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# Women and Alcohol Consumption in Fascist Italy

*Kate Ferris*

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## ABSTRACT

This article examines discourses and practices around women's drinking in Fascist Italy. The history of alcohol production and consumption in Italy during the fascist dictatorship has only recently received attention; alcohol's gendered dimensions, especially women's drinking, have been hitherto overlooked. While the production of legislation, rhetoric and propaganda on alcohol consumption was dominated by men, women were identified as key constituents whose alcohol-related practices could make or break the causes of fascist propagandists, 'anti-alcohol' campaigners and alcohol industry associations. The article explains how Italian women were imagined and addressed by regime propagandists, alcohol industry producers and temperance campaigners as (a) simultaneously the principal victims of and responsibility bearers for male excess alcohol consumption, (b) potential 'crisis-women' whose unpatriotic drinking choices (whether English tea, French champagne or American cocktails) denoted their prioritising of fashion over fascist values and (c) gatekeepers of family alcohol consumer practices and consumers of alcohol in their own right. It then moves to examine sources left by interwar Italian women to explore what, how and when they drank. Ultimately, it argues that despite attempts to construct women's drinking in archly nationalistic terms, the discourses and actual practices of Italian women around alcohol consumption operated within profoundly transnational frames.

Scholars across multiple disciplines, including history, anthropology, sociology, criminology and public health, have long acknowledged that 'gender plays a major role in shaping the ways the world drinks'.<sup>1</sup> While alcohol consumption clearly constitutes a bodily act involving various 'biochemical, physiological, and pharmacokinetic' responses in individual drinkers, it is also one that is enacted within particular – historically contingent and thus dynamic – social, cultural and political frames.<sup>2</sup> Gender comprises one component of 'the interlinked matrix of factors', alongside age, class, occupation, sexuality, race/ethnicity, among others, that mould drinking practices and cultures, and vice versa. Most often, albeit with important exceptions and transgressions, gendered socio-cultural codes around women's drinking operating across diverse geographical and temporal settings tend to posit male drinking, especially in public venues, as normative. Female drinking, meanwhile, has tended to be problematised, 'equating idealized femininity with temperance and sobriety', while construing 'female alcohol consumption [as ...] unfeminine and unrespectable, with drunkenness in particular associated with physical degeneration and moral bankruptcy'.<sup>3</sup>

Historians of female consumers of alcohol, working especially on experiences in industrialised Anglophone countries, have demonstrated both the increasing presence of female consumers in public drinking spaces (indeed, they were never wholly absent) and growing societal acceptance of this, particularly in the twentieth century, alongside continued contemporary forms of problematising female drinking, manifested in anxieties around 'excess' consumption and intoxication, maternal drinking, personal and public health and morality.<sup>4</sup> It is clear also that the increased and increasingly acceptable presence of women in mid-to-late twentieth-century drinking spaces affected not only the consumer practices and gendered identities of women, but also of men. This general trajectory in parts of western Europe and in the Americas did not unfold, of course, in a uniform, consistent way but rather was shaped by and reflected local particularities and practices, viticulture and commercial interests, national legislative frameworks and other restrictions, as well as transnational influences and transfers of habits, mores and fashions around drinking. In addition, seismic international events that provoked significant 'social turmoil', most notably war, tended to heighten socio-moral concern around alcohol consumption in general and female drinking in particular, mirroring broader anxieties around perceived changes to gender roles wrought by war-time mobilisation.<sup>5</sup> The First World War was a catalyst for increased curbs on drinking in several of the belligerent countries; prohibition was introduced during or shortly following the Great War in eleven countries, including Russia, the USA, Norway, Finland, Canada and Hungary.<sup>6</sup> Elsewhere, such as in the UK, wartime regulation, for example of drinking hours, was continued into the interwar years.<sup>7</sup>

Women's drinking in Italy under fascist rule must be understood within these manifold and sometimes contradictory contexts: industrialisation, mass consumption and increasing expectation of the fulfilment of material and consumer desires; the complex impact of Great War mobilisation on gender roles and relations in interwar societies; and the multiple local, national and transnational layers of authority and experience that contributed to shaping consumer practices, of which the Fascist dictatorship's policies and rhetoric around gender roles, national consumption and the physical and moral health of the nation was only one – albeit very important.

This article explores discourses and practices around women's drinking in Fascist Italy, focusing particularly on the years from the mid-1920s to 1940 as a key period in which women's roles and practices were subject to political scrutiny and negotiation, including as part of the dictatorship's anti-crisis-woman and autarky campaigns of the early-mid-1930s. It examines a varied primary source base of printed and archival material and ego-documents, paying close attention to material produced by Italian alcohol industry representatives, by Italian temperance campaigners and by Italian women drinkers themselves. These include: the wine industry journal, *Enotria*, the monthly publication of the *Unione Italiana Vini* which ran under the editorship of Arturo Marescalchi (also parliamentary deputy, later senator, Undersecretary at the Ministry for Agriculture and Forestry, 1929–1935, and prolific writer of books, pamphlets and articles on myriad aspects of wine production, sale, politics, legislation, history and consumption) for the entire period under examination; *Contro l'alcoolismo* and *Il bene sociale*, published in monthly editions during the dictatorship until the late 1920s and 1932, respectively; the advertisements and associated publicity material of two Italian beer campaigns masterminded for a joint consortium of thirteen beer

manufacturers by the Milanese outpost of the multi-national Erwin Wasey Ltd advertising agency, and publicity materials produced solely for the leading national beer company, Peroni, held at the Archivio Storico Birra Peroni in Rome; and diaries and memoirs produced by (predominantly upper- and upper-middle class) contemporary Italian women, some published, others held by the Archivio Diaristico Nazionale in Tuscany.

While the production of legislation, rhetoric and propaganda on alcohol consumption was dominated by men, women were identified both by Italian anti-alcohol advocates as well as by national wine and beer industry representatives as key constituents whose alcohol-related practices could make or break their cause. Both groups imagined and addressed women in strikingly similar terms; first, as supposed gatekeepers of family consumption and, second, as consumers in their own right. Moreover, both the anti-alcohol advocates and the alcoholic drinks lobby addressed women, simultaneously, as part of the problem that they framed – too much alcohol consumption or too little – and as agents vital to its resolution. Wine industry representatives indicted women, especially middle-class, urban women, for abandoning wine consumption either for abstemiousness or for alcoholic cocktails, imagined as American and thus epitomising foreign modernity. Accordingly, their propaganda directed to women encouraged them to support wine as a vital national product. Beer producers similarly stressed the compatibility between their product and (imagined) modern Italian women's ways of life. For its part, the anti-alcohol movement identified women simultaneously as the principal victims of intemperance, via alcoholic husbands who meted out violence and destitution on their families, as partly responsible for men's drinking practices, and as potential supporters and important agents for putting their temperance and prohibitionist goals into effect.

In the first section, the article sets out how Italian temperance leaders imagined and addressed women as simultaneously the principal victims of and responsibility bearers for male excess alcohol consumption. The article then moves to examine imaginaries created by regime officials in Mussolini's Press Office, and picked up by Italian cultural producers, around the so called 'crisis woman', a negative ideal-type or cipher whose unpatriotic drinking choices (whether English tea, French champagne or American cocktails) denoted their prioritising of fashion over fascist values around national consumption and women's reproductive roles. It explores how 'crisis woman' tropes, as well as those of autarky or national self-sufficiency in basic goods and foodstuffs, were harnessed and appropriated by Italian beer and wine manufacturers in their communications with Italian women through advertising and editorialising, demonstrating how commercial priorities meant that these could often deviate from the regime propagandists' original intent. In a final section, the article moves to examine sources left by a selection of (mostly middle class) interwar Italian women to set out their own practices and lived experiences around alcohol consumption: what, how and where they drank.

Though this article is concerned with the expectations and experiences of Italian women drinkers, it is, of course, essential to note that their gender intersected with other markers of identity, in this case most notably class, age and nationality, to shape both imagined and real female consumer practices around alcohol. Wine and beer manufacturers directed their attention – negative and positive – to middle-class

women, especially towards the housewives who were the presumed arbiters of family consumer practices and towards young, urban ‘modern misses’, more likely to have the relative means and opportunity to make the kinds of purchases and engage in the leisure habits they sought to either encourage or denigrate. Temperance campaigners included both working-class and middle-to-upper class women in their sights; working class women were mostly targeted for their proximity to, and supposed (at least partial) responsibility for, excess male consumption and thus as recipients of temperance educative campaigns, while middle-to-upper class women were expected to engage in the associational activities that would support and deliver temperance objectives. These class disparities are reflected also in the source base which, the author acknowledges, is uneven particularly in relation to women’s own accounts of their drinking practices, which coalesce around cosmopolitan and affluent upper- and upper-middle class social circles in Italy’s urban and more industrial centre-north: precisely the milieu that the imagined ‘crisis woman’ was deemed to inhabit.

The history of alcohol consumption, of wine in particular but also beer, spirits and cocktails, in Italy during the fascist *ventennio* (twenty years), has only very recently begun to be explored, for example by Brian J. Griffith.<sup>8</sup> Alcohol’s gendered dimensions, especially women’s drinking, remain largely unaddressed. Nevertheless, the livelihoods of millions of Italians derived from the production and sale of alcoholic drinks in this period, not least female grape pickers.<sup>9</sup> Wine production, especially, was a vital facet of Italian regional, national (and later colonial) economies; in 1924, the viticulture industry was estimated to employ, directly or indirectly, five million Italians, almost one third of Italy’s rural population.<sup>10</sup> As such, the wine industry presented a powerful and active lobby supporting the interests of wine producers, distributors and merchants; its representatives styled themselves from September 1923 the ‘Defence Committee for Italian Wine’ (abbreviated to ‘wine defenders’) intent on defeating what they identified as a ‘wine crisis’, brought about by overproduction, declining consumption and unfavourable legislation. Led by the aforementioned Marescalchi, the committee emphasised wine and viticulture as a ‘categorical imperative of nature’, of Italy’s climate, geography and history.<sup>11</sup> Wine was the ‘ancient national drink’, inextricably bound to Catholic rites and beliefs, the grape harvest a vital and sacred rite in the national calendar; for them, prohibition was a foreign import, ignorant of and inappropriate to Italian drinking cultures.<sup>12</sup> As a symbol and portent of *italianità* [being Italian] and *Romanità* [being Roman], they posited wine as an ideal nation-building tool in the fascist present. Though smaller in scale and influence, Italian beer manufacturers similarly joined forces to promote and defend their own product as ‘drawing upon ancient Roman traditions, [...] the favourite drink of the strong and the determined’.<sup>13</sup>

In avowed opposition to the ‘wine defenders’ was the relatively small (compared to other national temperance movements as well as to the wine and beer industry), but vociferous Italian anti-alcohol movement, which had engaged in the ‘struggle against the poison of alcohol’ since the late nineteenth century.<sup>14</sup> From 1907 collated under an umbrella organisation, the *Federazione Antialcoolista Italiana* (FAI), these groups of liberal middle-class, urban Italians, especially doctors and lawyers, sought to confront what they identified as the ‘social plague’ of excess alcohol consumption through propaganda, ‘re-education’ and governmental pressure. In their view, alcoholism was a

pathological import from industrialised northern Europe, now predominantly infecting the growing numbers of working classes in Italy's rapidly urbanising and industrialising northern cities, that was inextricably linked to crime and a prime explanatory culprit for the supposed failures of the new Italian nation to assert itself as a leading European power and empire. In 1913, the FAI successfully lobbied the Italian parliament to pass the country's first comprehensive 'defence against alcohol' legislation, although they were bitterly disappointed by the watering down of the bill as it passed through the parliamentary system and was subject to sustained challenge by Italian wine industry representatives.<sup>15</sup> In its original form, the bill had aimed to legislate to reduce the density of taverns per capita to one for every 500 and to reduce their weekend opening hours, to enforcedly detain a new category of people, 'dangerous habitual alcoholics', in public 'inebriate hospitals', to ban absinthe, and to end the custom in rural areas of paying wages in wine. In the end, though, the scope of the law was reduced drastically by the provision that measures such as the reduction of weekend opening hours be applied only to taverns that sold alcoholic drinks with an alcohol content above 21 *per cent*, an arbitrary distinction which effectively excluded wine from the law. The plans for 'inebriate hospitals' and to end payment of wages in wine were shelved, leading the socialist leader and temperance advocate, Filippo Turati to declare the law 'not a defence against alcoholism, but a defence of wine producers'.<sup>16</sup>

