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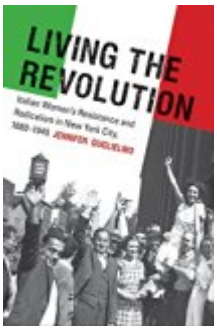

Jennifer Guglielmo. *Living the Revolution: Italian Women's Resistance and Radicalism in New York City, 1880-1945.* Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010. 404 pp. $39.95, cloth, ISBN 978-0-8078-3356-8.

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Much of the current scholarship on working-class women's radicalism focuses on Jewish women's significant contributions to labor militancy and radical activism.[1] While historians have done well in exploring the radicalism of Jewish immigrant women, a static picture of Italian working-class women's passivity has long been the standard historical narrative. Jennifer Guglielmo offers a powerful corrective to this in *Living the Revolution*, a smart, compelling study of Italian women's transnational radicalism in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. More than simply recovering this "lost" activist past, Guglielmo has done something more valuable; she explains the roots of Italian women's resistance and activism as well as the reasons why this history has been lost in the first place. According to Guglielmo, Italian women's radicalism was forgotten partially because of historians' reliance on English-language sources that painted Italian women as apolitical, and partially because of Italians' own acceptance of the norms of "whiteness," which included acceptance of capitalism, anti-radicalism, and white supremacy. *Living the Revolution* makes an important contribution to the historiography by challenging the previous narrative of Italian women's political passivity. Moreover, by tying Italian women's radical activism to racial construction and global capitalism, Guglielmo has challenged other scholars of radicalism, gender, and immigration to follow up on her insights in their own work.

Perhaps the most impressive aspect of this book is the sources that Guglielmo consulted. She has drawn on a truly global, bilingual collection of material ranging from police reports, newspaper sources, texts written by radical activists, and, crucially, oral histories of Italian women themselves. Where Guglielmo utilizes these oral histories, her monograph comes to life, and she does well to tie these women's stories to her larger narrative. Moreover, her sketches of the most prominent of the female activists such as Margaret DiMaggio and Angela Bambace are warm and detailed and are frequently the most moving parts of the text. The use of Italian-language sources

and the oral histories are important because, as Guglielmo notes, Italian women were generally rendered invisible by English-language newspapers and other activists, such as Elizabeth Gurley Flynn, who insisted, “There were practically no women in the Italian movement--anarchist or socialist.” (p. 3)

Guglielmo begins in Italy, where the processes of transnational capitalism had, by the late nineteenth century, upended traditional peasant life. While men traveled to the United States, Brazil, and Argentina in search of work, Italian women found a unique space to demand social and economic justice and confront inequality, especially when, as Guglielmo notes, they became part of the transnational labor market. As seamstresses and factory workers in the textile and garment industries, these women were drawn to syndicalism and anarchism, particularly as they saw the Italian state as a major source of their misery. This early tradition of activism in Italy would become especially important as Italian women began to migrate to the United States and other locations, not only as wives and family members, but just as often in search of better opportunities as laborers.

H-SHGAPE list members will find chapters 5 and 6 particularly useful, as Guglielmo explores Italian women’s involvement in the anarchist subculture and industrial unionism. As Guglielmo notes, for Italian women, both of those movements centered around labor militancy. Given their prior experiences in the diaspora, Italian women activists were harshly critical of American imperialism, organized religion, and even traditional gender roles, all of which they linked to the processes of transnational capitalism. Moreover, there was a clear working-class feminism in their activism. As opposed to liberal bourgeois feminism’s insistence on legal equality, radical Italian women often described their activism as ***emancipazione*** (emancipation), a term that “signified their commitment to freedom from oppression in all forms” (p. 141). These women passed their values to their daughters through a conception of "revolutionary motherhood" and especially theatrical productions, ensuring that the radical values they brought with them to America were passed down to the next generation.

Guglielmo also corrects the historiography that normally privileges working-class Jewish women’s role in the wave of industrial strikes in the 1910s. Italian women were heavily involved with the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW), whose policies of direct action and industrial unionism meshed well with their own traditions of radicalism and mutuality. Under these auspices, Italian women organized by the thousands, particularly in the New York City garment workers’ strike and the Paterson strike of 1913. The Paterson strike’s failure drove the IWW from the East Coast, but Italian women proved their worth to the labor movement during the 1919 strikes. Soon afterwards, they earned for themselves a space inside the traditional labor movement, as the International Ladies Garment Workers Union organized their first Italian-language local.

After 1920, radical activism declined with some exceptions, notably in the anti-fascist movement and in labor unions during the Great Depression. This was due to a government crackdown on radicalism, and more importantly, according to Guglielmo, changing racial dynamics in New York City and other places in the urban North. Long considered “inferior whites” due to the work of criminologists and racialists in the late nineteenth century, Italians were now joined by large numbers of others who were not white or whose whiteness was suspect. As African Americans and Puerto Ricans came to the city, they took jobs in the garment trades and entered traditional Italian neighborhoods such as East Harlem in significant numbers. To fully claim the privileges of whiteness, Guglielmo contends, Italian men and women had to pay “the price of the ticket” which included accepting capitalism, patriarchal authority, and white racial supremacy.

While Italian women were still active in the 1930s and 1940s, their activism turned now to more reformist efforts. There were a few interracial attempts at cooperation as well, such as the Harlem Legislative Council and the East Harlem Housing Committee, but these had limited effectiveness. Guglielmo perhaps overstates the potential of these interracial organizations to "transform the political institutions and methods of economic production that threatened all working-class people's lives," (p. 265) but this is a small flaw in an otherwise convincing argument.

Ultimately, *Living the Revolution* is an important book that opens up new areas for interpretation in the history of gender, ethnicity, and radicalism. Well written and meticulously researched, Jennifer Guglielmo has produced a monograph that anyone interested in gender, ethnicity, and radicalism should read immediately.

Note

[1]. For two examples, see Susan Anita Glenn, *Daughters of the Shtetl: Life and Labor in the Immigrant Generation* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990); and Annelise Orleck, *Common Sense and a Little Fire: Women and Working-Class Politics in the United States, 1900-1965* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1995).