
the fields, fragrance of the earth, festival of life. Do not waste bread, wealth of the Fatherland, God’s sweetest gift, the holiest reward of human toil. – Benito Mussolini.

The logical question that arises here is that of pasta, perhaps the most quintessential product of the Italian culinary legacy. As mentioned in Part I, the Futurist Cuisine author Filippo Tomasso Marinetti abhorred pasta for it caused laziness and lack of zeal in Italians. Pasta from dough of wheat flour and eggs, as it is made in the North, became a luxury when eggs were essential as a primary source of protein. It is still considered a richer and more extravagant style of pasta, for it is also frequently served with meat-based sauces like ragù. The humbler type, from a dough of semolina and water as is typical of Southern regional pasta and mass-produced dried pasta, would have been more accessible for most and was conveniently associated with vegetable-based dressings and sauces. But bread remained the predominant staple starch of most of Italy in this period.

3.3: “PATRIOTIC” FARE: SACRIFICE, NUTRITION, AND A “NATIONAL” CUISINE

Fats were very difficult to find and even harder to afford in the period of 1940-1943. The fascio femminile of Milan published a week’s worth of recipes without oil or butter in 1940 that relied on herbs, vegetables, tomatoes, rice, bullion, 

milk, polenta, potatoes, and eggs for substance and seasoning.\textsuperscript{96} It has been reported that the price of oil rose from 6 lira per kilo in 1936, to 7.80 lira per kilo in 1938, and finally to 540.50 lira per kilo in 1943.\textsuperscript{97} We must approach such a generalized statistic with caution, for market prices and rationing varied by region and determined the development of local black markets. But when we consider that the average farm hand made 150-200 lira a month and the average specialized factory worker made 350-420 lira a month, it is safe to assume that fats were out of the question for most farm and worker families after 1940, especially with the loss of income and labor when men went off to war. A velina from fall 1940 told Italian publications: “Foodstuffs restrictions: Do not consider reporting that butter is bad for your health, that oil gives one indigestion, etc. Write instead that [the restrictions] are about bearing a heady sacrifice.”\textsuperscript{98} Contemporary articles in \textit{Donna fascista}, however, frequently dissuaded meat and fat consumption on health grounds. As Mussolini engaged Italy in further military engagements and food became less and less available, a discourse of healthy eating for the \textit{Patria} may well have seemed ridiculous, but in fact patriotism and health were often connected in recipes and women’s literature.

The importance of patriotic sacrifice of certain foods in the name of the regime’s ideological priorities (empire in Africa, for example, or “political

\textsuperscript{96} Bellei, "Ricettario Autarchico. La Cucina Nel Ventennio: Quando Eravamo Poveri Davvero," 126.
\textsuperscript{97} Lilli Craveri, "Ricette Senza Condimenti Per Una Inter"a Settimana (Recipes without Condiments for an Entire Week)," (Milan: Federazione dei Fasci Femminili di Milano, 1940).
independence” from Western liberalism) was already discussed in Part II. The discourse of nutrition, insofar as it was “patriotic,” is a curious and inconsistent tool of control that could be turned on in the public conception to highlight the “modernity,” or “scientifically proven” vitamin quality of ingredients like tomatoes and alternative grains, like rye and corn. Nutrition as a quality of food that was distinct from energetic (recently minted “caloric”) value was a relatively new phenomenon; vitamins were only discovered at the beginning of the 20th century and were still largely under-researched, and for the average Italian rural housewife the concept of vitamins may well have been a product of fascist era research and development. Reports in the Giornale della donna and other publications for women were directed in veline to report on the health benefits and natural abundance of vegetables and rice to encourage their consumption by Italian families. This would support national agro-industry (like ENR and the mondine, female rice workers) while alleviating the dependence on animal protein and wheat flour for pasta and bread, allowing these important sources of calories and protein to be privileged to the army. Bread, “the richness of the Patria,” was especially important because it was seen to bolster soldiers’ love of country. Meanwhile, those who remained to work the fields and raise the next generation of fascist soldiers politicized the meal, however

---

99 See Mussolini’s “Prayer for Bread,” this section page 7
100 “The extent of the power of future citizens and a large part of the possibilities for the development of the fortune of the Patria depends upon the ‘preparation’ of children. The daily action of woman in the home is in strict correlation with the military interest group, impregnable strength of the fascist State.” (Emphasis mine). Faber, "Etica Fascista," La donna fascista (Giornale della Donna), 5 March 1935.
humble, with “patriotic” ingredients and techniques. In this way tomatoes represented that eating itself was co-opted for ideological goals. In a popular wartime cookbook by Lunella de Seta, a recipe for a chilled tomato cream (a type of savory flan or milk pudding) highlighted tomatoes for their healthy qualities as well as for their significance to the Italian palette:

Considering the particular nutritional importance of the tomato, especially lightly cooked, as in this case, for its vitaminic endowments, it is fitting for this type of preparation, and particularly attractive also for its color. A typically patriotic lunch, perhaps? A red mousse of tomatoes, followed by boiled eggs cut in half and displayed on the serving platter such that the yolks are face down and you see only the whites. Add a fine side of cooked vegetables, chopped. White red and green!101

Tomatoes were institutionalized as an “Italian” product for their accessibility, “vitaminic endowments” and their color, which, combined with green vegetables and an “autarkic” protein like cheese, eggs, chicken, or rabbit was a practical and aesthetically patriotic choice.