The fascist-led government brought to power in October 1922 intervened quickly in the alcohol debates, which resurfaced in the 1920s as the national anti-alcohol movement reconstituted after the hiatus of the Great War and as the international climate brought increasing awareness and circulation of prohibitionist ideas. In October 1923 the fascist-led government introduced a new 'defence against alcohol' decree, which became law in 1926. The decree aimed to tighten the 1913 legislation aiming especially to affect working-class and rural labourers' alcohol intake, by restricting the number of establishments permitted to sell and/or serve alcohol to 1 per 1,000 inhabitants and introducing a moratorium on the granting of new licenses, by restricting their opening hours, crucially removing the percentage clause that in 1913 has exempted wine, beer and some fortified *aperitivo* drinks from the legislation, and by increasing the sales tax on wine (from 20 to 30 lire per hectolitre).<sup>17</sup>

The dictatorship's early anti-alcohol legislation notwithstanding, both the Italian wine industry lobby and the anti-alcohol movement claimed common cause with fascism. Mussolini's own position and practice with respect to alcohol appeared ambivalent: on the one hand, in line with the projected image of Mussolini as a model of virile masculinity, it was asserted that he followed an abstemious, austere diet and 'never [drank] wine'; on the other, key 'wine defenders' Valerio Montanari and Tom. Giacalone Monaco, who would advocate the creation of militia-squad-style *fasci vinicoli di combattimento*, claimed the *Duce*, 'though he drinks very little', recognised 'the great value of wine when it is consumed in the right amount' and thus was an 'enophile'.<sup>18</sup> Both the Italian anti-alcohol movement and the wine and beer industry representatives adopted the language and values of the regime, around nationalism and the conflation of individual physical, moral and national hygiene, and around productivity and national self-sufficiency. This political alignment was more fraught for the anti-alcohol movement who had to defend themselves against accusations that prohibitionism was 'a type of bolshevism' and of being socialist themselves, particularly

given the prominence of pre-war socialist politicians who advocated temperance, including Adolfo Zerboglio and Turati.<sup>19</sup>

Despite the 1920s legislation, the numbers of premises licensed to sell alcohol in Italy did not actually decrease and the early victories of the anti-alcohol movement gave way to the 'wine defenders' well-orchestrated campaign to enjoin the regime to favour the production and consumption of quality, verifiable Italian *vini tipici* as a nutritious 'liquid food' and as nothing less than the 'national drink' with the capacity to deliver the regime's priorities of autarky and of nation building through regional integration.<sup>20</sup> In 1933, a biannual national exhibition of wine was inaugurated in Siena, which in 1939 registered 225,000 attendees; in 1934, the viti-viniculture industry acquired its own syndicate within the corporativist system (with olive oil producers) and in the same year, on 28 October, an auspicious day in the fascist national calendar as the anniversary of the March on Rome, the first *Autotreno del vino* was inaugurated, a mobile wine shop exhibit on articulated trucks which travelled the peninsula in order to familiarise Italians with wine from other regions, to stimulate greater 'knowledge of good wine' and, naturally, 'greater consumption'.<sup>21</sup> Such policies consciously intended to use regional wines as national building blocks, to use wine as a means of 'making Italians'. Ultimately, in 1937, the wine defenders used the industry journal *Enotria* to declare victory over the anti-alcohol brigade in the 'battle for wine'.<sup>22</sup>

That discourses and practices of alcohol consumption in general, and women's drinking in particular, in 1920s–1930s Italy took place within the ideological and political frame of the fascist dictatorship is vitally significant. Regime rhetoric, and therefore social and cultural practices, involving alcohol were undoubtedly conditioned by national-fascist ideas about morality, hygiene, femininity (and, of course, masculinity, though this is not explored here) and the ideologically driven policy campaigns on autarky, against the 'crisis woman', and the anti-bourgeois 'custom reform'. At the same time, discourses of anxiety around alcohol consumption, including those that linked concern for female respectability, emancipation, employment and fertility to (imagined and real) female drinking cultures, were hardly exclusive to Italians and to fascists in these years. On the contrary, alongside attempts to construct drinking in wholly nationalist terms, all the actors considered here – anti-alcohol campaigners; Marescalchi and the wine industry lobby; regime-sanctioned cultural producers of 'crisis woman' imagery; advertising executives for the collective beer industry campaigns, and women drinkers – operated within consciously international worldviews, frequently referencing practices, whether of production, consumption, regulation or prohibition, elsewhere, including the Americas, Scandinavia, France, Germany, the UK and even the Soviet Union. Above all, the prohibitionist United States loomed largest as a model, or anti-model, drinking culture: for Marescalchi, it was the country that 'started the anti-alcohol experiment with the foolish pretense of saving humanity by irrigating it solely with mineral water and confusing wine with spirits' and also home of the 'poisonous' cocktail; for the prohibitionist newspaper, *Il bene sociale*, it was the go-to exemplar of the 'what we might call "American" energy' required to combat Italian alcoholism; for Italian beer advertisers, it was the source of the fashionable consumer mores – 'drinking American-style [*bere all'american*]' – they needed to cut through in order to sell their product.<sup>23</sup> In this sense, the US functioned as a 'true fictional space' for Italians (as for other Europeans): a 'cipher for modernity',

alternately Europe's 'radical other' or 'future previewed', and a key imaginary site in which domestic concerns could be projected, previewed and debated.<sup>24</sup> Italian discourse and practices around women's drinking therefore emerge from the interface between national (fascist) and transnational frames of reference, as well as individual possibilities, circumstances and consumer choices.

### The 'natural ally of anti-alcohol propagandists'? Women as victims of excess (male) alcohol consumption

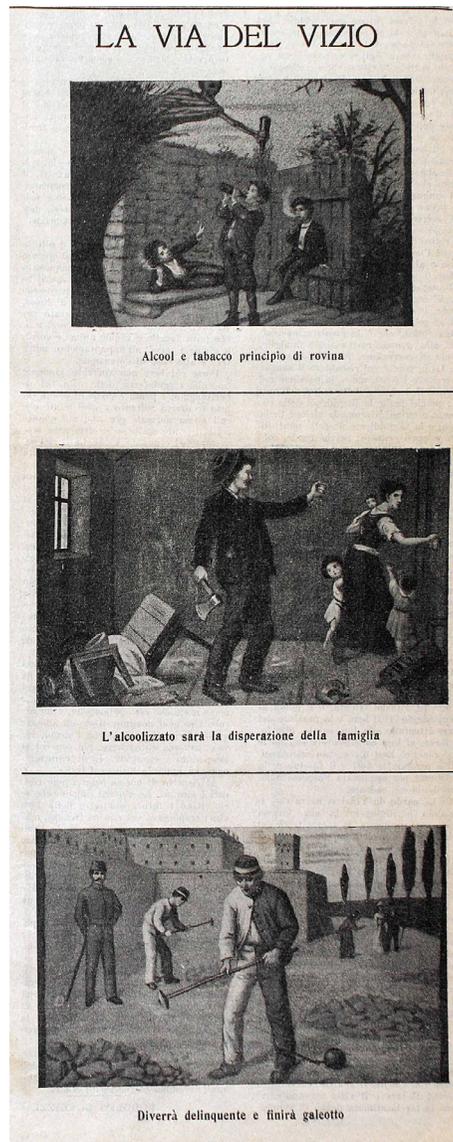
Italian temperance advocates characterised Italian women, particularly working-class women, as the principal victims (alongside children) of excess alcohol consumption by virtue of their relational roles as wives and mothers. Temperance propaganda posters pronounced 'the alcoholic' to be 'a bad husband and a terrible father'.<sup>25</sup> 'In families in which the father has abandoned himself to the vice of drinking,' intoned the anti-alcohol movement newspaper, *Contro l'alcoolismo*, 'it is his wretched spouse who suffers the most sorrowful effects'.<sup>26</sup> The newspaper regularly reeled off lists of crimes, accidents and other misfortunes that demonstrated alcohol's role as a 'source of blood and tears' including family desertions and domestic violence and published visual representations of family life with and without the presence of the 'vice of drinking' (Figures 1 and 2).<sup>27</sup> These images unobtrusively pitched depictions of happy abstemious families against representations of women and children impoverished by an incapacitated or violent alcoholic husband/father.

Qualitative evidence of contemporary drinking practices laid out in the diaries and memoirs of working-class and rural labouring Italians often corroborates the anti-alcohol movement's depiction of (working-class and rural labouring) women as the principal victims of men's excess alcohol consumption. Zelina G., for example, born in 1924 in a village near Padua as the second of eight children, recalled a childhood marked by poverty due to her injured war veteran father's drinking: 'on Sundays, he would go out to play cards with friends, which brought him to the early hours of Monday, victim of one too many litres of wine'.<sup>28</sup> Similarly, Emilio F. (who in later life became a wine merchant) grew up in a household of eleven, near Cremona, with very little food, thanks to his father and grandfather's tendency to spend 'the majority of what they earned on their need to drink'.<sup>29</sup> Emilio's recollections of the time spell out the detrimental impact on family life, including finances, this had for the children, and, above all, for Emilio's mother, Isolina:

For people on the outside, he was truly an Angel [Emilio's father's name was Angelo], he was cheerful and well-loved because he was so amusing due to the drink and to keeping company, day and night, also with people who were much younger than him. They could have been his sons, but he didn't care, he would drink and drink and make everyone laugh, but when he came home, even if there was nothing in his demeanour to deem him cruel or untrustworthy, when he was in an alcoholic stupor he was an unmanageable, indomitable beast, everyone had to keep quiet, and let him say and do whatever his miserable brain told him to.

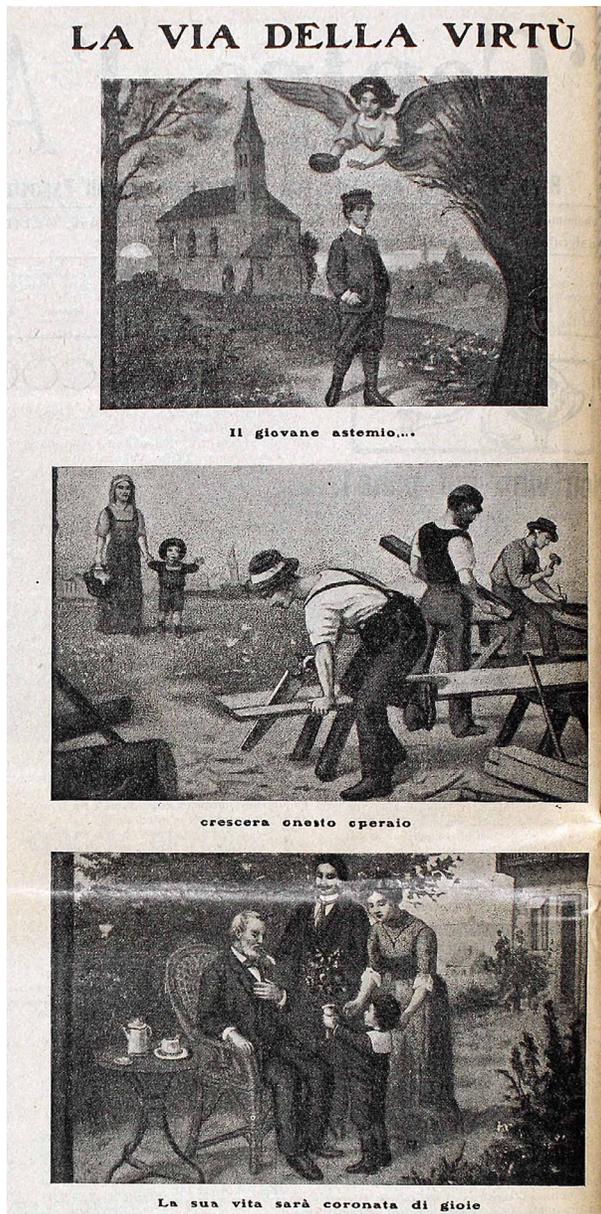
[...]

