White blouses in the blackshirt nation: women and uniforms in Fascist Italy

Perry Willson

To cite this article: Perry Willson (2022): White blouses in the blackshirt nation: women and uniforms in Fascist Italy, Women's History Review, DOI: 10.1080/09612025.2022.2055272

To link to this article: https://doi.org/10.1080/09612025.2022.2055272

© 2022 The Author(s). Published by Informa UK Limited, trading as Taylor & Francis Group

Published online: 25 Mar 2022.

Submit your article to this journal

View related articles

View Crossmark data
White blouses in the blackshirt nation: women and uniforms in Fascist Italy

Perry Willson

School of Humanities, University of Dundee, Dundee, Scotland

ABSTRACT

Uniforms were a core element of the visual spectacle of the Italian Fascist regime and a means for its supporters to publicly proclaim their political allegiance. Initially considered intrinsically masculine, part of the Fascist quest to bolster Italian virility, there was considerable hostility to the idea of women in uniform. By the mid-1930s, however, women were allowed and even encouraged to wear uniforms, albeit in different versions to those worn by men, versions that underscored their marginal position in the party. Drawing on archival and contemporary press sources, as well as memoirs, this article explores the meaning and limitations of uniform-wearing for the millions of female Italians who eventually wore them, looking at aspects like the impact on women’s role and visibility in the regime, the symbols embedded in the uniforms’ garments and insignia, and women’s and girls’ experience of wearing them.

KEYWORDS

Uniforms; Fascism; Italy; women; Fasci femminili

The interwar period was an interesting time for women’s dress. In the era of Chanel, the comfortable ‘sports look’ predominated, affording women far more freedom of movement than the heavy garments and tight-laced corsets of previous decades. During the years of Fascist rule, Italian women participated in these broad trends, and, in most respects, there was nothing particularly ‘fascist’ about how they dressed. They wore similar clothes to other European women and those who could afford it continued to follow international (particularly Parisian) fashion trends. The fashion houses of Turin (Italy’s fashion capital in these years) did so too, rather than developing their own style. However, the regime’s extolling of fecund, maternal women and its idealisation of the rural, traditional world, images of modern, fashionable women, epitomised by Mussolini’s own elegant daughter Edda, continued to abound in Fascist Italy.

This did not mean that the Fascist government lacked interest in women’s fashions. On the contrary, it intervened heavily in this sector. Government policy, however, mainly pursued the autarkic (and essentially economic rather than political or aesthetic) project of attempting to challenge the dominance of the Parisian fashion houses, and made no attempt to invent a specifically Italian, or even Fascist, style of dress. Historians...
who have written about fashion in interwar Italy have tended to focus on this policy whereas virtually no historiographical attention has been paid, either by dress historians or by those writing on women’s role in the Fascist Party, to something that, in many ways, was a far greater novelty, the fact that millions of Italian women and girls began to wear a totally new type of garb - Fascist uniform.

The Fascists themselves thought that uniforms were important. They placed a great deal of emphasis on appearance and style, and uniforms were used as markers of faith and allegiance. Uniforms soon began to take centre-stage in Fascist display and spectacle and became a core element of much of the elaborate, stage-managed pageantry of the regime’s rallies and parades. In uniform, the wearers lost their individuality, and a chaotic crowd could be arranged into an orderly, disciplined gathering of patriotic followers of the Fascist faith. As such, they played a role in the regime’s project to both dominate and mobilise the masses. As Mussolini commented in 1932: ‘The masses, for me, are nothing more than a flock of sheep, until they are organised … they cannot rule themselves’.

For women, the innovation that uniforms represented should not be underestimated. Uniforms for civilians that publicly signalled the wearer’s allegiance to a political ideology were, of course, something fairly new for men too but the novelty for women was compounded by the fact that, prior to the rise of Fascism, political party membership in Italy had been largely a male affair. Only very small numbers of Italian women had joined political parties. There was, moreover, no real precedent for women in uniform, apart from occupational uniforms like those worn by domestic servants, the habits of nuns or school uniforms. Up to this point, military uniforms had been worn exclusively by men. Although Italian women had made important contributions to the war effort during the Great War, playing a prominent role on the home front in manufacturing, agriculture, welfare and the dissemination of propaganda, none had been allowed to wear any sort of military uniform or serve, even in auxiliary roles, in the armed forces. The only exceptions were the handful of young women who attempted to get to the front disguised as soldiers. Red Cross nurses, mostly upper-class women, did wear a sort of uniform but their flowing white robes made them seem more like nuns (or even angels) than members of the armed forces. The core message of their uniforms, indeed, was that they quite clearly were not soldiers. The only real precursors to Fascist women’s uniforms were the red shirts worn by a few of Garibaldi’s female supporters during the Risorgimento and the light blue blouses of some of the women who rallied to Gabriele D’Annunzio’s occupation of Fiume after the First World War (light blue signified the nation, as the colour of the reigning House of Savoy). Uniforms, particularly quasi-military uniforms, for women were, therefore, something quite new. But what did it mean for women and girls to dress in this way, and how did the obligation or opportunity (or lack of opportunity) to wear uniforms affect their standing, visibility and role in the party? How, moreover, did ideas about gender affect Fascist uniforms?

