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How Fascism Ruled Women: Italy, 1922-1945



Synopsis

"Italy has been made; now we need to make the Italians," goes a familiar Italian saying. Mussolini was the first head of state to include women in this mandate. How the fascist dictatorship defined the place of women in modern Italy and how women experienced the Duce's rule are the subjects of Victoria de Grazia's new work. De Grazia draws on an array of sources—memoirs and novels, the images, songs, and events of mass culture, as well as government statistics and archival reports. She offers a broad yet detailed characterization of Italian women's ambiguous and ambivalent experience of a regime that promised modernity, yet denied women emancipation. Always attentive to the great diversity among women and careful to distinguish fascist rhetoric from the practices that really shaped daily existence, the author moves with ease from the public discourse about femininity to the images of women in propaganda and commercial culture. She analyzes fascist attempts to organize women and the ways in which Mussolini's intentions were received by women as social actors. The first study of women's experience under Italian fascism, this is also a history of the making of contemporary Italian society.

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Customer Reviews

"Extremely well researched and drawing upon a vast array of sources, this is the first full-length study of the experiences of women under Italian fascism."--Marie M. Mullaney, "Library Journal

"For the common reader as well as the professional one, Victoria de Grazia opens doors and sheds

new light on a fascinating subject."—Mary Gordon, author of *The Other Side*

good

I am fascinated by Fascism, but for all the books I have read on the subject, the women who were part of the fascistic experience are often marginalized or just ignored, except for some brief concepts of motherhood addressed in sections detailing the domestic policies of the NSDAP regime. Victoria Grazia's book is a welcomed counterbalance to this state-of-affairs. However, please note that her book, "How Fascism Ruled Women," deals with true Fascism (that is the Italian variety) and not the German, Spanish or various fringe groups/quasi-fascistic movements. Also note that Grazia does not really address the war years from 1940 onwards (except for some brief remarks in the last chapter about females in the Resistance Movements). Instead, her book focuses on society before Mussolini's advent, throughout his consolidation of power in the 20s and at the apex of Fascism during the Ethiopian War. In her book, Grazia has done an excellent job of detailing the myriad experiences of women under Mussolini's totalitarian rule and the conflicted nature of PNF expectations regarding women, with its promoted cult of domesticity and concurrent image of the new citizen and fixation on active youth. Grazia also addresses how the legacy of the defunct liberal culture of prewar Italy, the influence of the Church, the expanding American cultural revolution and the individual choices of Italian women contributed to their life, emancipation and personal experiences in Fascist Italy. From party policy to social organizations to actual work-a-day experiences, Grazia draws upon a wealth of sources and perspectives to address an extremely complicated and encompassing topic. Nonetheless, the themes of her book still manage to stand out. If you are interested in Fascism, womenfolk's experience within the totalitarian state or the progression of women rights in Italy, you should find "How Fascism Ruled Women" an insightful, comprehensive and enjoyable read.

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