I remember well in the winter of 1929, which was a very, very cold winter, it got to -30 degrees below zero and there were 40 centimetres of snow. Imagine that in that wretched winter, father Angelo was oblivious to the misery and sacrifices mother Isolina encountered. He allowed himself the luxury of guzzling a 300-litre barrel of wine; you can imagine the frustration felt by mother and all of her children finding such an excessive surprise but [...] we just had to carry on surviving.<sup>30</sup>



**Figure 1:** *Contro l'alcoolismo* June 1925 'La via del vizio' (Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale di Firenze) [Colour figure can be viewed at [wileyonlinelibrary.com](http://wileyonlinelibrary.com)]

While the anti-alcohol movement was quick to depict women as victims of excessive alcohol consumption and its attendant ills – impoverishment, illness, destitution – simultaneous to and as a corollary of their principal victim status, it was also quick to see women as key to the success of its cause, determining that women constituted a reservoir of potential support for and, indeed, agents in bringing about, temperance aims. In part, the presumption that, as leading temperance advocate, Dr Eugenio



**Figure 2:** *Contro l'alcoolismo* July–August 1925 'La via del virtù' (Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale di Firenze) [Colour figure can be viewed at [wileyonlinelibrary.com](http://wileyonlinelibrary.com)]

Bajla suggested in 1923, women would be 'natural allies of anti-alcohol propagandists', manifested in the belief that (middle-class) women would join the anti-alcohol movement and propagandise on its behalf, which, indeed, some did, though few in number: under Maria Camperio's presidency, the *Nastro Bianco*, the Italian outpost of the mighty Women's Christian Temperance Union (the white ribbon being the

symbol of the WCTU), reformed in early 1923 with thirty-three members.<sup>31</sup> In urging ‘the women of Italy’ to emulate the ‘apostolate’ of Cora Frances Stoddard and other American female temperance activists in order to ‘extend the roots [of temperance] even further into this Italian earth, where love and kindness flourish’, Bajla posited the WCTU, Stoddard’s Scientific Temperance Foundation, and US women’s temperance campaigning more generally, as blueprints for Italian women to follow, but in so doing had to negotiate the perception – happily fuelled by the wine industry – of temperance and prohibition as not only foreign, but also Protestant, imports.<sup>32</sup> While nineteenth-century and pre-war anti-alcohol ‘anti-clerical’ doctors, jurists and politicians had imbued the Italian movement with secular, scientific arguments against alcohol consumption, both Bajla in *Contro l’alcoolismo* and Domenico Pastorello in *Il bene sociale* were at pains to point to the compatibility of Roman Catholicism with temperance ideas; Pastorello even claimed the church’s support, citing Pope Pius XI’s affirmation that abstinence ‘is not only a good act, but a sacred and worthy battle, a struggle for good, a battle for God and for one’s neighbor, for the people and for the Church, for the family and for the individual’.<sup>33</sup> Marescalchi in *Enotria* responded with a barrage of articles corraling Catholic scripture, historical rituals and rites of Mass in support of wine consumption.<sup>34</sup>

Italian temperance advocates’ assumptions about women’s natural allyship also manifested in discourses that held (working-class) women at least partly responsible for male excess drinking and charged them to change their behaviour in order to maintain men’s sobriety. This reading of women as part of the alcohol problem, not just the solution, emerged in two ways. First, the anti-alcohol movement identified working-class women as constituencies in significant need of education and guidance around alcohol consumption and produced propaganda to this effect. In November 1925, *Contro l’alcoolismo* listed ten ‘things that every family wife and mother must know about alcohol’. These comprised the central tenets of the anti-alcohol movement, centring on the health and financial implications of excess (or even any) alcohol consumption. Women were instructed that wine, beer and spirits ‘are not food’ (suggesting that long-held arguments to the contrary, also peddled by the wine and beer industry, had traction), that habitual alcohol consumption ‘weakens the blood and is the root of many illnesses’, and that, above all, ‘children’ should never be given ‘wine, nor beer, nor grappa, nor liqueurs’.<sup>35</sup> Five of the ten must-know ‘things’ sought to drive home the financial consequences of male excess drinking on families: ‘frequent absorption of alcohol extracts a quantity of money from one’s husband that would be significantly better employed for his family’s needs’. The final ‘thing’ advised that the only means for the alcoholic to recover was to never ‘again swallow a single drop of alcohol’.

Second, temperance campaigners made links between female employment, domesticity and male drinking, wrapping up their concerns about alcohol consumption in post-war angst about women’s supposed usurpation of men’s roles and the damage being wrought to gendered roles and practices by the forces of ‘modernity’.<sup>36</sup> At base, they held women responsible for men’s behaviour and practices. Dr Bajla enjoined women to be ‘very cautious in choosing a spouse’ (a process he went on to acknowledge involved more ‘acceptance’ than ‘choice’ for many), but also to be attentive to ‘the appeal of a clean, quiet, calm house’, which he considered ‘the best enticement for a husband, the most effective means for preventing that he spend his hours in the

*osteria*'.<sup>37</sup> To this end, in June 1924, Dr Bajla proposed the inauguration of 'prizes for housewives for the best kept house'.<sup>38</sup>

In drawing a direct line between female neglect of domesticity and increased male excess alcohol consumption, Bajla placed the blame for this correlation squarely on 'modern' women's working and leisure practices. Not only was 'the *young unmarried woman*' competing with men on the job market, but 'also the *married woman* is leaving the domestic hearth for most of the day in order to attend to profitable work'. This was, for Bajla, 'one of the most serious setbacks that civilization has brought us, [...] undermin[ing] the basic nucleus of human society, the family'.<sup>39</sup> The woman who is 'called out of the home to work in offices and factories' could, therefore, no longer be relied upon as a 'natural ally in the campaign against alcoholism'.

What's more, although the anti-alcohol movement continued to view women principally through the lens of victimhood of excess male drinking, even while holding them partly responsible for it, there is evidence also of some indictment of excess female drinking, again intimately connected to the supposed impact of changing gender roles and practices; since the Great War, Dr Bajla argued, 'alcoholism and tobacco addiction have made large strides among the female element' due to increased female employment. As a result, premature arteriosclerosis, once 'an essentially male illness' was now commonly found in women:

Women have entered into competition with men in the harsh trials of life's struggles; she may also earn a salary and wage today, but she also pays the consequences of the new kind of life.<sup>40</sup>

### **'Vestire al inglese, bere all'americana, [...] ballare alla "negra"'. Alcohol, transnational 'modernity' and the female body**

Concerns about women's drinking practices formed part of a suite of post-war anxieties, responses to the experience of the Great War and to political, social, cultural, economic and technological developments often collectively ascribed to 'modernity', which in contemporary discourses were thoroughly gendered and very often identified in and projected onto bodies. While 'both male and female bodies' were subjected to disciplining scrutiny, the 'greater dangers and potential' were particularly invested in female bodies.<sup>41</sup> A series of ideal-type female characters emerged through fascist discourse on women and modern life. Alongside the positively construed ideal types of the *'donna madre'* and the sporty, dynamic and politically engaged 'new fascist woman' was their negative inversion, an archetype labelled the 'crisis woman', effectively the Italian, fascist iteration of the global 'Modern Girl' phenomenon of the 1920s and 1930s.<sup>42</sup> The 'crisis woman' was the imagined inhabitant of Italy's industrialising and (from a fascist perspective) politically suspect 'sterile cities'.<sup>43</sup> She was thin, worked outside the home, wore fashionable – foreign – clothes and danced to fashionable – foreign – music at night clubs and cabarets. She was conspicuously child free and unmaternal. Crucially, she was also depicted propping up fashionable city bars, alcoholic drink in hand, containing not Piedmontese Barolo nor Asti spumante, but French champagne or some 'poisonous' cocktail, whose cachet derived from associations with foreign fashionability and, in the case of cocktails, with an aura of 'forbiddenness' bestowed by US prohibition. Another twist on the trope was to present the 'crisis woman' as exaggeratedly abstemious, tee-total because obsessed with

slimming in order to maintain the body shape deemed essential to carry off contemporary fashions. For example, the image usually considered emblematic of the ‘crisis woman’, the June 1932 cover cartoon of the satirical magazine *Il Selvaggio* was titled simply ‘Cocktail’, while the popular song which further disseminated the archetype, Romano Balzani’s 1933 ‘*Donna crisi*’, lyricised the song’s protagonist, Nina, as following a daily diet of:<sup>44</sup>

a slice of lemon with three apples *alla giudia*  
 a sprig of salad, and a piece of breadstick  
 a marinated anchovy, without fruit and **without wine**...<sup>45</sup>

As scholars including Victoria de Grazia and, more recently, Natasha V. Chang, have shown, the fascist imaginary pitched the ‘crisis woman’ against her opposite, the conjured ‘authentic’ or maternal woman, who was ‘national, rural, floridly robust, tranquil and prolific’.<sup>46</sup> Both archetypes, and their associated tropes, were used as bellweathers and battlegrounds on which imagined conflicts between modernity, cosmopolitanism and transnational influences and exchange on the one hand, and the traditional, the national – and therefore fascist – on the other, could be played out. Thin female bodies, without curves and without children, clothed in fashions inspired by Paris or Hollywood, and found working in the offices or partying in the night-time venues of Italy’s northern urban centres signalled the threat wrought by modernity to the Italian nation and national fascism; at the same time, if they could be converted into curvaceous, fertile bodies to be found either happily toiling in Italian fields or nurturing Italian children at home, they presented an opportunity for national-fascist salvation. Such thinking prompted the noted anti-fascist Gaetano Salvemini’s wry observation in 1933 that, in step with the regime’s penchant for styling policy drives as ‘battles’, a new battle had joined those for the lira, for grain and for births: the ‘battle for fat’.<sup>47</sup>

While scholars have outlined the ways in which the ‘crisis woman’s’ body, and the purposes to which it was put, were ‘coded as male’ with respect to body shape (thin), fertility (sterile), sexuality (frigid), politics (emancipated), occupation and locus (urban offices), dress (‘flapper’ fashions including dropped-waisted dresses, pyjama suits and trousers), styling (short, bobbed hairstyles) and pastimes (sports, motoring and smoking), the ‘crisis woman’s’ connection to alcohol consumption has not yet been explored.<sup>48</sup> Nonetheless, alcohol consumption and, in particular, the type of alcoholic drink consumed was an important marker of the ‘crisis woman’, linked, just as her clothing, eating and reproductive ‘choices’ were, to notions of personal and national health, morality and prosperity.<sup>49</sup>

The ‘crisis woman’ lens was taken up by alcohol industry lobbyists and advertisers, magazine editors and writers alike, to discuss contemporary female drinking practices and, vice versa; they used discussion of women’s alcohol consumption to both contribute to and to critique ‘crisis woman’ tropes. Besides being shaped by the ‘inter-linked matrix’ of notions of gender, class, religion and age, the discourses and social realities around women’s drinking and the ‘crisis woman’ were thoroughly grounded in racist, nationalist, protectionist and xenophobic ideas that connected drinking ‘exotic’, ‘foreign’ beverages, wearing ‘foreign’ fashions, listening and dancing to ‘foreign’ jazz music as ‘un-Italian’.<sup>50</sup> As the Erwin Wasey-penned 1929 article placed

in fifty-two newspapers across central and southern Italy put it, 'the prevailing mania for dressing English-style, drinking American-style, and dancing "Black"-style, can only be justified by the easy adaptability of those peoples who have no traditions. The Italian needs only to let themselves be guided by the teachings of their glorious past and their traditions to find the way forward'.<sup>51</sup> This pronouncement was both constitutive and reflective of contemporary scripts that intertwined gendered, racial and nationalist imagery and stereotypes, while also recognising the fashionable cachet of illicit practices: 'drinking American style' in 1929 meant drinking illegally.