Consider that “Italian cuisine” is an altogether arbitrary category within Italy. The “Italian” cookbook (that is, one written in Italian Standard instead of in a regional dialect) only came into being around 1837, corresponding nicely with pre-Unification waves of nationalist sentiment. Cookbooks in regional dialects persisted into the 20th century. Pellegrino Artusi’s 1891 opus La scienza in cucina e l’arte di mangiar bene (The Science of Cooking and the Art of Eating Well) is widely considered the first “national” Italian cookbook for compiling recipes from diverse regions of Italy. Massimo Montanari, eminent scholar of Italian food and its

---

101 Seta, La Cucina Del Tempo Di Guerra : Manuale Pratico Per Le Famiglie, 51.
relationship to Italian history, has astutely summarized Artusi’s homogenization of regional recipes collected largely from oral sources, his privileging of the northern Tuscan and Emilian cuisines that he—and his openly preferred audience of “well-heeled” northern readers—was most familiar with, effectively, in Hobsbawm’s terms, “inventing tradition.” Dishes still maintained the “alla (region’s name here)” nomenclature of their provenance, however, in accordance with the binary region-nation Italian identity that is the inspiration for this paper. Thus a “patriotic” discourse in discussions of wartime eating cannot refer to a canonized Italian cuisine along the lines of Artusi’s La scienza in cucina e l’arte di mangiar bene. Such a diet would be reserved to those who could afford to buy (perhaps more commonly on the black market than through legal channels) the meat, animal fat, and flour that are the building blocks of Tuscan and Emilian/Romagnola cooking. Without fats, how were Italian families to season their pasta, when they could afford it, or the vegetables that by now constituted most of the average diet? Petronilla and Lunella de Seta recommend cheese, “as they do in the Marche,” utilizing the regional cucine povere as a resource during wartime scarcities.

In wartime, food became a vehicle for spreading regional cuisines even as fascist rhetoric and ideology trumpeted the importance of a nationalism that transcended individuality in favor of a unified race capable of winning a war against a multinational enemy. The necessity of a cooking style that was feasible within the

---


103 Seta, La Cucina Del Tempo Di Guerra: Manuale Pratico Per Le Famiglie, 53.
limits of sanctions, autarky, and rationing led to a spread of the cuisines of the most undervalued, rural, often southern regions of Italy. These *cucine povere* were often largely vegetarian, required local goods, and featured ingredients that could be foraged or grown for cents at home. Their influence is present in the suggestion of one *Donna fascista* (formerly *Giornale della donna*) article to raise rabbits in an apartment courtyard and in the emphasis on tomatoes as a “patriotic” and healthy food; tomatoes are a typically southern crop, best grown in warm climates. Famous recipes highlighting tomatoes, like Caprese salad and the ubiquitous, often Americanized, marinara sauce originated in southern regions. Considering the challenge regionalism posed to fascist nationalism, it is almost ironic that war’s tendency to unify people in a single national effort could encourage the spread of *regional* cooking styles under such a hypernationalistic regime as fascism.

### 3.4: THE DECAY OF CONSENSUS: HOARDING, RATIONING, AND THE DISINTEGRATION OF FASCIST ANTI-CLASSISM

In 1942, a middle-class Ligurian housewife lamented the loss of her maid in a somewhat hysterical letter—

I would never have thought that I would be living this anxious, nervous, and totally prosaic existence, the point of which, the continual day and night problem of which, is one thing, and always the same thing: food. You sit down at table and eat in silence the meal which has cost you so much sweat, not so much in earning the
money for it, as in finding the food for it, paying for it and cooking it in the least bad way possible…alas, thorns aplenty for us poor consumers. The serving woman, at the end of the month, tells me some story and takes off to her place, where it appears there is no lack of, rather an abundance of, bread, focaccia, all the various flours that exist, including those on her ration-card…I can well believe it, since she is the daughter of peasants, which means today’s rich people, along with the shopkeepers. And so here I am…humiliated to the point of seeing my own serving woman leave my house for the want of bread!104

This incredible source, cited by Philip Morgan in *The Fall of Mussolini*, demonstrates rather well much of what will be discussed in the final section of this chapter. First, though previous sections of this paper have primarily been concerned with the impacts of fascism on rural women, here wartime scarcity hit the urban middle and lower classes hardest. This situation led to an eruption of what Gramsci had described over a decade earlier in his “Notes on Italian History”—

“Urbanism in Italy is not purely, nor “especially,” a phenomenon of capitalistic development or that of big industry…there exist strong nuclei of populations of a modern urban type; but what is their relative position? They are submerged, oppressed, crushed by the other part, which is not of a modern type, and constitutes the great majority. Paradox of “cities of silence.” In this type of city there exists, among all social groups, an urban ideological unity against the countryside, a unity which even the most modern nuclei in terms of civil function do not escape...There is hatred and scorn for the “peasant,” an implicit common front against the demands of the countryside...Reciprocally, there exists an aversion-- which, if “generic”, is not thereby any

104 Quoted in Morgan, *The Fall of Mussolini: Italy, the Italians, and the Second World War*, 64.
less tenacious or passionate-- of the country for the city and all the groups which make it up.”

