

BOOK REVIEWS

Italian Women in Basilicata: Staying Behind but Moving Forward during the Age of Mass Emigration, 1876–1914

by Victoria Calabrese, Lanham, Lexington Books, 2022, 212 pp., \$95.00 (paperback), ISBN 978-1-7936-0778-2

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Victoria Calabrese's *Italian Women in Basilicata: Staying Behind but Moving Forward during the Age of Mass Emigration, 1876–1914* offers a new perspective on the region of Basilicata during the great wave of emigration from Italy. Studies on migration have tended to focus on migrants themselves (often men) and their impact on their destinations, and have only more recently started to consider migration as a non-linear phenomenon that needs to include connections and continuity. In this context, Calabrese's book breaks new ground and approaches migration from a long-neglected perspective: the everyday struggle for a living for the women and the families left behind. Calabrese focuses on Basilicata, countering the narrative that has seen it perceived by outsiders as 'dark, unknown and desolate', and arguing instead that 'there were ... connections with the outside world, despite physical limitations' (p. xxiv).

The book is composed of an introduction, seven chapters and a conclusion: each chapter is devoted to a specific aspect of migration. The introduction immediately draws the reader into the world of those left behind by presenting the case of a woman who petitioned the local mayor to seek news of her husband who had migrated years earlier, leaving the family without financial support. After this first hint of the individual and inter-connected narratives of migration, Calabrese moves on to analyse the regional and national context, with particular reference to women's status and legal, economic and cultural frameworks, before examining the current state of research on the subject and the methodology of her own research.

In the first two chapters, Calabrese investigates the impact of migration on marriages and motherhood. In addition to influencing marriage patterns, migration facilitated the emergence of a particular type of transnational motherhood. At the time, marriages were rarely driven by love, being more commonly a strategic familial decision. Men and women had precise roles: 'it was a partnership where each spouse had their obligations, regardless of emotional connection. Men were working for wages whether nearby or across the ocean, and women remained at home and worked for the household' (p. 13). Migration redefined these roles, blurring cultural expectations and legal constraints. In particular, at that time, married women needed their husband's authorisation to perform many acts in civic society, but 'while the Civil Code and other laws may have been restrictive for women, in practice men trusted women, and often gave their wives appropriate authorisations when necessary' (pp. 8–9) – a powerful reminder that real life was far more nuanced than the written law of statutes and books might suggest.

Migration also had a substantial impact on the economic fabric of the region. Calabrese's examination of these changes highlights that, 'with more cash circulating, wages increased ..., a largely barter economy shifted to one relying on cash, making the region more capitalistic' (p. 46). Alongside the emotional cost of migration, remittances from abroad and the fact that, in the absence of their husbands, the wife was commonly the acting head of the household, enabled women to take on 'a greater legal and economic role' (p. 51) in their everyday activities, even whilst the law formally continued to limit their agency within precise boundaries.

Calabrese also pays significant attention to Church, state, and community. Her analysis of the role and mechanisms of the state in Basilicata demonstrates not only its proximity to the individual, but also that women knew how to engage with it. Indeed, documents demonstrate that 'women turned to state officials when in need' (p. xxx) and that the state worked effectively to address their concerns and to ensure spouses abided by their duties to the extent that was possible. Furthermore, the region of Basilicata was made up of small communities in which the Church played a crucial role: on the one hand, it helped shape a sense of community and promoted mutual support; on the other, it kept a watchful eye over the behaviour of the individual. This was particularly relevant in a society like Basilicata's, 'an honor culture centered around the values and actions that guided a person to behave in a certain way in order to earn respect and status in the community' (p. 112). Calabrese powerfully reinforces this point in her examinations of cases of prostitution, infidelity, unwanted pregnancy, abortion, infant abandonment and infanticide, demonstrating that honour and issues revolving around its preservation were complex and multifaceted.

The book additionally dedicates a chapter to the female migrants who made up some 20 per cent of all emigrants, and also covers the issue of illegal emigration – compelling evidence itself of the needs and desperation of so many.

Italian Women in Basilicata provides a significant contribution to scholarship, revealing how migration changed gender roles and stereotypes and moulded society. In addition, Calabrese's use of archival sources such as records of requests by women (in the form of, for example, passport applications and petitions to find relatives abroad), court records from the *Corte d'Assise*, and government bulletins, statistics, newspapers and secondary sources, makes this a strong and convincing study.

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La paternità nell'Italia fascista. Simboli, esperienze e norme, 1922–1943

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Martina Salvante's book provides an all-round analysis of paternity in Fascist Italy. The book is divided into three parts, each addressing a specific aspect of the topic. Each