**Camicie nere: men in uniform**

Fascist men adopted uniforms from the very start, even before the transformation of the Fascist movement into a political party. The *squadrista* garb of black shirt, knee-breeches and fez, inspired by the military dress of soldiers in the trenches (particularly the shock troops - the *arditi*), emerged quickly. Initially such outfits were quite
varied and often included a good degree of improvisation, but they were gradually formalised into the uniform of the Fasci di Combattimento, the party sections for adult men. This resembled a military uniform - indeed Fascists in full uniform did look much like soldiers - but at the same time was intended to make them easily distinguishable from the actual armed forces. The precise elements of the men’s uniform did change slightly over time but the most important item, the only truly essential one for a man to be deemed in uniform, was the black shirt, to the extent that the term camicia nera (black shirt) became virtually synonymous and interchangeable with the word Fascist and continued to be used in this way throughout the long years of Fascist rule. In some contexts, camicie nere was used specifically to denote squadristi, or members of the Fascist Militia, although these were often called ‘the blackshirts of the revolution’, but camicia nera was sometimes used to simply denote any male Fascist (and it is frequently used in this way nowadays).

Much of the cult of uniform-wearing was bound up with the regime’s obsession with reshaping and bolstering up masculinity. No longer would Italian men be servile, effeminate lackeys, lampooned and despised by both foreign observers and by Italians themselves. Now they would be reforged into ‘Fascist new men’, men who were militaristic, active, energetic, youthful and virile. The type of masculinity celebrated in this transformative politics was seen as the diametric opposite of the supposedly weak male of the previous Liberal regime, whose dented masculinity was deemed to have contributed to key moments of national shame like the humiliating military defeats at the battles of Adowa and Caporetto. The Partito Nazionale Fascista (PNF), with its military and virile values, was to play a key role in this reinvention. One way to reinforce this message was by enabling its members to play at soldiers by dressing them up in military-style uniforms. This approach was, of course, not unproblematic. As Simonetta Falasca-Zamponi has argued, the Fascists ‘… believed that style was a visible sign of internal characteristics, and, in a peculiar logical reasoning, they also seemed to think a change in style could produce a transformation in character.’

Women, unsurprisingly, found it hard to carve out a space for themselves in a project of this kind, where a quest to restore the honour of Italian masculinity was now equated with national pride, and, in the 1920s, there was a good deal of opposition to the very idea of Fascist women in any kind of uniform at all. How could mere women be allowed to wear a uniform that was so deeply associated with the virile business of war and the Fascist notion of masculinity? Women’s role, in Fascist ideology, was something quite different. Women were supposed to contribute to the nation as mothers, by giving birth to and raising the next generation of soldiers, not aping men by playing at soldiers themselves. Consequently, the idea that women should wear uniforms initially made little headway, for men wanted to keep the prestige of uniform-wearing exclusively for themselves. Uniforms made the regime’s endless marches and parades opportunities for swaggering, masculine display. Dressed up in his Fascist finery, even the most ordinary Italian man could be transformed, at least temporarily, into a proud member of the party’s pretend army.
Fascist women and uniforms in the 1920s

Nonetheless, during the early years, the years of the rise of Fascism, some young female Fascists did enthusiastically adopt forms of uniform. They concocted an improvised female approximation of the male squadrist outfit that included black shirts, flowing skirts, caps and waist sashes. One of those who wore a uniform of this kind was Piera Fondelli, a young art student who went on to hold various prominent roles under Fascism. In her memoir she remembered how she, together with a handful of other women, had dressed up like this during the March on Rome. She recalled that:

But earlier, many years earlier, I had worn a black shirt. Even if no-one knows about it, as well as the 100,000 squadristi who took part in the March on Rome, on the 28th of October 1922, there were twenty women. I was their commander. I was 20 years old. I made my black shirt and fez at home, in Rome, with my mother’s help. Once they were ready, she pinned two beautiful golden stripes on my sleeve and cap; the insignia of the ‘officer’ of the ‘honorary escort squad to the colour’. That was what our group was called.\footnote{14}

Those Fascist women who did dress in uniform in these early years were undoubtedly an interesting novelty. For example, in 1924 a photograph appeared in the Almanacco della donna of a young woman wearing a cap and a black blouse decorated with various insignia. The caption read: ‘Dora Cazzola, from Lonigo, a young and intelligent Fascist, a ‘blackshirt’.’\textsuperscript{15} The admiring tone of this caption was, however, in stark contrast to the views of male Fascists on the matter. Most were strongly opposed to the idea of uniformed party women (as they were to the idea of women having any sort of meaningful role in the party and its politics at all).\textsuperscript{16} In the view of most Fascist men, women should limit themselves to welfare activities within the party and their domestic mission as wives and mothers. Politics, and therefore uniforms, were a purely masculine affair.