The letter that opens this section illustrates that wartime rationing of essential foods and especially bread greatly exacerbated these tensions between city and country in Italy. The Ligurian signora’s distress—her provincial maid, from the traditionally impoverished agricultural class, was suddenly privileged with bread while the traditional elites had none—indicates that these tensions often coexisted with mutual scorn between the urban middle class and the rural poor. Considering Fascist claims of being a unifying force on the basis of a purely rhetorical “tribal solidarity,” the rifts between city and country, poor and bourgeois, and North and South were enhanced due to the scarcity of bread, and thus undermined concept of the “multi-class” or “trans-class” Fascist state, and of the Italianità which is foundational to Fascist nationalism. “Mussolini blamed the decision to ration bread from October 1941 on those farmers who were not consigning their quotas of grain to the ammassi,” mandatory stockpiles of grain collected from regional farmers. This serves as further evidence that the increased strains on food production in World War II Italy, though in practice deeply entrenched in gender politics, deepened historical social and topographical tensions between city and country, which, viewed through the homogenizing and symbolic lens of Fascist rhetoric, are rough ideographs of rich and poor.

105 Gramsci, Selections from the Prison Notebooks of Antonio Gramsci, 91.
High food prices clashed with earlier fascist policies like the Battle for Grain, which rallied agricultural people as workers for the economically (thus politically) independent state. Ideologically it was inconsistent with the Fascist cult of bread, perhaps “Italian cuisine” in sense that bread was consumed by most Italians; this “religion of pane” inspired works of propaganda such as Mussolini’s ubiquitous schoolroom “Prayer for Bread” (Figure 7). These policies had served to make nominal citizens of otherwise disenfranchised rural women in order to solicit their complicity in increased demands on Italian farms and home cooks by creating a unified eating culture within autarkic confines. The cult of bread seems particularly devoid of substance since prices were so high and rations were so small; “Mussolini knew well that the rationing of bread and pasta was a fundamentally intolerable policy for the public, especially in southern regions but most acutely in the deep South. In Sicily, farmers call grain ‘u lavuru, livelihood, and one of the most diffuse and well-known proverbs is ‘Who takes bread, takes also life.’”108 The cult of bread had turned bread into a symbol of national solidarity—in fact the only true “Italian” cuisine of the Fascist ventennio—of tradition, and the domestic sphere. Fascism began to unravel in bread lines and at ammassi collection sites.

Hunger gnawed at the myths that constituted fascist legitimacy. Rationed food was distributed based on age, gender, and labor intensity of occupation. The tessere anonarie, or ration-books, consigned 400 grams of bread per day to heavy laborers, 300 grams to “workers in general,” and 200 grams per day for everyone else in

From summer to winter 1942, however, bread rations dropped precipitously to 50 grams per day for “everyone else,” children included. 50 grams of bread is about 2.5 slices of commercial sliced bread by weight. Considering the density of breads made from “autarkic” or “resistance” flours like rye, corn, and buckwheat, the resulting ration was clearly insufficient. The monthly ration of meat in 1941 was 400 grams per person (about 20 slices of bread, fewer than one slice per day) and 100 grams per person of oil. Butchers were only allowed to open on certain days of the week to discourage meat consumption, although by 1942 it was hard to find and very few could afford it anyway. The privileging of food supplies to Italian armies in Africa and on the European stages of World War II created food insecurity conditions of low supply and high prices in government-regulated markets. Prices were so outrageous on the white market that the urban middle and lower classes turned to the first alternative markets in two decades that were not controlled by the regime’s corporate and labor syndicates. “Black market thieves” were denounced frequently in visual propaganda for keeping legal market prices inflated, creating a panic that allowed the scapegoating of farmers. Bread prices were dangerously high because of “the supply and distribution of foodstuffs, how the food reached the consumer,” a function of corruption by ammassi administrators. In this way the defiance of alternative commerce like the black market at this time signified the end of the people’s trust in regime promises, a recourse to local solidarities against corrupt appointed officials. Remarkably this took place in cities which, due to their

109 Ibid., 127.
110 Ceretta and Minola, Le Donne E La Cucina Nel Ventennio (Women and Cuisine under Italian Fascism) 118.
111 Morgan, The Fall of Mussolini : Italy, the Italians, and the Second World War, 65.
cosmopolitanism, their economic and productive competitiveness, their connectedness to the rest of urban society—essentially, their “modernity”—were most valued within fascist ideology. Thus the failure to secure bread for the Italian middle classes effectively severed the trust of the regime’s fundamental social base.