Women were criticised both for what they did and did not drink: at base, for not drinking (sufficient quantities of) Italian wine or beer, and for drinking either other alcoholic drinks like French champagne or cocktails – 'this strange and insidious drink [that] has come from America to Europe' – or for abstemiously following 'English' tea-drinking practices.<sup>52</sup> 'Oh, those ever so modern misses', lamented Marescalchi in an *Enotria* editorial of October 1938, 'who smoke twenty cigarettes a day and drink three cocktails, horrible poisons, per day, just for fashion's sake ...', had 'forgotten that they are the daughters of Enotria, the land in which for over two thousand years a healthy, laborious and productive people have drunk wine... and have ended up just fine'.<sup>53</sup> As the editorial articulated, at the root of the 'wine problem' for Marescalchi were female consumers of 'the upper classes' and 'youngsters' who had become 'indifferent' and 'neglectful' towards wine.<sup>54</sup> Younger Italians no longer 'want[ed] to have anything to do with wine' thanks to the combination of legislation prohibiting the serving of alcohol to children and changing fashions and tastes.<sup>55</sup> Upper and upper-middle class women, especially those wealthy inhabitants of Italy's political and economic capitals, Rome, Turin and Milan, harboured 'ridiculous prejudices' against wine, especially Italian wines, founded on what Marescalchi considered spurious 'health reasons' and the widespread belief that wine was a working-class beverage, 'the stuff of drunkards, for people who want to get drunk'.<sup>56</sup>

Above all, wine and beer producers saw women's (and men's) rejection of their products as driven by 'modernity', by which they intended changing consumer habits and ways of life. New types and patterns of employment, involving mechanisation, electrification and increasing urbanisation, were contributing to 'the reduction of wine usage' and to changing drinking practices whereby drinkers 'gulp down rapidly, standing up, their drinks, alcoholic or not'. As Giovanni Zibordi, writing in *Enotria*, concluded, "'the life lived in haste" of the modern era is yet the enemy of wine'.<sup>57</sup> Moreover, Italian consumers were now 'sick with exoticism', their heads (or rather wallets) turned away from 'quintessentially Italian' products, towards goods perceived as foreign and thus fashionable.<sup>58</sup> Already in 1924, Marescalchi indicted Italian consumers as well as owners and waiters of restaurants, 'elegant cafés and nocturnal tabarins', who refused to replace drinking and serving French champagne with Italian sparkling wines, thereby revealing themselves Italians only 'when convenient', or in cruder language, 'degenerate Italian idiots, who desire the exotic label'.<sup>59</sup> According to the *Giornale d'Italia*, it was impossible to find Italian wines in the 'elegant nightclubs of the capital'; only champagne was served in the fashionable venues *Notturmo* and *Bragaglia*.<sup>60</sup>

It was the stereotypical speakeasy drink, the 'American' cocktail, that was 'the ultimate exoticism' and was reviled above all others by the Italian wine and beer

industries and the producers of ‘crisis woman’ rhetoric alike.<sup>61</sup> To the beer companies, cocktails were ‘poison’; to *Enotria*, the ‘curse[d]’ cocktail was an ‘unhygienic, un-national, perverter of the senses, the moral sense first of all’.<sup>62</sup> It was, of course, a cocktail that *Il Selvaggio*’s influential cartoon representation of the ‘crisis woman’ was sipping. Perhaps the most notorious critic of Italian consumption of cocktails was the futurist Filippo Tommaso Marinetti. Marinetti’s rants against cocktails (and champagne), published in *Cucina Futurista* (1932), formed part of his manifesto ‘against xenophilia’ and were directed particularly ‘towards ladies’ and ‘intellectuals’.<sup>63</sup> He arraigned ‘aristocratic and upper-middle-class Italian ladies’ for their infatuation with ‘foreign customs and snobbisms’, particularly, ‘the American snobbism about alcohol and the fashion for the cocktail-party, which are perhaps suitable for the North-American race, but are certainly noxious to our race’.<sup>64</sup>

We therefore consider the Italian lady who proudly participates in a cocktails-party [sic] and associated alcoholic competition oafish and dim-witted. Oafish and dim-witted is the Italian lady who believes it to be more elegant to say, ‘I’ve drunk four cocktails’ than to say, ‘I’ve eaten minestrone’. [...] Elegant Italian ladies, we implore you to replace cocktail parties with afternoon gatherings that you could call, as you wish, Signora B’s Asti spumante, Countess C’s Barbaresco, Princess D’s Capri Bianco. The best selection of quality wines will be honoured at these gatherings. And enough with the word ‘bar’ which should be replaced by the supremely Italian ‘*quisibeve*’.<sup>65</sup>

Marinetti went on to devise menus for futurist banquets that paired Italian wines and beers with dishes of rice and ‘*carneplastica* [synthetic meat]’. At the same time, and suggestive of the cocktail’s cultural potency, he also provided recipes for a series of futurist cocktails, renamed for reasons of linguistic autarky ‘*polibibite*’.<sup>66</sup> Although some featured Italian alcoholic drinks like Barolo wine, Asti spumante, Grappa and Campari, other *polibibite* recipes mixed the distinctly non-Italian beverages of rum, gin and pineapple liqueur.<sup>67</sup>

While the opprobrium directed towards cocktails by the wine and beer producers, Marinetti, and the creators of ‘crisis woman’ imagery, was located in its perceived Americanism, this was also a source of its allure for European consumers. The cocktail’s supposed connection to US prohibition and the venues associated with its circumvention, construed as sophisticated, glamorous and illicit, was a key component of its fashionable cachet for consumers. The speakeasy and the cultural practices it introduced or made exotically alluring – the provision of table service, serving of food, installation of ‘powder rooms’, and ‘new styles of entertainment’ including jazz bands and dances like the Charleston and shimmy – were designed ‘specifically to attract women’ clients and to encourage ‘co-educational drinking’.<sup>68</sup> In New York’s Cotton Club, Catagonia Club and Club Ebony and in the Harlem Cave and Cozy Corner in Detroit, prohibition-subverting ‘black-and-tan’ nightspots brought Black and white clientele, owners and musicians into the same leisure spaces, though often in ways that enforced new forms of segregation.<sup>69</sup>

Images of glamorous women drinking (cocktails) and socialising in speakeasies were mainstays of Hollywood productions; despite the veto on depicting the act of drinking on screen, 66 *per cent* of the 115 films released in 1929 contained images of drinking, mostly cast in a positive light.<sup>70</sup> Cinematic pictures were a vital medium for transnationally transmitting drinking practices, just as they were a key conduit of transfer for music, dance, other leisure activities and material accoutrements.<sup>71</sup>

Italian cinemagoers, who were presented with a range of films that never comprised less than 80 *per cent* foreign (mostly American) productions even at the height of regime efforts to promote cinematic autarky in the late 1930s, imbibed Hollywood projections of cocktail parties and speakeasies and depictions of female drinking (and to a lesser extent interracial sociability) as reflections of modern ‘American life’, coded with glamorous and illicit allure.<sup>72</sup> Certainly, the consumer objects and practices on display in Hollywood comedies (and in the so-called ‘white telephone’ films produced in Italy in the 1930s to emulate them) remained removed from the everyday lived realities of most interwar Italians. However, despite the evident gap between cinematic imagery and the realities of people’s purchasing power and leisured practices, scholars of Italian cinema and consumption including Scarpellina, Gundle and Hay have all demonstrated the ‘power of films to harness material aspirations’ and to ‘place Italian audiences in the presence of “modern” and cosmopolitan lifestyles [that...] appeared to be seductively plausible’.<sup>73</sup> When the Italian joint beer companies’ advertising campaign set out its interlinked revulsion for ‘drinking American-style [and] dancing “Black”-style’ in 1929, it is entirely conceivable, not least because the advertising campaign was run by the Milan subsidiary of US firm, Erwin Wasey & Co. Ltd, that it did so with Hollywood-filtered images of prohibition-era speakeasy cultural tropes in mind.<sup>74</sup>

### **Women as consumers of alcohol and as gatekeepers of family alcohol consumption**

The institutions and individuals representing Italian alcohol producers recognised the central role women played in shaping their own and family consumer practices. From the institution of the ‘battle for grain’ in 1925 to the ramping up of calls for austerity and autarky around the invasion of Ethiopia (1935), the Fascist regime recast shopping for, and consuming, foodstuff as a patriotic duty. Italian women, who predominantly oversaw the purchasing and preparing of domestic foods, were recast as ‘consumer-combatants’.<sup>75</sup> In their publicity material, journals and magazines, Italian wine and beer producers acknowledged women’s roles as controllers of consumption: they addressed them both as gatekeepers of their family’s consumer practices around alcohol, and as drinkers of alcohol themselves, in both public and private spaces. Wine and beer advertisers and lobbyists simultaneously courted and rebuked women for their attitudes and practices around alcohol consumption as they sought to persuade women to consume in ways that would profit their businesses. In so doing, they adopted – and adapted – the regime-sanctioned rhetoric of autarky and of the ‘crisis woman’, albeit not always with the critical lens expected by the regime.

### **Women as gatekeepers of family alcohol consumption**

Just as the Italian anti-alcohol campaigners identified women as a key constituency for temperance propaganda due to their relational roles as wives and mothers, wine and beer manufacturers recognised women as ‘indispensable’ to their cause as the assumed arbiters of family consumer habits. Part of the ‘wine crisis’ identified by the ‘wine defenders’ was the seeming drop in overall alcohol consumption levels, particularly of wine, among young Italians. In part, this was understood to stem from increased

government regulation and taxation but what particularly concerned the wine defenders were the changing tastes and practices of young Italians, especially middle class and female, causing them to ‘let slip the consumption of the old and delightful beverage of our forefathers’.<sup>76</sup>

Towards the end of 1936, Marescalchi published a series of editorials and articles directed at Italian family practices, recognising women as the ingress through which these could be accessed and, ultimately, altered. Since the 1920s, the wine defenders’ sustained riposte to the anti-alcohol movement’s equation of wine with ‘poison’ had been to stress wine as a nutritious ‘liquid food’, that is ‘rich in vitamins’ and ought to be drunk moderately ‘during meals’, co-opting doctors and scientists to lend authority to their argument.<sup>77</sup> Ensuring that wine was placed on the dinner table at meal times, and ‘educat[ing] the family [...] about wine’ was a task for Italian parents, and above all, mothers.<sup>78</sup>

In similar vein, the beer manufacturers promoted their products to Italian mothers and wives, stressing beer’s compatibility with food consumption and its appropriateness for all members of the family to consume.<sup>79</sup> The advertising agency’s report on the second annual collective beer advertising campaign (1930–31) made clear that the underlying objective of the campaign was to ‘foster beer consumption in other seasons [besides summer, by] seeking to introduce it into domestic usage’.<sup>80</sup> Radio spots told women, ‘before, during and after meals, drink only beer’, and advised them to ‘teach [your children] strength and serenity, and accustom them to drink good Italian beer daily’.<sup>81</sup> Newspaper adverts depicted foaming glasses of beer alongside classic Italian foodstuffs – pizza, pasta, cheese and fish – and a series of advertorials placed in women’s magazines including the aspirational fashion publications, *Lidel*, *Donna*, *Fantasia* and *Moda*, urged, ‘Lad[ies], try to get into the habit of putting beer on the [dining] table’ and ‘ladies, try, and get your family-members and guests to try [beer]’.<sup>82</sup> (Figure 3). Alongside recipes for ‘roast with beer’ and for a ‘plum pudding [in English in original]’, which included ‘half a glass of strong beer’ among its ingredients, the advertorials promised that drinking Italian beer ‘aids digestion and ensures peaceful sleep’.<sup>83</sup> Finally, three propagandistic pamphlets, sent to the homes of 50,000 Italian families between April 1930 and March 1931, stressed beer consumption as good for breast-feeding mothers and focussed on domestic economy, positing beer as an inexpensive, nutritious drink which ‘greatly reduces daily spending on beverages’.<sup>84</sup> Moreover, they deployed a trope that became ubiquitous in alcohol industry messages directed to women drinkers: the reassurance that beer ‘is not fattening’.

## Women as consumers of alcohol

Italian women were also imagined as consumers of alcohol in their own right and the wine and beer industry targeted and solicited their custom as such. Marescalchi’s and fellow wine journalists’ editorialising on female wine consumption, as well as the Peroni and joint beer manufacturers’ advertising campaigns addressing women as consumers, were refracted through the broader political discourses of the ‘crisis woman’ and autarky.

With respect to autarky, the dictatorship recast the consumption of basic foodstuff in terms of patriotic duty, through mobilising drives styled as ‘battles’, to urge national self-sufficiency in grain and other consumables. Women were positioned ‘in the front

ERVA - S. A. I. - PUBBLICITA - MILANO  
Birra Femminili ad. 9a - Lidel - 1 pagina - Dicembre 1930

**Provi,  
Signora!  
È squisito...**

Provi a gustare e a far gustare agli ospiti un bicchiere di birra italiana dopo il formaggio. I sali e i grassi del formaggio si combinano così bene con i componenti amari della birra, da dare al palato un gusto assolutamente nuovo e raffinato. Offra ai suoi commensali di pasteggiare con birra italiana. Serva questa saporosa bevanda una volta tanto. Vedrà che molti le saranno riconoscenti di aver loro offerta una bevanda che rende i cibi più buoni e meglio digeribili.

**UNA RICETTA PER  
IL PLUM PUDDING**

Ingredienti: gr. 125 di farina, 125 di pane, 25 di uvetta, 170 di grasso di bue tagliato a pezzetti, 170 di uva di Corinto, 40 di candito a pezzetti, 20 di mandorle tritate e cannella. Quindi: tre chiodi di garofano in polvere; un pizzico di sale, un mezzo bicchiere di birra forte, due uova, un cucchiaino di zucchero. Si mescolano per bene gli ingredienti asciutti, vi si aggiunge la birra e subito dopo le uova lavorate con lo zucchero. Si versa il composto in uno stampo rettangolare e lo si fa cuocere a forno moderato per alcune ore.