Fascist women themselves were far from united on this question. Early female Fascists did aspire to a political role of some kind (although there were disagreements about what that might be exactly), but many were uncertain about the need for uniforms. Those who rallied to Fascism in these years were a varied group, with varied ideas (not all, for example, supported female suffrage) and far from all were keen to take part in actions and marches dressed in outlandish outfits of this kind. Those who did so were mainly younger activists who participated in some way in Fascist squad activities like strike breaking (or at least identified with this type of Fascism). Overall, their numbers were small and many other women Fascists, particularly the older and more respectable among them, considered the activities of this turbulent minority, and their wearing of uniforms, inappropriate for their sex.

At the Congress of the Veneto Fasci Femminili (FF - the women’s section of the Fascist Party) held in Padua on 1–3 June 1923, the issue was aired. In his opening speech, which included some flattering words praising the contribution of women to the Fascist cause and grandly promised them the vote, Mussolini referred to Fascist women as ‘valiantly wearing the most glorious black shirts’.\textsuperscript{17} But the question of whether women really should dress in this manner was much more controversial than his words appeared to suggest. Some of those present, like ‘Signora Franca’ from Trieste, were in favour, ‘because the black shirt is eminently a social leveller and because it prevents Fascist women from wearing styles that are unsuitably frivolous for the occasion during..."
Fascist public events’. Others, however, including the President of the Congress, Carmelita Casagrandi (an aristocratic doctor who was the founder and leader of the Padua FF), took a different view. Casagrandi, a conservative nationalist who was unsympathetic to both women’s squadism and the wearing of uniforms, recommended that the leaders of each FF section be allowed to decide for themselves whether or not their members could wear black shirts, just as, she counselled, they should weigh up carefully on each occasion how appropriate it was to take part in Fascist marches or ceremonies. She then proposed a motion (which was passed unanimously) that women’s squadism be definitively abolished and that, moreover, local section leaders should employ their ‘common sense’ to decide whether women could appear in black shirts, albeit ‘only for patriotic ceremonies and provided that they did not treat the wearing of the shirt lightly or frivolously’.  

More radical in approach, with its demands for the FF to have more autonomy and political clout in the party, was the congress of the FF of Lombardy held the following year in Milan. At that event, according to Detragiache, there were ‘about forty women’s groups present (or represented) with pennants and in uniform’. At this congress a draft FF Statuto (constitution) was presented, drawn up by Elisa Majer Rizzioli, Elisa Savoia and Giuseppina Cagnola Mauri. It did mention uniform-wearing, albeit only in certain circumstances, stating that:

Fascist women will be allowed to wear black shirts only at Fascist rallies and ceremonies. The Directorate will be able to ban the wearing of black shirts by any Fascist women who, due to poor discipline or unworthiness, have shown that they do not deserve this honour.

The draft Statuto also included a reference to the creation of an ‘exhibition squad’ (squadra di rappresentanza), a special group of female Fascists selected to participate in marches and other public events. The criteria for selection were clearly an attempt to make a female presence palatable to hostile male Fascists, for the squad members were to be chosen not for any particular political achievements or service to the party, but as decorative embellishments. This squad, according to a draft of the regulations sent to Mussolini along with the draft Statuto, was to be ‘composed exclusively of young ladies who are aesthetically and physically suitable. They will be chosen by the Secretariat, after seeking the opinion of a competent leader of the local men’s Fascio’. It was also stated that exhibition squad members would all wear identical uniforms, but other women Fascists were not to adopt them. Uniform wearing for women was, therefore, to be reduced to young, pretty girls adorning a Fascist event, rather than, as it was for men, a chance to publicly demonstrate the allegiance of those who had rallied to the cause.