Figure 8: “FARMERS bring immediately all of your required grain to the ammasso. It is an act of loyalty to the Duce and of devotion to the Patria which will make you once again worthy of the recognition of the Nation.”

Since the first mandatory ammassi del grano (grain collection for state distribution) in 1936, agricultural sector was largely able to avoid illegal market activity by providing food for their families off of their own land—hence the maid is more secure of her bread at home in the countryside (Part II discusses how this and other autarkic policies resulted in increased burdens on rural women). The increased demands of World War II on agriculture eventually overtook this farmer’s privilege, and they could “default on ammassi consignments in order to protect their own families’ consumption, when the government decided to reduce the amounts of produce the farmer was allowed to retain for family use,” or, in the case of some larger holders, they could sell surplus or part of their consignment on the black

112 Picture by author. From Sandro Bellei, ed. La Cucina Autarchica. Chi Mangi Troppo Derubi La Patria. (CDL).
113 Morgan, The Fall of Mussolini: Italy, the Italians, and the Second World War, 68.
market. The “effective boycott” that the regime referred to in propaganda as “hoarding” or “black theft” deepened anti-rural sentiment, even though, as Morgan claims, Mussolini’s wartime attitude was generally “anti-bourgeois.”\footnote{Ibid., 67.} In the Battle for Grain, bread became a fascist ideograph of national purity, the essence of Italianità, and the country’s ability to provide for itself guided by the regime. Scarcity during rationing thus represented the failure of the regime to live up to the promises of the autarky years—that intrusions into the lives of rural people were valid in the name of national well-being and dynamism.

Figure 9: “The Black Market Thief! All will know him.”\footnote{From Bellei, La Cucina Autarchica. Chi Mangi Troppo Derubi La Patria.}

It is unsurprising, then, that veline from this period project a confused message about how to treat the subject of rationing in the media. One from September 1940 reads “Food restrictions….. are a matter of grave sacrifices.” A few months later, “do not approach the subject of the so-called “tails” (lines) outside of stores.”\footnote{Passarello, “Veline E Veleni. Cultura E Potere Tra Le Dittature Del Xx Secolo,” 127.} Even La cucina italiana, a periodical much advertised in La donna fascista (formerly

\begin{enumerate}
\item[Ibid., 67.]
\item From Bellei, La Cucina Autarchica. Chi Mangi Troppo Derubi La Patria.
\item Passarello, "Veline E Veleni. Cultura E Potere Tra Le Dittature Del Xx Secolo," 127.
\end{enumerate}
Giornale della donna), perhaps the cheapest food periodical in Europe at this time (at 0,80 - 1 lira an issue), was not exempt from these rhetorical “acrobatics.” The issue from October 1941, the first month of official bread rationing, begins with a dull article praising for Bottai’s practicality-based educational reforms, claiming the “Party, the Family, and the School” at the heart of educating children for a successful Italian future. Meanwhile, Italian homemakers and cooks were “living [the] anxious, nervous, and totally prosaic existence, the point of which, the continual day and night problem of which, is one thing, and always the same thing: food”; with work absences subject to appearance before a military court, women and children were understandably consigned to secure food to eat before they could focus on luxuries like fascist reformations in education. Those who could afford to read a periodical like La cucina italiana, though it was aimed at home cooks and featured many practical suggestions on domestic economy and substitution cooking, may well have been able to scrape by in the war years without taking their children out of school to work or otherwise acquire food.

Italians did not suffer quietly. The Italian Resistance to the Nazis at the end of the war famously included many women, in particular those from the countryside, as informants, messengers, and providers of supplies. Many rural families housed partigiani (“partisans,” volunteer Resistance fighters) in their homes and fed them with what little food they had. The classic neorealist film Roma, città aperta (English: Rome, Open City, 1945, Roberto Rossellini) which depicts “open” Rome occupied by

---

117 Morgan, The Fall of Mussolini : Italy, the Italians, and the Second World War, 64.
118 For more, see Mabel Berezin, Making the Fascist Self : The Political Culture of Interwar Italy (Ithaca [N.Y.]: Cornell University Press, 1997).
the Nazis, features prominently a group of disenfranchised children of elementary
school age from families of Rome’s lower middle classes. These children do not
attend school; they collect contraband, including food, and they build bombs. They
preach the Marxist maxims absorbed from their parents. Anna Magnani’s character,
Pina, contributes to the Resistance by starting riots in bread lines and storming
bakeries. This is may seem an extreme example wrested from melodrama, but in
quintessential neorealist style, the feature film was an outgrowth of two
commissioned documentary projects, one of which was about the real Roman
children’s Resistance during Nazi occupation. It was set in the actual wartime ruins of
Rome and featured mostly unprofessional, local people as actors (including the
children). The film was written just two months after Nazi evacuation, and released a
few months later in January 1945. It had to be put together patchwork with film
salvaged from the United States Army Signal Force, for film stock was in very short
supply in Italy during the war. It was apparently too realistic and too soon for Italian
audiences, who initially largely dismissed it, but it acquired significant international
acclaim. Though Nazi occupation happened in response to the ousting of Mussolini
and subsequent armistice with the Allies, I cite Roma, Città Aperta to demonstrate
that the war was a time when few could stomach fascist habits of bread worship or
Bottaian education. The fascist press continued to pump out pro-government
propaganda on these and other topics until the very end of the regime (and afterward
from the Italian Social Republic at Salò), their message was inconsistent with the dire
conditions facing ordinary Italians. Thus their rhetoric and political capital dried up
along with the bread supply.
3.5: CONCLUSION