**CHI BEVE BIRRA CAMPA CENTO ANNI**

**Figure 3:** Advertorial, ‘Try it madam! It is delicious...’ (Archivio Storico Birra Peroni pubblicità b.1 f.4 s.1) [Colour figure can be viewed at [wileyonlinelibrary.com](http://wileyonlinelibrary.com)]

line’: national consumption and reproduction became the female equivalent to military sacrifice.<sup>85</sup> Women were urged to be parsimonious, make and mend, to buy national (but also, variously, local and colonial) products to feed and clothe themselves and their families. While all women were reimagined as ‘consumer combatants’, regime messages on curbing ‘excess’ spending and avoiding the allure of foreign goods were directed especially at middle- and upper-class women.

Marescalchi remained particularly incensed by the failure, both societal and governmental, to treat wine ‘seriously’ as a national product in the way that other Italian goods like wheat, wool and cellulose were viewed, because, he believed, of its association with working-class consumption.<sup>86</sup> During his tenure as Undersecretary for Agriculture and Forestry (1929–35), Marescalchi sought to use his political and industry clout and editorship of *Enotria* to align the self-declared ‘battle for wine’ to the regime’s autarky drive.<sup>87</sup> Towards the end of 1932, he ‘threw out the most brilliant idea’ of replacing the ‘insipid afternoon beverage “Tea five o’clock [sic]” with Italian wine. High tea was deemed a foreign intrusion favoured ‘by high society, especially by English and American *High-life* [sic]’, and a ‘fastidious, foolish’ practice, ‘rendered even more tiresome and gloomy by the ingestion of that insipid hot water, which does nothing for our bodies’<sup>88</sup> (Figure 4). In its place, demonstrating the apparent inescapability from foreign-language terms even for a nationalistic initiative, he suggested the term ‘Wine-Times’. However, by 1935, by which time he had spearheaded the creation of the *Comitato femminile italiano di propaganda per il consumo di vino nelle famiglie* (Italian Women’s Propaganda Committee for Family Wine Consumption) who also propagandised for this, the proposed custom was rephrased as ‘Italian *merenda* [afternoon break]’, in step with the linguistic autarky component of the anti-bourgeois ‘customs reform’ campaign then being spearheaded by PNF secretary, Achille Starace. Italian women were pressed to ‘bring into their own parlours and dispense to their friends’ wine and fruit in the late afternoon, thereby ‘replac[ing] the various beverages and assorted stereotypical delicacies of the *merenda* hour, until now set by foreign fashions, with the most exquisite products of our gentle Mediterranean climate’.<sup>89</sup>

‘Crisis woman’ imagery conforming to the national regime-sanctioned campaign was especially visible in the wine and beer industry representatives’ denunciations of contemporary women’s supposed preoccupations with cosmopolitanism and thinness. In 1933, with the regime’s rhetoric at its height, *Enotria* embarked on its own campaign to convince middle-class female readers to drink Italian wines. An avalanche of news articles, editorials and fiction stories, many entitled ‘Women and wine’ or variations thereof, were published in the journal between 1933 and 1937, coinciding with the journal’s switch to a magazine-style format in January 1933. Marescalchi editorials more than once rebuked the ‘society misses [and ...] ladies’ for being ‘worried – too much so – by their figure’, while the magazine’s illustrations visually connected slim, fashionably dressed women with abstinence and tea drinking and images of hearty, curvaceous, modestly or traditionally dressed women with wine consumption and production.<sup>90</sup> Short stories recounted tales of women being restored to health – and often finding love – thanks to ‘that gift of the Gods’ recommended by ‘the *Duce*’.<sup>91</sup>

However, while ‘crisis woman’ imagery certainly informed the way alcohol manufacturers addressed women drinkers in their publicity campaigns, it did so in ways that did not always conform to the regime’s negative construal of the (middle-upper-class) ‘modern girl’ and her leisured lifestyle. On the contrary, the advertising and other materials produced by the wine and beer industries very often promoted and effectively validated the presumed desires of Italian women to pursue the accoutrements

*Prendere il the è snobismo...*



*...i buoni italiani lo sostituiscono con dei buoni vini passiti e malvasie.*

**Figure 4:** *Enotria* February 1933 ‘Taking tea is snobbish ... Good Italians replace it with good raisin and malmsey wines’ (Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale di Roma) [Colour figure can be viewed at [wileyonlinelibrary.com](http://wileyonlinelibrary.com)]

of the archetypal ‘modern girl’ from sporting and leisure activities through dress and hairstyle to a slender figure.

This was particularly evident in the Italian beer manufacturers’ first joint publicity campaign masterminded in 1929 by Erwin Wasey Ltd. The campaign’s black-and-white print advertisements were disseminated across national and local press, including fourteen magazines aimed at women readers, ranging from the aspirational fashion magazines, *Lidel*, *La Moda* and *La Vita Femminile*, to magazines aimed at middle-class housewives, such as *Il Giornale della Donna* and *La Cucina Italiana*, as well as the official *Opera Nazionale Dopolavoro* (Fascist after-work organisation) publication, *Gente Nostra*.<sup>92</sup> The advertisements comprised text alongside stylised silhouette figures engaging in different activities while drinking beer. The majority of silhouetted figures depicted were male: consumers and waiters. However, several adverts depicted female beer consumers as part of a male–female couple/group or presented alone.<sup>93</sup> The silhouetted figures were intended to connect beer consumption to a middle-class and modern, fashionable leisured lifestyle, connoted by the dress, setting, activities and material objects surrounding the figures: women were shown wearing fashionable hats, dresses and pearls, men wearing smart suits and sporting gear; women were shown playing tennis and swimming, men playing football, running, cycling, mountaineering, motoring and smoking (Figures 5, 6, 7 and 8).<sup>94</sup> The Peroni company’s own advertising towards the end of the decade followed similar lines in its representations of stylised female figures in tennis outfits and beachwear in order to stress beer as a healthy – refreshing and hydrating – and modern product (Figure 9).<sup>95</sup>

The advertisements depicting male drinking presented beer consumption as beneficial to healthy longevity – ‘beer drinkers live to 100 years’ – but the advertisements depicting women solely or as part of a male–female couple or friendship group focussed their message on bodily health differently, stressing beer as a palatable, nutritious and, above all, ‘light’ drink that would not cause women to gain weight.<sup>96</sup> Indeed, the message that beer is ‘a light, healthy, delicious drink that is refreshing and pleasant’ as well as ‘strength[ening] and slim[ming]’ predominated in the advertising messages aimed at female consumers across both beer campaigns.<sup>97</sup> In this respect, the beer adverts conform to the gendered divisions within food advertisements from inter- to post-war Italy identified by Diana Garvin: imagery and text of food advertisements aimed at women consumers ‘suggest that the most important element of women’s food is low calorie count’ and that, ‘food’s primary value was in its capacity to restructure the female body’.<sup>98</sup> The campaign’s radio announcements, which were transmitted nightly over 140 days across southern Italy and Sicily, reaching a daily audience which the advertising agency (optimistically) put at 10,000 listeners, included many intended to emphasise beer’s nutritious and non-fattening properties:

Ladies, you are wrong to believe that beer is fattening. Drunk in moderation, it strengthens and nourishes, quenches and doesn’t bloat, refreshes and doesn’t cause perspiration. Make beer your usual drink.<sup>99</sup>

Its advertorials, placed in fashion magazines including *Lidel*, *Donna* and *Rassegna Femminile*, encouraged women to ‘be a friend of beer’ through reassurances that beer consumption was entirely compatible with women’s supposed concerns around physical slenderness, beauty and ‘being modern’. All used illustrations, either in line

ERVA - S. A. I. - PUBBLICITÀ - MILANO  
 Prop. Birra Generali - ad. 23 - Giornali - mm. 110x200 - Agosto 1930

**UN BRIVIDO  
 NELLA  
 CALURA**

In questo Agosto infocato è una vera gioia dissetarsi con birra. E come se un superstite brivido d'aria si raccogliesse su l'orlo del bicchiere. La birra è veramente una bevanda leggera, sana, squisita, che rinfresca e dà piacere. A sentirla scendere giù per le arse vie della gola, pare di rinascere. Disseta e fa bene in ogni ora. Bevete birra italiana.

**CHI BEVE BIRRA  
 CAMPA CENT'ANNI**



erva-milano

**Figure 5:** Advert, 'A shiver in the heat' (Archivio Storico Birra Peroni pubblicità b.lf.4 s.1) [Colour figure can be viewed at [wileyonlinelibrary.com](http://wileyonlinelibrary.com)]

ERVA - S. A. I. - PUBBLICITÀ - MILANO

Propaganda Birra - ad. 9 Sportivi - Gazzetta Sport, Milano e Roma  
Gazzetta Lunedì - Mezzogiorno Sportivo - Sport Giallo - Littoriale  
Fonosport - Friuli Sportivo - Domenica Sportiva - Tutti gli Sports  
mm. 110x250 - Luglio 1930

Il nuoto è uno degli  
esercizi fisici più salu-  
tari. Ma esige una spe-  
sa di energia muscolare  
assai forte. Di qui la  
necessità per chiunque  
di bere birra, bevanda  
leggera e nutriente. Ri-  
fiutate le bevande non  
igieniche che appe-  
santiscono lo stoma-  
co. Prendete sempre  
birra italiana fresca,  
ma non gelata. Ne  
ritrarrete soddisfa-  
zione e forza.

CHI BEVE  
BIRRA  
CAMPA  
CENT'ANNI

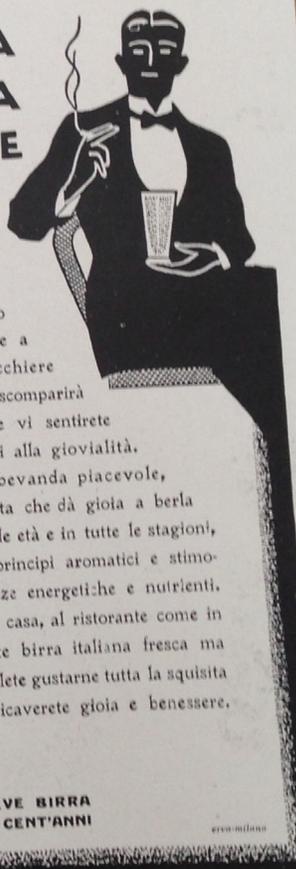
Pubblicità ERVA - Milano

**Figure 6:** Advert (Archivio Storico Birra Peroni pubblicità b.1f.4 s.1 [Colour figure can be viewed at [wileyonlinelibrary.com](http://wileyonlinelibrary.com)])

ERVA - S. A. I. - PUBBLICITÀ - MILANO  
 Prop. Birra Generali - ad. 21 a - Giornali - mm. 110x200 - Luglio 1930

## DÀ GIOIA A BERLA E FA BENE

Quando avete sete e nessuna bevanda vi attrae in modo particolare, provate a bere un buon bicchiere di birra. La sete scomparirà immediatamente, e vi sentirete ristorati e disposti alla giovialità. La birra è una bevanda piacevole, saporosa e squisita che dà gioia a berla e fa bene a tutte le età e in tutte le stagioni, perchè ricca di principi aromatici e stimolanti e di sostanze energetiche e nutrienti. Al caffè come in casa, al ristorante come in campagna, bevete birra italiana fresca ma non gelata, se volete gustarne tutta la squisita fragranza. Ne ricaverete gioia e benessere.



**CHI BEVE BIRRA  
 CAMPA CENT'ANNI**

erva-milano

**Figure 7:** Advert, 'To drink it brings joy and is good for you' (Archivio Storico Birra Peroni pubblicità b.1f.4 s.1) [Colour figure can be viewed at [wileyonlinelibrary.com](http://wileyonlinelibrary.com)]



**Figure 8:** Advert (Archivio Storico Birra Peroni pubblicità b.1f.4 s.1) [Colour figure can be viewed at [wileyonlinelibrary.com](http://wileyonlinelibrary.com)]



**Figure 9:** Advert, 'If ... you live in the open air' (Archivio Storico Birra Peroni, pubblicità b.2 f.9) [Colour figure can be viewed at [wileyonlinelibrary.com](http://wileyonlinelibrary.com)]

drawings or silhouettes, of slender women, with fashionable clothes and hairstyles, engaging in quintessentially 'modern' pastimes such as mixed-company motorcar picnic excursions, social dances and beauty contests, to put across the twin message that beer 'is fashionable' and 'nourishes without fattening'.<sup>100</sup>

ERVA - S. A. L. - PUBBLICITÀ - MILANO  
Propaganda Birra - ed. 3 Financiacchi - Lidel - Natura - una pagina

## La birra diventa di moda



**D**iscretamente purissimo e di alto valore nutriente, la birra sta diventando ovunque la bibita preferita dal pubblico femminile. Le signore della migliore società ne fanno all'estero un largo uso, siccome bevanda graditissima anche ai palati più delicati. Ricca di proprietà nutritive e salubri, avviva le energie, favorisce la digestione e procura sonni tranquilli. Provate voi pure a prenderne qualche tazza in casa e fuori, durante i pasti e nelle riunioni mondane. Vi persuaderete come non sia vero che la birra ingrassi. È provato scientificamente che facendone uso moderato, la birra dà snellezza al corpo e giova allo spirito e accresce la freschezza e la bellezza della carnagione. Signora, seguite la moda, bevete e offrite ai vostri ospiti birra italiana, la più igienica delle bevande.