Though a general “definition” of fascism has eluded scholars, Emilio Gentile, Roger Griffin, even “royalist” Charles Maurras and Mussolini himself have defined fascism in multi- or trans-class terms.119 “Fascism was not fundamentally a class-movement. Its claim to transcend classes is in a sense quite genuine; for it reaches back, behind the class-divisions of modern society,“120 but in practice (down to the leadership of the FF and the FNFMR) class hierarchy was ultimately maintained. Mussolini’s expulsion from the Italian Socialist Party for his interventionism in 1914 created a type of anti-democratic socialism of the right,121 one that eschewed class conflict in favor of nationalism, which was race-based and trans-class, where a ruling elite could theoretically come from any social stratum.

Antonio Gramsci suggests that the failure of early twentieth century socialism to take root instead of fascism after World War I has much to do with the inability of the working class to recognize itself as the proletariat; in any event they lacked a national consciousness that would allow for effective transformation of class consciousness to political lucidity, for “unity had not taken place on a basis of

119 I am of the opinion that national fascisms are diverse, autonomous political entities. While they may share common ideological characteristics or methods, nationalism and history play too strong of a role in the proliferation of individual fascisms to allow for a “universal” typology of historic fascisms (e.g. German Nazism, Francoism in Spain). There are times where I am tempted to describe Italian fascism as “Mussolinism.”
120 Cole, The Meaning of Marxism, 164.
equality”\textsuperscript{122} and any “cultural unity was the basis, and a very weak one at that, of the Risorgimento and of national unity; it served to group the most active and intelligent strata of the population around the bourgeoisie, and it is still the substratum of popular nationalism.”\textsuperscript{123} This lack of nationalism outside of the bourgeoisie, according to Gramsci’s Prison Notebooks, stemmed from historic town-country antagonism that is roughly reflected in a later phenomenon of north-south antagonism that exists today. These ideas run throughout the basic premise of this paper (which is to say, how could an ultra-nationalistic ideology of state and private life emerge in a country with very little apparent nationalism) and they inform conclusions about the economic control underlying nationalist and modernizing rhetoric.

Corporatism’s attempts to place labor on equal footing with management and the Fascist party in directing the economy while erstwhile eradicating the liberty of unions reflects the way anti-class ideology came to be weakened in practice. Political and economic exigencies, particularly in the difficult years from the sanctions through the end of the war and the fall of the regime (1935-1943), intensified the role that the government and industrial and financial elites played in the direction of production, while correspondingly eroding the power of labor syndicates. Organized labor, and the productive classes more generally, were pushed in these years into increasing complicity with the state’s manipulation and direction of resources. In wartime, essential foodstuffs were privileged to soldiers, leaving average lower-class laborer families hungry; hunger itself was repackaged in regime propaganda, press dispatches and in Mussolini’s speeches as a patriotic sacrifice and the price of political

\textsuperscript{122}Gramsci, \textit{Selections from the Prison Notebooks of Antonio Gramsci}, 70-71.
\textsuperscript{123}Ibid., 274-75.
independence for the Fascist century. Cooperation with such policies was the form of political participation declared suitable to women farmers and urban housewives. During sanctions and wartime rationing it was also their civic and social duty as good Fascist mothers.

Considering the breadth of these sources and even the singular reach of Petronilla the effects of wartime scarcity would render essential the woman’s role in the war effort. Equally important was the spread of regional “cucina povera” throughout the country across regional lines; people who were accustomed to reliance on rationed foods found recourse in peasant cuisines that had been eating in an “autarkic” manner for centuries. The first traces of a conception of “Italian” cuisine was born from these scarcities and even today “Italian” food consists of regional specialties that are more often than not the kind of food that has sustained Italian families throughout historical times of dearth: legume-centric dishes like bean soups (*minestrone*), creamy polenta, gnocchi (a common replacement for pasta because it utilizes an equal measure of potatoes to flour), risotto, and frittata. Though many of these dishes have numerous local iterations, it served both to assuage dietary monotony and spread a national awareness of Italian localities to have regional variations established by the regime as “patriotic” fare. Strangely the proliferation of regional dishes in fascist publications, propaganda, and cookbooks that were well suited to the conditions of 1939-1943 Italy served to reinforce a national cuisine that is a patchwork of humble “country style” dishes, a far cry from the Futurist cuisine of multisensory experience and moving parts. It is at once a testament to the endurance of peasant food in the formation of an Italian national consciousness and exemplary
of the ideological slipperiness that resulted from fascist economic and productive policies.


Bartoli, D. "Lo Stato, La Famiglia, La Donna (the State, the Family, and Woman)." *Giornale della Donna (Women's Journal)* (06/01/1933 1933).


Craveri, Lilli. "Ricette Senza Condimenti Per Una Intera Settimana (Recipes without Condiments for an Entire Week)." Milan: Federazione dei Fasci Femminili di Milano, 1940.


Morelli, Lidia. "Le Massaie Contro Le Sanzioni (Housewives against the Sanctions)." Torino: S. Lattes & C., 1935.


When Benito Mussolini and the fascists came to power in 1922 Italy was hardly a nation in the contemporary sense. Only officially unified after the Capture of Rome in 1870, it was a Western European state in name and historical legacy only—a “geographical expression,” in Count von Metternich’s words. The reality of “Italy” in the early 20th century was a nation divided along the lines of geography, gender, class, and education. While Italy today is still considered very different in the North than in the South, lines of division in the World War I era were acute. Thus, the need to ‘make Italians’ has been the subject of much scholarly work precisely because it was the fundamental challenge posed to late 19th and early 20th century Italian governments. What an odd circumstance for a fascist government to arise in, for, according to academic Roger Griffin, “palingenetic populist ultra-nationalism” is the essential tenet of Italian fascism.

Dissecting this phrase is crucial to this analysis of fascist ideology. “Palingenetic” here refers to the rebirth or resurrection of the memory of the Roman Empire for the 20th century Italian state, particularly after Italy’s nationalist ambitions were thwarted in their humiliating treatment in the Treaty of Versailles. A constructed memory of the Roman Empire was crucial to establishing a myth of glorious Italianità to rally citizens around a national banner. “Populist” implies the regime’s ruralizing impulses and blurring of the public and private spheres. The final piece of this descriptor, “ultra-nationalism”, highlights the main problem in studying Italian
fascism and its ideology—how did a nation described today as “ultra-nationalist” manage to nationalize a country with few consistencies between North and South, city and countryside, man and woman? How were regional identities subverted to place a “palingenetic populist ultra-nationalist” government in power for over two decades?

The kitchen table is the only place frequented with regularity by every strata of society that can afford to feed itself, to survive. If the fascists could change the way people eat and think about eating in the service of a political ideology, they could fundamentally affect the nation’s conception of itself, its heritage, and its future. The kitchen table is the perfect place to instill a concept of a “national” cuisine and by extension a set of national values and characteristics. The existing scholarship on fascist food policy as a locus of fascist nationalist ideology is woefully incomplete if not virtually nonexistent. Historians have focused so much on women because they were highly problematic for the fascist regime; fascist ideology, stemming from the artistic movement of Futurism, denigrated the position of the femininity in Italian society and the position of women overall. The artistic leader of the movement, Fillippo Tommaso Marinetti, wrote several tracts on the role of women in society and in the state as Futurism became more and more entrenched with budding Italian Fascism in the late teens and early twenties. As the futurism became politicized by its involvement with fascism, so Marinetti’s writings on women (such as the 1919 tract *Contro il matriomonio*, “Against marriage”) take on a political tone, and it is

---

within these writings that we find the aesthetic ideology which would come to characterize the highly ambiguous and often contradictory Fascist program towards women: “Woman does not belong to man, but to the future and to the development of the race.” Though women were the antithesis of Futurist masculinity and the home sphere was the antithesis of “cleansing violence,” women were essential to the economic priorities of the regime. Their political importance as agricultural producers and consumers (in both city and countryside) undermined their societal inferiority but did not result in their emancipation or modernization.

What race, exactly, were women under fascism co-opted to develop for the “fascist century”? What characterized the fascist cultural program that necessitated the inclusion of women, despite the misogyny (or perhaps fear of women, as has been suggested by David Dollenmayer) that seems to seep from fascist texts? How specifically were women supposed to engender a future generation of fascists?

Woman’s domain under fascism was unequivocally the home. Therefore if historians are to trace the specifics of how fascist ideology was instilled in the nation they must look to the basic social unit (for the concept of the individual was abhorred by fascism) and the basic social space. This thesis suggests that the need of families to eat, and the delegation of cooking tasks to women, made women much more powerful disseminators of fascist ideology than the regime was perhaps willing to admit. Concerns over the woefully low Italian birthrate, however, made women

---

126 David Dollenmayer astutely suggests that the themes of male sexual self-sufficiency in Marinetti’s French-language novel _Mafarka_, published in 1910 and translated immediately into Italian, indicates an underlying fear of female sexuality’s ability to interfere with the virility of ideal warriors.
essential to the fascist program despite its hypermasculine rhetoric in early policies like the Battle for Births.

But the fascists, as previously mentioned, faced another challenge to cultural unity: rampant regional differences between former city-states patched into “Italy” from 1859 and 1870. Despite rhetoric that glorified national cohesion and an “imperial” cuisine, distinctive regional cucine povere were spread by the regime’s economic policies. Centuries of poverty and scarcity had refined local cannons of humble dishes that were very well suited to the restrictiveness of “autarkic” and “resistance” eating.