PUBBLICITÀ ERVA - MILANO

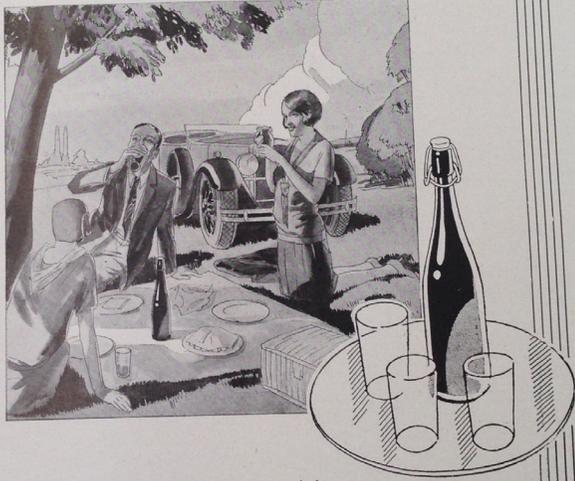
**Figure 10:** Advertorial, 'Beer becomes fashionable' (Archivio Storico Birra Peroni pubblicità b.1 f.4 s.1) [Colour figure can be viewed at [wileyonlinelibrary.com](http://wileyonlinelibrary.com)]

In pandering to fashionable women's supposed concern for their '*linea*' [female figure], the advertorials departed from the usual stressing of beer's *italianità*, as a home-grown, centuries-old drink, and instead played on the apparent foreign-ness and social exclusivity of beer as the source of its fashionable, modern status. The advertorial 'Beer becomes fashionable' (Figure 10) assured *Lidel* and *Natura* readers that 'high society women abroad make great use [of beer], given that it is a drink that is

ERVA - S. A. I. - PUBBLICITÀ - MILANO

Propaganda Birra - ad. 2b Femminili - Lidel - Natura - una pagina - ad. 2c - Donna - Fantasic - Moda  
Sovrana - Rassegna Femminile - una pagina - Maggio/Giugno 930

## Signora, siate amica della birra



**B**evanda che disseta, rinfresca e rinforza, la birra è la bevanda più indicata per le Signore che partecipano attivamente alla vita mondana, che stanca ed esaurisce. Bevuta moderatamente, nelle dosi appropriate, la birra nutre senza ingrassare, regola il sistema nervoso e fuga ogni senso di stanchezza e di malumore. Domandatene alle amiche che viaggiano e ai medici. Essi vi diranno che all'estero le signore della migliore società preferiscono la birra a tutti gli altri dissetanti perchè igienica, limpida e saporosa e ricca di capacità caloriche. Siate amica della birra, signora, sia bevendola che offrendola agli ospiti e consigliandola alle amiche. Bevete birra, signore. Ne ritrarrete un maggior benessere fisico e morale.

Pubblicità ERVA - Milano

**ITALIANI  
BEVETE  
BIRRA  
ITALIANA**

**Figure 11:** Advertorial, 'Madam, be a friend of beer' (Archivio Storico Birra Peroni pubblicità b.1 f.4 s.1) [Colour figure can be viewed at [wileyonlinelibrary.com](http://wileyonlinelibrary.com)]

exceptionally appreciated by more delicate palates'.<sup>101</sup> 'Madam, be a friend of beer' presented beer as the best tonic for 'the worldly lifestyle, which is tiring and wears one out' (Figure 11). For confirmation, they suggested, 'ask your friends who travel and your doctors about it. They will tell you that abroad, high society women prefer beer to all other hydrating drinks'.<sup>102</sup> The final advertorial, 'Beauty contest' [Figure 12], deployed striking imagery of male masks gazing down at female silhouettes clothed

ERVA - S. A. I. - PUBBLICITÀ - MILANO  
 Propaganda Birra Femminili - ad. Sa - Lidel - Natura - una pagina - Settembre 1930

## CONCORSO DI BELLEZZA

Dal Narciso della mitologia che si specchia candidato in uno stagno, su su ai moderni concorsi di bellezza, la vita femminile si svolge tra un solo trapunto di aspirazioni: piacere. Le adunate di Galveston e Rio de Janeiro confermano e attualizzano il mito. La bellezza è un dono e una conquista. La luce di un bel viso non basta. Occorre anche e soprattutto avere un corpo equilibrato, e forme graziosamente pronunciate. E per ciò ottenere, serve una giudiziosa ginnastica e una più giudiziosa scelta dei cibi e delle bevande. I risultati dei recenti concorsi di bellezza, collocano ai primi posti e rappresentanti di quei popoli che fanno un largo uso di birra, questa preziosa bevanda igienica che i medici chiamano pane liquido. In realtà la birra è un dissetante squisito, leggero e nutriente, che avviva le energie e mantiene al corpo snellezza e robustezza. Provate voi pure a prendere qualche tazza di birra italiana. È fresca e saporosa. E dissetando allietta.

Pubblicità ERVA - Milano

**CHI BEVE BIRRA CAMPA CENT'ANNI**

**Figure 12:** Advertorial 'Beauty contest' (Archivio Storico Birra Peroni pubblicità b.1 f.4 s.1) [Colour figure can be viewed at [wileyonlinelibrary.com](http://wileyonlinelibrary.com)]

only in bathing suits and cloche hats to align beer consumption with slenderness and beauty:

Beauty is a gift and an achievement. The luminescence of a pretty face is not enough. It is also and above all necessary to have a balanced figure, and gracefully articulated curves. And in order to achieve this, one needs a sensible fitness regimen and even more sensible choices in terms of food and drink. The results of the recent beauty contests allocated the first places to representatives of

those peoples with high rates of beer consumption, the precious, healthy beverage that doctors call 'liquid bread'. In reality, beer is a delicious, light and nutritious thirst quencher, which unleashes energy and keeps the body slender and firm. Try for yourself a glass of Italian beer. It is fresh and tasty. And as it quenches, it enlivens.<sup>103</sup>

In this sense, then, beer and wine manufacturers' engagement with women drinkers through advertising and editorials served to shore up the regime's anti-crisis-woman campaign and its critique of women's appearance and practices only in part. It also served to undermine it by co-opting – and validating – supposed contemporary concerns with calorie-intake and physical slenderness. At base, for the alcohol industry, commercial interests took priority over political conformity.

### Women drinkers

It is important to ask – even if we cannot fully answer – what Italian women actually drank. The following paragraphs consider female drinking practices as revealed in the memoirs and diaries of the upper and upper-middle class women who constituted the prime intended readership of magazines like *Grazia*, *Lidel* and their ilk, as well as potential 'crisis women'. Were they, as contemporaries from Marinetti to Marescalchi feared, enthralled with exotic- and glamour-coded cocktails and champagne? Did they eschew alcohol altogether, along with other calorific foodstuffs, in order to achieve and maintain the ultra-slim body shape that would best show off their beaded flapper dress or Chanel-inspired pyjama suit?

The wine defenders' rhetoric decrying the 'crisis' into which their product had fallen was not simply bluster. Though annual production of wine continued to increase through the 1920s and 1930s, Italians' consumption of wine declined significantly from 1930.<sup>104</sup> Having steadily increased decade-on-decade since unification to a peak of 112.7 litres of wine consumed annually per capita in the decade 1921–30, consumption fell markedly in the following decade (1931–40) to an annual per capita average of 88.2 litres.<sup>105</sup>

While consumption statistics support Marescalchi and others' arguments that wine – and indeed alcohol – consumption was falling in Italy in the 1930s, they do not bear out the assertions that Italians were abandoning wine in favour of beer, cocktails and other alcoholic beverages. Indeed, per capita annual consumption of both beer and spirits followed a similar pattern to wine, that of a significant decline in consumption in the 1930s following years of relatively steady increase. Beer consumption dropped from 3.3 litres average annual consumption per capita in 1921–30 to 1.3 litres in the decade 1931–40. Consumption of liquors fell from 0.6 litres average annual consumption per capita in 1921–30 to 0.2 litres between 1931 and 1940.<sup>106</sup>

What is not possible to tell from the quantitative data cited above is how alcohol consumption overall, and the consumption of given alcoholic beverages in particular, varied by gender. We know from a contemporary (prohibitionist) survey of Italian children's drinking practices in 1930 that girls (23.4 *per cent*) reported higher rates of abstention from alcohol than boys (14 *per cent*).<sup>107</sup> This chimes with evidence available for later periods – ISTAT figures for 1983 show 49.7 *per cent* of Italian women declared themselves teetotallers compared with 26 *per cent* of men – and with late-twentieth-century academic studies.<sup>108</sup>

In all countries and historical periods for which there are general population survey data, the two strongest predictors of drinking behaviour are gender and age. Men consistently drink more than women, and the young drink more than the old.<sup>109</sup>

Contemporary qualitative evidence offers further enticing clues about the drinking practices of wealthy, leisured bourgeois Italian women. Their diaries and memoirs depict affluent social circles in which drinking alcohol, by women and men, and across different age-groups, was entirely normative. Susanna Agnelli's carefree youthful world of 1930s, which took in Turin, Rome, the up-market coastal resorts of Fonte dei Marmi and the French Riviera, was one in which champagne, vermouth and cocktails were freely consumed, including by the children.<sup>110</sup> Her parents 'usually have cocktails', she recalled, while her grandfather, *'il Senatore'* 'only drinks vermouth'.<sup>111</sup> At her grandparents' house for dinner, the young children were allowed to taste 'white, rather sweet wine' while, a few years later, as school children, with her siblings, cousin and childhood friend, Agnelli drank 'red wine and talk[ed]' when left unsupervised at her cousin's house.<sup>112</sup>

Drinking alcohol was understood as an integral part of the privileged lifestyle of ultra-wealthy, ultra-fashionable Italians and their international set, as depicted in the snap shots provided by the journalist Irene Brin. Although alcohol, unlike cigarettes and cocaine, was not accorded its own entry in Brin's directory of the 'habits and customs' of the interwar years, cocktails and wine, especially champagne, and their spaces of consumption – *osterie*, *tabarins* [cabaret venues] and bars – were ubiquitous.<sup>113</sup> The idealised lifestyle of the privileged 'modern girl' that she catalogued dictated not only 'infinite accessories of sporting equipment, *shakers*, typewriters, cars [and] a – preferably colourful – job' but also 'the possibility of drinking sticky champagne and barrelled whiskey every evening in some night-spot frequented by Black people and adorned with cotton pom-poms and confetti'.<sup>114</sup>

Maria Damerini, who recorded the social whirl of daily life as a member of Venetian elite society in the 1930s, described a similar round of dinners, luncheons, balls and excursions to the Lido lubricated by alcohol. She and her friends consumed alcohol in public and private venues, at formal and informal occasions: at formal balls in friends' *palazzi* or during more informal 'soirées' amid the young Venetian beau monde; at luncheon with friends in Asolo; at local *osterie* with her (newspaper editor) husband; at Annina Morosini's – the grand dame of Venetian elite society in the early twentieth century – habitual table at Caffè Florian; at the Film Festival on the Lido and in countless other fashionable venues that comprised the city's commercial public spaces at the disposal of monied Venetians and wealthy tourists.<sup>115</sup>

The types of alcoholic drinks Damerini and friends consumed were as varied as the locations in which they were drunk. Damerini recalled drinking: 'sparkling wine' at the Cavalchina carnival ball at the Fenice and aboard a boat in the waters of St Mark's bay during the Regatta; wine with Pirandello; cognac with coffee at the end of a meal with Morosini; cocktails during the Film Festival and the Redentore festival; champagne in countless venues, perhaps most notably as the fuel for midnight skinny-dips in the waters of the Lido.<sup>116</sup> While the ubiquity of cocktails and champagne among Damerini's social circle seems to confirm the 'wine defenders' lamentation that it was 'well-to-do society ladies' who were driving the Italian wine industry into the ground thanks to their embracing of 'foreign' trends in alcohol consumption, it is

worthwhile noting that, according to Damerini, it was Morosini, ‘always the first lady of a changing city’, who single-handedly ‘made an Italian sparkling wine fashionable: prosecco.’<sup>117</sup> Similarly, Marescalchi and fellow wine-enthusiasts need not have found Damerini, Morosini and their fellow Venetian society women cause for concern with respect to the other supposed transnationally transferred practice they habitually laid at the door of fashionable, wealthy *signore* and *signorine*: abstinence from alcohol. Morosini reportedly broke off from presiding her al-fresco salon at her usual table when Damerini, on arrival, ordered a tomato juice, to remark, ‘unbelievable! [...] unbelievable! Puréed tomato is only good for Madrilenian soup’.<sup>118</sup> Indeed, for Damerini and her circle, it was abstinence that was entirely alien: Damerini was left non-plussed by the direction she received when hastily organising a soirée for an American guest – none other than ‘Mrs. Coolidge’, teetotal wife of the late prohibition-era thirtieth President of the United States – to ensure that ‘everything was very simple and no alcohol; just and only orange juice and tea’:

It might have been ok for the *Presidentessa*, probably owing to prohibitionism but certainly not for the others there in Asolo, all invited by us and undoubtedly hoping for a more substantial buffet than the one offered that day.<sup>119</sup>

That said, there are echoes of the crisis woman tropes about fashionable obsession ‘with gymnastics, with dieting, with sun-bathing’ in the recollections of the era, for example in Brin’s cataloguing of interwar Italian high-society mores.<sup>120</sup> ‘Milanese or Triestine professionals, who are always in the avant-garde in Italy,’ she observed wryly, ‘did without an evening meal and took refuge in the cinemas, to lose an hour or so, settling for a warm lemonade’.<sup>121</sup> Though she noted the new attention to diet, exercise and slimness as preoccupying both men and women, she identified it as having a greater, and more concerning, impact on notions of female beauty and thus on women’s bodies and health:

And everyone used to eat salad and oranges without oil or sugar. Everyone weighed themselves, took their waist measurements, talked about diets that were tricky to follow with family meals, dreamed about departing to renowned treatments centres where fasting was permitted and monitored. Vera Vegani, so it was said, had lived for a long time on only four bananas and four glasses of milk a day: splendid. Marlene Dietrich, as soon as she got to America, had been put on a regime of warm lemon and boiled spinach. But, as the specialist magazines repeated, if for one month you ate only buttered potatoes or cream cake, one single foodstuff basically, you would lose weight in any case. Hollow cheeks, protruding cheekbones, deep-set eyes and a bitter smile were not only distinguishing but admirable: young girls started to look unworldly and developed stomach problems. Doctors would tell us that fasting inevitably led to bad breath: the humoristic press belittled the ‘Signorina Crisis’. Everyone knew about the tragic end of at least one ambitious woman who died, generally of consumption, because she slimmed too much.<sup>122</sup>

This was, after all, the period in which the ‘calorie’, as an invented unit of measurement to quantify the energy content of food, was widely disseminated, never ‘a neutral, objective measure of the contents of a dinner plate’, deployed then as now to survey, shape, govern and regiment the use of ‘food as an instrument of power’.<sup>123</sup> As Brin’s comments lay bare, if Italian women really were in ‘crisis’ then this was a crisis, a violent disciplining, that was enacted upon women rather than a societal or moral panic of their inducing.<sup>124</sup>

## Conclusion

Drinking (alcohol) was and is a 'cultural act, embedded in social codes, rules, and attitudes which are shaped by gender as well as class, ethnicity, age and nationality among other influences'.<sup>125</sup> As such, exploring the cultures and practices around women's drinking in Fascist Italy sheds light on the policies, spaces and codes that shaped individual consumer practices as well as societal parameters. It also tells us more broadly about the making of 'modern' consumer culture in interwar Italy, as well as about how post-Great-War 'civilizational despair' was projected onto and located in women's bodies.<sup>126</sup> Like the fears invested in monied, educated and urbane 'lady tipplers' in fin-de-siecle Chicago, and the alarm raised at purported increases in female insobriety, particularly female munitions-workers and serving soldiers' wives, in Great-War Britain, women's practices and (supposed) attitudes to drinking were construed as problematic; the anxieties evident in surrounding discourses inextricably tied to broader fears about the perceived emancipation of women and their presence in modern work and leisure spaces.<sup>127</sup>

While changing societal practices and cultural discourses afforded some women opportunities to experience alcohol consumption as liberating, these also furnished new means for regulating and disciplining women. Women's drinking functioned similarly to clothing in this respect. The abandonment of corsets and adoption – by some fashion-conscious women of means – of dropped-waisted dresses, pyjama suits and trousers may have been billed and, indeed, experienced as emancipatory but it also created new strictures around female physical slenderness as well as critiques of women's adoption of supposedly masculine and sterile corporeal forms. Correspondingly, the (imagined) drinking habits of Italian women, including the archetypal 'crisis woman', fed into disciplining propaganda that connected female drinking to fertility and 'hygiene', and individual female bodily health to the health of the body of the nation.

Women were imagined as vital determiners of national drinking habits and were singled out as crucial to both problematic drinking practices and the resolution of these, whether the problem was framed, in the anti-alcohol movement's terms, as one of (mostly male) excess alcohol consumption, or, in the wine and beer producers' terms, as a crisis of over-production and under-consumption of national products. Blame abounded: women employed outside the home, presumed neglecters of home and hearth, imperilled the anti-alcohol campaigners' secure assumptions around male alcoholism. Women who drank for pleasure in fashionable bars, hotels and nightclubs affronted norms of gendered public sociability. Women who failed to place Italian wines and beers on the family dining table, or to serve these to visiting friends, were deserting their duties as patriotic consumers and exacerbating the 'wine crisis'. The fascist government itself vacillated but ultimately shifted from a position that, through its legislation in the 1920s, exhibited sympathy with the anti-alcohol movement's concerns, to one more supportive of the alcohol industry lobbyists, whose propaganda programme encouraging consumption of Italian alcoholic beverages was by the 1930s in step with the regime's developing autarky project. Both groups in the alcohol debate appealed to so-called fascist values in staking their claims. Both presented themselves as sharing and representing the ideological tropes that fascism continually exalted and claimed as its own: a concern for national 'hygiene' and the health of the Italian *stirpe* [stock/race]; patriotism; autarky.

The admonitions and propaganda of regime, temperance advocates and drinks industry lobbyists notwithstanding, Italian women drank alcoholic drinks of varied types in public and private venues. Memoirs and diaries indicate that many Italian women – at least those with disposable means and time – were entirely comfortable in the myriad spaces and occasions in and on which alcohol was served and consumed. For Damerini and Agnelli, the ‘crisis woman’, along with the ‘wine crisis’ appears as far from their everyday lived experience as did the idea of a tee-total buffet with a prohibitionist former First Lady.

Importantly, the Fascist regime recedes in this picture. Certainly, both the anti-alcohol movement and alcohol industry lobbyists were keen to present their causes as thoroughly Italian and entirely compatible with fascist ideals. That said, all the groups discussed here – anti-alcohol campaigners, wine and beer industry lobbyists, advertising firms, magazine editors and journalists, and women drinkers themselves – participated in the creation of discourses and the enactment of social practices around female drinking that were not nationally bound and isolated. On the contrary, all operated, often consciously, within transnational frameworks: international prohibitionist and temperance networks; multinational advertising companies and commercial priorities that prized cosmopolitan lifestyle and fashion trends; consumer cultures and practices associated with the imagined originators of interwar modes *par excellence*, Hollywood and Paris. In this sense, the Fascist-regime created discourse around the ‘crisis woman’, the fantasy feminine social lives conjured in the advertising and editorialising imagery of Italian alcohol producers and the kinds of cosmopolitan drinking practices described by Damerini, Agnelli and Brin, were effectively domesticated iterations of the global ‘Modern Girl’ phenomenon of the 1920s and 1930s, incorporating ‘local elements with those drawn from elsewhere’ through ‘mutual, though asymmetrical, influences and circuits of exchange’.<sup>128</sup> Italian ‘ever so modern misses’ were perhaps more likely to be the ‘natural allies’ of their counterparts in Paris, London, Tokyo or Chicago than they were of either the self-proclaimed ‘wine defenders’ or the domestic ‘anti-alcohol propagandists’.

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## Notes

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2. Chrzan, *Alcohol*, p. 5.
3. Stella Moss, ‘Gender and Sexuality’, in Deborah Toner (ed.), *Alcohol in the Age of Industry, Empire, and War* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2021) pp. 133–152.

4. Claire Langhamer, "A Public House is for All Classes, Men and Women Alike": Women, Leisure and Drink in Second World War England.' *Women's History Review* 12 (2003), pp. 423–43; David Gutzke, *Women Drinking Out in Britain Since the Early Twentieth Century* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2013); Catherine Gilbert Murdock, *Domesticating Drink: Women, Men and Alcohol in America, 1870–1940* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998).
5. Stella Moss "'Wartime Hysterics": Alcohol, Women and the Politics of Wartime Social Purity in England', in Jessica Meyer (ed.), *British Popular Culture and the First World War* (Leiden: Brill, 2008) pp. 147–172. Robert Duncan, *Pubs and Patriots: The Drink Crisis in Britain During World War One* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2013).
6. Mark Lawrence Schrad, *The Political Power of Bad Ideas: Networks, Institutions and the Global Prohibition Wave* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010) p. 5.
7. John Greenaway, *Drink and British Politics since 1830: A Study in Policy-Making* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2003).
8. Brian J. Griffith, 'Bacchus among the Blackshirts: Winemaking, Consumerism and Identity in Fascist Italy, 1919–1937', *Contemporary European History* 29 (2020) pp. 394–415.
9. Ann B. Matasar, *Women of Wine: The Rise of Women in the Global Wine Industry* (Berkeley & Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2006), pp. 10–11.
10. Arturo Marescalchi, *Il problema del vino* (Bologna: Paolo Neri, 1924), pp. 5–6.
11. *Enotria* 6 June 1929.
12. *Enotria* 6 June 1930 for the quotation and further examples of this rhetoric.
13. Beer promotion advertorial 'Ascolate Terenzio' placed by Erwin Wasey & Co. Ltd, Milan, in Italian newspapers, November 1929. Archivio Storico Birra Peroni (ASBP) pubblicità b.1 f.3.
14. For the quotation, *Contro l'alcoolismo* November 1922. On the development of the anti-alcohol movement in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries, see Paul Garfinkel, 'In Vino Veritas. The Construction of Alcoholic Disease in Liberal Italy, 1880–1914', in Mack Holt (ed.), *Alcohol: A Social and Cultural History* (Oxford: Berg, 2006), pp. 61–76.
15. R. D. 19 June 1913, n. 632 'Provvedimenti per combattere l'alcoolismo'.
16. Garfinkel, 'In Vino Veritas', p. 72.
17. R.D. Legge 7 October 1923, 'Disposizioni per combattere l'alcoolismo'.
18. Valerio Montanari, *Parliamo di vino* (Vicenza: Stab. Tip. Mariani-Raschi 1942), p. 68; Tom. Giacalone Monaco, *Considerazioni sulla politica vinicola con prefazione di S. E. Arturo Marescalchi* (Venice: Gastone Bellini, editore, 1933), pp. 266–70.
19. Giacalone Monaco, *Considerazioni*, p. 5.
20. Griffith, 'Bacchus', pp. 398–410.
21. Griffith, 'Bacchus', pp. 410, 412.
22. *Enotria* January 1937, pp. 36–7.
23. Arturo Marescalchi, *Politica del vino* (Casale Monferrato: Casa editrice F.lli Marescalchi, 1924), p. 54; *Enotria* September 1937; *Il bene sociale* XXIV. I January 1930; ASBP pubblicità b.1 f. 3 'Sensibilità e gusti italiani'.
24. Jean Baudrillard, *America* (London & New York: Verso, 1988), p. 95; James Epstein "'America" in the Victorian Cultural Imagination', in Fred M. Leventhal and Roland Quinault (eds), *Anglo-American Attitudes: From Revolution to Partnership* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2000), pp. 107–8; Kate Ferris, *Imagining 'America' in Late Nineteenth Century Spain* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), pp. 1–3.
25. Poster produced by the Reale Società Italiana d'Igiene, reproduced in *Contro l'alcoolismo* June 1923.
26. *Contro l'alcoolismo* March 1923.
27. *Contro l'alcoolismo* May 1925; March 1926; *Contro l'alcoolismo* June 1925; *Contro l'alcoolismo* July–August 1925. Such representations were, of course, not confined to Italian anti-alcohol propaganda; for example, they were recurrent tropes for temperance movements in both the UK and US.
28. Archivio Diaristico Nazionale (ADN) MP/91.
29. ADN MP/Adn2.
30. ADN MP/Adn2 2-3.
31. *Contro l'alcoolismo* March 1923; *Contro l'alcoolismo* April 1923; June 1925. On the WCTU, see Ian Tyrel, *Woman's World/Woman's Empire: The Woman's Christian Temperance Union in International Perspective* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1991).
32. *Contro l'alcoolismo* June 1925.
33. *Il bene sociale* January 1931. In May 1930, Pastorello published letters of support and subscription renewals, including from members of his *Comitato centrale italiano contro l'alcool*. These included letters