According to Victoria de Grazia,128 the premier historian of women under Mussolini, early historiography on women’s issues by Marxist and liberal historians such as Ernesto Ragionieri and Renzo de Felice from the 1970s appropriate fascism as a “modernizing” force for women for it opened up different economic opportunities and appropriated new organizations and institutions to them.129 This might seem strange for a regime so masculine and so rhetorically misogynistic; indeed, de Grazia rejects these earlier interpretations on the basis of their wrongful characterization of what is at stake for women—“The signal difference was that the fascist dictatorship sought as systematically as possible to prevent Italian women

---

127 Bellei, La Cucina Autarchica. Chi Mangi Troppo Derubi La Patria.
Renzo de Felice, Mussolini il Duce: Lo stato totalitario, 1936-1940, 76-81.
from experiencing [access to new freedoms] as moments of individual, much less collective, emancipation.”

De Grazia instead argues that Fascists condemned all the social practices customarily connected with the emancipation of women...they also sought to extirpate the very attitudes and behaviors of individual self-interest that underlay women’s demands for equality and autonomy. On the other hand, fascism, in an effort to build up national economic strength and to mobilize all of Italian society’s resources...inevitably promoted some of the very changes it sought to curb.

The framework provided by de Grazia is both topologically and chronologically fundamental to a discussion of fascist food culture because it considers gender under fascism in terms of ideology-in-practice, whereas most other historiographies treat the topic as an aesthetic and rhetorical issue.

One such historiography is Paul Corner’s article “Women in Fascist Italy. Changing Family Roles in the Transition from an Agricultural to an Industrial Society.” Firstly, he cites economic changes derived from “plurality” of employment available to women before fascism (in manufacturing of silk, rice working, etc) as the factor that led to a redefinition of their role within the home. Importantly, both de Grazia and Corner suggest that women’s new economic powers under fascism were part and parcel of a movement with roots in the pre-fascist period and which did not culminate until after the fascist regime had fallen. Thus, the “modernizing” trend in women’s historiography is largely removed from fascist policy concerning gender roles, though the regime certainly picked up on women’s new economic role since the first World War. Both Corner and de Grazia, though

130 De Grazia, 15.
131 Ibid, 2
132 Paul Corner. “Women in Fascist Italy. Changing Family Roles in the Transition from an Agricultural to an Industrial Society,” 1993
tangentially, stress the regionality of Italy in the pre- and early fascist periods; this consensus despite their different historiographical interpretations bolsters the essential premise of this thesis, that Italian regionalism is a precedent, albeit paradoxically, for national identity under the regime.

Perry R. Willson, author of “Cooking the Patriotic Omelette: Women and the Italian Fascist Ruralization Campaign” (1997), bridges the gap between economic and political interpretations of the role women played in disseminating fascist *italianità* under Mussolini.133 Willson claims fascism was not as concerned with “modernizing” rural women so much as stemming urbanization and making strides, at least rhetorically, towards a “class-neutral concept of nation.”134 Willson thus places her interpretation in the discourse of class strata, which she claims to be indelible from a discussion of gender and food under fascism. According to “Cooking the Patriotic Omelette,” the *massaie rurali* (Rural Housewives), an organization of rural women “designed by the urban elite for the peasant masses”135 to extend “fascist propaganda into the most peripheral areas via the housewife, who is the core of the rural…family. Thus the prevalent concept is one of *political organization*. The economic activities are only complementary…”(italics added).136 Willson analyzes this issue as socially, politically, and economically relevant, but does so without discussing the content of the government propaganda to housewives. As has been

134 Willson, 532.
135 Ibid, 542.
136 Ibid, 539, quoting letter from Mario Mazzetti to Lincenzo Laj, Presidente della Confederazione fascista lavoratori dell’agricoltura, 22.01.1940, ACS, Fondo PNF, Dir. Naz., Serie II, b. 125. See also Willson, 532.
demonstrated, “fascism, for all its rhetoric about the end of class conflict, mobilized women in a manner which reinforced rather than diminished class divisions.” This interpretation calls to question how successful patriotic, unifying propaganda aimed at homemakers really was in terms of modifying class conceptions. Interestingly, Willson and many other scholars of fascism do not consider the urban-rural dimension; that is, the maintenance of class divisions occurred largely along the lines of city and countryside by using women of the urban middle- and upper-class to control their impoverished rural counterparts. This process did not bolster unity or nationalism but rather programmed regional identity into Italian nationalism to better control people. Though few historians have realized the potential of cooking and eating to illuminate this tricky balance, the Italian binary identity of region and nation continues to persist in “Italian” cuisine. Massimo Montanari and Alberto Capati’s *Italian Cuisine, a Cultural History* is an excellent example of a work that sees the intersection of gender, fascist politics, propaganda and food policy as a cultural phenomenon. These Italian historians see food policy and the role food played in propaganda as directly related to unifying efforts on behalf of fascist forces but still do not question what specifically about propaganda relating to cooking could unify such a regional country. I am interested in exploring the ingredients and techniques embedded in propaganda for Italian housewives to get at the essence of “Italian-ness” as defined by the profoundly nationalistic fascists—essentially, the intersection of semiotics and ideology in practice, or at least the way one worked with the other.

---

137 Ibid, 538.
under the Regime. Since a unified culture was what the fascists sought to create, the
cultural interpretation of propaganda and gender policy seems the most fitting, but the
sociopolitical issues are paramount in understanding the drive behind fascist
ideology.

A recent economic interpretation is Carol Helstosky’s *Garlic and Oil: Politics
and Food in Italy*. Helstosky’s interpretation centers on the autarky campaign
undertaken by Mussolini after the League of Nations placed sanctions on Italy after
their failed campaign in Ethiopia. Despite a promising title, her argument is
economic, plain and simple—she does not mention any elements of the fascist food
policy that might reflect an overtly political unifying tendency, or a modernizing one
for the women responsible for cooking them. Rather, the movement for self-sufficient
food production reflected the need to fight inflation. Bizarrely, autarky in food
production, though inexorably tied to economic issues, was highly symbolic of an
ideal fascist nationalism of political independence (for the State, not individuals, and
especially not women), energy, and action.

George Talbot’s recent work on censorship under Mussolini offers an
excellent summary of the recent historiography of Italian fascism, particularly as it
relates to the media, propaganda, and the regime’s ideals:

"Recent work on Italian fascism has concerned itself with the
question of whether the myths of culture or of politics should be
given primacy in its interpretation. This debate, which has widened
out to embrace art historians, literary and cultural historians,
geographers and anthropologists, has helped to deepen our

---

139 Carol Helstosky, *Garlic and Oil Politics and Food in Italy*, (Oxford; New York: Berg, 2004),
&AN=132873.
understanding of sets of assumptions, conscious or otherwise, which were present in Italian society in the 1920s and 1930s. From the work of cultural historians, guiding theories have emerged which involve the ritualization, aestheticization, and sacralization of power.\textsuperscript{140}

Myth, however, was never the purview of this work. Rather this thesis concerns itself with how fascist ideologies were actually disseminated, and how the regime managed to overcome so many challenges: regionalism and military defeats threatening “palingenetic populist ultra-nationalism”, economic instability challenging the glory of the Duce and his policies, an era of both new opportunity for women (after their assumption of new economic importance during World War I\textsuperscript{141}) and their denigration by the fascist regime, even as they were co-opted to serve it—just to name a few. It would seem that, in the service of a unified national entity, Italian regionalism should have been rigorously deemphasized by the fascist regime. This did not occur. Italian “nationalism” was less the product of a definable Italianità than a fascist construct which repackaged traditional ways of identifying as nationalism in order to facilitate the control of resources, labor, and gender politics.

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{140} Talbot, \textit{Censorship in Fascist Italy, 1922-43}.
\end{itemize}
"Almanacco Della Donna Italiana." [In Italian]. *Almanacco della donna italiana.* (1920).


Bartoli, D. "Lo Stato, La Famiglia, La Donna (the State, the Family, and Woman)." *Giornale della Donna (Women's Journal)* (06/01/1933 1933).

Bellei, Sandro, ed. *La Cucina Autarchica. Chi Mangi Troppo Derubi La Patria.*: CDL.


Benni, Antonio. "Italian Autarchy in Practice." *Journal of Foreign Affairs* 17, no. 3 (1 April 1939).


Craveri, Lilli. "Ricette Senza Condimenti Per Una Intera Settimana (Recipes without Condiments for an Entire Week)." Milan: Federazione dei Fasci Femminili di Milano, 1940.


Ferrini, Lina. *Economia in Cucina Senza Sacrificio a Tavola: 200 Liste Per Un Pranzo Complete, 700 Ricette Economiche, 1000 Suggerimenti, Una Lista Miniera Di Idee (Economy in the Kitchen without Sacrificing at the Table: 200 Menus for Lunches, 700 Frugal Menus, 1000 Suggestions and a Gold Mine of Ideas).* Milan: Edizioni Gion Conte, Exact date unknown.


http://www.italianfuturism.org/manifestos/foundingmanifesto/.


Morelli, Lidia. "Le Massaie Contro Le Sanzioni (Housewives against the Sanctions)." Torino: S. Lattes & C., 1935.


Pettini, Amadeo. "Cento Ricette Del Cuoco Del Re. Creazioni Gastronomiche Di Amadeo Pettini, Capocuoco Di Sua Maesta'. (100 Recipes of the King's Chef. Culinary Creations of Amadeo Pettini, Head Chef to His Majesty)." Gazzetta del Popolo, 1923?


Quarestani, Elena and Campion, Paola. La Cucina Del Ventennio: Se Tu Mangi Troppo Derubi La Patria! (the Cuisine of the Ventennio: If You Eat to Much You Subvert the Motherland!). Guido Mondani Editore, 1976.