- from the Methodist Episcopal church, a nun, and also on behalf of the Archbishop of Milan conveying his approval for the committee's work, though he was unable to serve on it.
34. For example, 'The Catholic Church against the prohibition of wine', *Enotria* March 1926.
  35. *Contro l'alcoolismo* November 1925.
  36. Mary Louise Roberts, *Civilization without Sexes: Reconstructing Gender in Postwar France, 1917–1927* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994).
  37. *Contro l'alcoolismo* March 1923.
  38. *Contro l'alcoolismo* June 1924.
  39. *Contro l'alcoolismo* March 1923.
  40. *Contro l'alcoolismo* March 1923.
  41. David Horn, *Social Bodies: Science, Reproduction and Italian Modernity* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994).
  42. Victoria de Grazia, *How Fascism Ruled Women: Italy, 1922–1943* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992); Gigliola Gori, *Italian Fascism and the Female Body: Sport, Submissive Women and Strong Mothers* (London: Routledge, 2004); Natasha V. Chang, *The Crisis Woman. Body Politics and the Modern Woman in Fascist Italy* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2015); Alys Eve Weintraub et al., *The Modern Girl Around the World. Consumption, Modernity and Globalisation* (Durham & London: Duke University Press, 2008).
  43. Horn, *Social Bodies*, pp. 95–122.
  44. Chang, *The Crisis Woman*, p. 66.
  45. For the song lyrics, see Chang, *The Crisis Woman*, p. 126. My addition in bold.
  46. De Grazia, *How Fascism Ruled Women*, p. 6.
  47. Horn, *Social Bodies*, p. 64.
  48. Some attention has been paid to the drinking practices of 'flappers' in other national contexts. See: Dan Malleck, *Try to Control Yourself. The Regulation of Public Drinking in Post-Prohibition Ontario, 1927–44* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2012); Roberts, *Civilization without Sexes*, p. 65.
  49. Indeed, these markers were interwoven in that alcohol consumption, as part of one's overall calorie intake, was correlated to the 'masculine' body shape associated with modern fashions; to that end the French edition of *Vogue* admonished readers in 1923, 'eat little, [and] don't drink'. Roberts, *Civilization without Sexes*, p. 82.
  50. On jazz, see Camilla Poesio *Tutto è ritmo, tutto è swing. Il jazz, il fascismo e la società italiana* (Milan: Mondadori, 2018), especially pp. 19–22; on dancing, see Kate Ferris, 'Dancing through Dictatorship: Everyday Practices and Affective Experiences of Social Dancing in Fascist Italy', in Klaus Nathaus and James Nott (eds), *Social Worlds of Dancing: Practices, Transfers, and Infrastructures between the World Wars* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, forthcoming).
  51. ASBP pubblicità b.1 f. 3 'Sensibilità e gusti italiani'.
  52. *Enotria* September 1937.
  53. *Enotria* October 1938.
  54. *Enotria* January 1937.
  55. For example, *Enotria* February 1939.
  56. *Enotria* frequently called upon supportive doctors – the other group, alongside women, that Marescalchi identified as a key constituency to deploy in the wine defence campaign – to publish letters stressing wine's supposed health-giving properties and its suitability for women. For example, *Enotria* February 1935; *Enotria* February 1938.
  57. *Enotria* September 1938. The author also held 'modern life' responsible for the cigarette's eclipsing of pipe and cigar smoking.
  58. ASBP pubblicità b.1 f. 3.
  59. *Enotria* March 1924.
  60. *Il giornale d'Italia* 25 August 1927.
  61. Francesco Adinolfi, *Mondo Exotica. Sounds, Visions, Obsessions of the Cocktail Generation* (Durham & London: Duke University Press, 2008), p. 226.
  62. ASBP pubblicità b.1 f. 3; *Enotria* January 1939.
  63. Filippo Tommaso Marinetti *La cucina futurista* (Milan: Sonzogno, 1932), p. 71.
  64. Marinetti *La cucina futurista*, p. 73.
  65. Marinetti *La cucina futurista*, p. 74.
  66. For others 'coda di gallo' was the preferred literal Italianisation.
  67. Marinetti *La cucina futurista*, pp. 205, 212.

68. Daniel Okrent, *Last Call: The Rise and Fall of Prohibition* (New York: Scribner, 2010), p. 211. See also Poesio *Tutto è ritmo*, pp. 15–27.
69. Okrent, *Last Call*, p. 212.
70. It is worth noting that Italian films also presented the Italian cinema-going public with multiple images of women drinking. Film historian Gian Piero Brunetta describes early Italian cinema (especially during the period 1914–20) as using the enticements of, among other things, ‘the sparkle of a goblet of champagne’ to draw in its audience: Gian Piero Brunetta, *Cent’anni di cinema italiano* (Rome-Bari, Laterza, 2001), p. 99.
71. Victoria de Grazia, *Irresistible Empire. America’s Advance through 20<sup>th</sup>-Century Europe* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2005), pp. 284–335; on music, see Poesio, *Tutto è ritmo*, pp. 42–4; on dance, see Ferris, ‘Dancing through dictatorship’ [forthcoming].
72. Victoria de Grazia, *The Culture of Consent: Mass Organization of Leisure in Fascist Italy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), pp. 216–17; Edward Tannenbaum, *The Fascist Experience: Italian Society and Culture* (New York: Basic Books, Inc., 1972), pp. 230–39.
73. The quotations are from Stephen Gundle, *Mussolini’s Dream Factory: Film Stardom in Fascist Italy* (New York & Oxford: Berhahn Books, 2013), p. 72 and James Hay, *Popular Film Culture in Fascist Italy: The Passing of the Rex* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987), p. 109; see also Emanuela Scarpellini, *Material Nation: A Consumer’s History of Modern Italy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), p. 83.
74. The Italian branch of Erwin Wasey Ltd. was set up in 1928 by Nino Caimi, who returned to Italy from the US, where he had learnt his trade, to establish the country’s first advertising agency. Two years later, Caimi opened his own agency, Enneci, which was responsible for the ‘Chi beve birra campa cent’anni’ slogan. Mauro Trotta, *La pubblicità* (Elissi: 2002), pp. 85, 208, 216.
75. Kate Ferris, ‘Consumption’, in Joshua Arthurs, Michael Ebner and Kate Ferris (eds), *The Politics of Everyday Life in Fascist Italy* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), p. 129.
76. The 1925 Law for Maternity & Infancy prohibited the provision of alcohol to children and adolescents in boarding schools; *Enotria* November 1936; December 1936.
77. *Enotria* November 1936.
78. *Enotria* November 1936.
79. There was no suggestion in the advertising materials that younger family members ought to have their beer watered down.
80. ASBP pubblicità b.1 f.4 s.4.
81. ASBP pubblicità b.1 f.3.
82. ASBP pubblicità b.1 f.3.
83. ASBP pubblicità b.1 f.3.
84. ASBP pubblicità b.1 f.4 s.4; ASBP pubblicità b.1 f.3.
85. Scarpellini *Material Nation* 58.
86. Marescalchi also pinpointed criticism at those ‘in high positions of power’: *Enotria* February 1938.
87. Giacalone Monaco, *Considerazioni*, pp. 241–44.
88. *Enotria* January 1933.
89. *Enotria* June 1935 & January 1936.
90. *Enotria* June 1937.
91. *Enotria* April 1933; October 1933; March 1933.
92. ASBP b1 f.4 s.3. The agency report to the beer companies specifically highlighted the choice to place advertisements in ‘magazines aimed at families and women’.
93. Diana Garvin discusses one of these images in ‘Producing Consumers: Gendering Italy Through Food Advertisements’, in Peter Naccarato, Zachary Nowak and Elgin K. Eckert (eds), *Representing Italy Through Food* (London & New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2017), pp. 144–47.
94. ASBP b.1 f.3; b.1 f.4 s.1. Other advertisements focussed on the cooling, hydrating effects of beer in the hot summer months, or on its suitability for consumption at mealtimes, alongside various foods, including fish, pasta and pizza.
95. ASBP b. 2 f.7.
96. ASBP pubblicità b.1 f.3.
97. ASBP pubblicità b.1 f.4 s. 1.
98. Diana Garvin, ‘Producing consumers’ 144.
99. ASBP pubblicità b.1 f.3.
100. ASBP pubblicità b.1 f.3; b.1 f.4 s.1; ASBP pubblicità b.1 f.4 s.1.
101. ASBP pubblicità b.1 f.4 s.1.
102. ASBP pubblicità b.1 f.4 s.1.

103. ASBP pubblicità b.1 f.4 s.1.
104. Scarpellini, *Material Nation*, pp. 6–7.
105. Only in 1970 did per capita wine consumption exceed 1921–30 levels and, indeed, from there it has continued to rapidly decline, reaching 50.5 litres per capita per year in 2003. Allemani, Francesco Cipriani, Franco Prina (eds.), *I cambiamenti nei consumi di bevande alcoliche in Italia. Uno studio esplorativo sul decremento dei consumi negli anni 1970–2000* (Rome: Osservatorio Permanente sui Giovani e l'Alcool, 2006), p. 36. [https://www.alcol.net/wp-content/uploads/2013/05/images\\_Quaderni\\_quaderno-17-ita.pdf](https://www.alcol.net/wp-content/uploads/2013/05/images_Quaderni_quaderno-17-ita.pdf)
106. Scarpellini, *Material Nation*, pp. 6–7.
107. *Il bene sociale* January 1930.
108. Allemani, Cipriani and Prina (eds.), *I cambiamenti*, p. 51.
109. Sharon C. and Richard W. Wilsnak, 'Drinking and Problem Drinking in US Women', in Marc Galanter (ed.), *Recent Developments in Alcoholism vol. 12 Women and Alcoholism* (New York: Phenom Press, 1995), pp. 25–60.
110. Susanna Agnelli was the granddaughter of Giovanni Agnelli, founder of FIAT car manufacturers and later senator. In later life, Susanna Agnelli herself became a politician in local and European government and Italian foreign minister.
111. Susanna Agnelli, *We Always Wore Sailor Suits* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1976), p. 15.
112. Agnelli, *We Always*, p. 16.
113. Irene Brin, *Usi e Costumi 1920–1940* (Palermo: Salerio, 1981), pp. 16, 26, 166, 209.
114. Brin, *Usi*, p. 108.
115. Maria Damerini, *Gli Ultimi Anni del Leone. Venezia 1929–40* (Padua: il poligrafo, 1988), p. 244.
116. Damerini, *Gli Ultimi*, pp. 14, 283.
117. Damerini, *Gli Ultimi*, pp. 70, 87.
118. Damerini, *Gli Ultimi*, p. 244.
119. Damerini, *Gli Ultimi*, p. 94.
120. Brin, *Usi*, p. 15.
121. Brin, *Usi*, p. 15.
122. Brin, *Usi*, pp. 115–16.
123. Nick Cullather, 'The Foreign Policy of the Calorie', *The American Historical Review* 112(2) (2007), pp. 337–64.
124. I am grateful to Diana Garvin for this observation.
125. Moss, 'Gender and Sexuality', pp. 133–5.
126. For interwar France, for example, Mary Louise Roberts located the rhetoric and competing tropes of modern womanhood within the discourses and practices of post-war hedonism and civilizational despair. Roberts, *Civilization without Sexes*.
127. For example, Emily Remus, 'Tippling Ladies and the Making of Consumer Culture: Gender and Public Space in Fin-de-Siècle Chicago', *Journal of American History* 101(3) (2014), pp. 751–77; Stella Moss, 'Wartime Hysterics'; see also Kevin C. Kearns, *Dublin Pub Life and Lore. An Oral History* (Dublin: Gill & Macmillan, 1996), pp. 40–45.
128. Weintraub et al., *The Modern Girl*, p. 4.

**Kate Ferris** is a Reader in Modern European History at the University of St Andrews (UK). Her research focusses on Italy and Spain from the late nineteenth to mid-twentieth century, and especially on questions of subjectivity, agency, practice and the lived experience of dictatorship. Her books include *Everyday Life in Fascist Venice* and (co-edited) *The Politics of Everyday Life in Fascist Italy* and she is PI of the ERC-funded research project, 'Dictatorship as experience' (DICTATOREXPRIENCE, 772353).