However, when the definitive version of the Statuto was signed, a document that disappointed many women Fascists as it left the FF very little autonomy at all, even this cautious approach was abandoned and neither uniforms nor exhibition squads were mentioned at all. Only the new girls’ groups were to have uniforms. The moderate feminist Elisa Majer Rizzioli, who had just, in December 1924, been appointed Ispetttrice Generale dei Fasci Femminili (FF General Inspector) was the sole female representative on the committee that drafted the document. She attempted to defend these omissions by stating that: ‘Some of you, veteran and valorous Fascist women, will be hurt that the Statuto deliberately makes no mention of women taking part in parades, or of female
ranks and black shirts.’ But, she continued, there was no longer any need to fight ‘the reds’ and now ‘times have changed and Italian women need to return calmly to work’. She then resorted to a patriotic historical analogy to explain why Fascist women should accept this situation:

Hail, O Black Shirt! You were worn by our sisters with the same heroism as our grandmothers wore the Red Shirt, and they will lay you down with that sense of relief and regret that we felt when we took off our white nurses’ gowns after four years of war.

With our faces, our sober dress, we will now go among our people, sisters of friends and of enemies, demonstrating with our actions that Fascism is life, work, and silent dedication to the Nation.25

What she omitted to mention in this eloquent eulogy of patient, patriotic sacrifice was the fact that men were not being asked to make it. The ending of squadrist activism for them did not lead to the abolition of uniforms for, unlike women, they were to continue to use uniforms to affirm their collective identity (and virile masculinity) and celebrate what they had done to bring Fascism to power.

Some female Fascists, however, proved reluctant to accept this new state of affairs. Eventually on 14 May 1926, shortly after the embattled Majer Rizzioli herself had been unceremoniously pushed out of office, at a time of particular weakness for the Fasci Femminili when they were robbed of whatever vestiges of autonomy they had been able to carve out for themselves, a line was drawn under the issue. As part of the ‘normalisation’ - the drive to get control of unruly members of the party, both male and female -, Augusto Turati, (PNF Secretary) took a firm stand. He sent round a circular to all the local FF secretaries, banning women from wearing black shirts, seen as the core element of the uniform. For him, as for many Fascist men, the black shirt was an intrinsically masculine garment and, as such, totally inappropriate for women Fascists. Turati’s circular spelled out his thoughts in no uncertain terms:

Some Secretaries and Delegates are still asking for Fascist women to be allowed to wear black shirts.

I declare in the most formal manner that the regulations issued by the previous Inspectorate are still in force and that, personally, I am utterly opposed to women and girls wearing black shirts.

The black shirt is the virile symbol of the combative spirit of our revolution and it has absolutely nothing to do with the task of good works and welfare that Fascism has entrusted to women.

Fascist women need to educate themselves spiritually until they gain a perfect understanding of the lofty goals of our movement, but they should stick to their womanly tasks of goodness, hard work, piety and kindness, shunning anything to do with uniforms and parades.26

After this, adult women were no longer seen in Fascist uniforms of any kind for a number of years.

The era of mass mobilisation: the 1930s

In the mid-1930s, however, the situation changed and Fasci Femminili members were at last allowed, and indeed encouraged, to adopt uniforms. Those perusing the internet for
images of the FF might be surprised to learn how late uniforms for women were introduced, as so many photographs of Fascist women that appeared in the Fascist press, and are available today, show them dressed in this way. This is because the late 1930s and early 1940s was the period of the greatest activity for FF women, when they took very active roles in the civilian mobilisation in response to the League of Nations sanctions and then during the war. Thus, the years when female Fascists were most frequently filmed and photographed coincided with the period when they actually wore uniforms.

In their quest, in these years, to get every single FF member in uniform, the Italian Fascists went much further than Nazi Germany. There, although the girls in the youth organisations did have uniforms, adult female party members did not, with just badges and cloth arm patches to denote their political allegiance. Only the professional leaders of the Nazi women’s organisations wore full uniforms. The reluctance to dress Nazi women in militaristic dress of this kind, deemed unfeminine by male Nazi leaders, meant that even many of the female auxiliaries deployed during the war were kept in civilian dress.

In Italy, conversely, every single woman was urged to both join the party and get a uniform. Reality, however, did not always match these grandiose ambitions and, in practice, even among those who did join the FF, far from all actually acquired a uniform. The number of party members (of either sex) was always greater than the number of uniforms. The reasons for this undoubtedly varied, ranging from the political (publicly appearing in uniform was a much bigger step than simply taking out membership) to the economic (not all could afford one). Nevertheless, by the end of the 1930s, there were millions of women and girls in Italy who did own a Fascist uniform and wore it on various occasions. For them, uniforms opened the door to participation in many of the regime’s great showcase events like the highly choreographed rallies, ceremonies and parades. Now that they were suitably attired for dramatic effect, it was even possible to organise a special women’s rally - the ‘Grande adunata delle forze femminili’ (Great Rally of Women Fascists) - staged in Rome in May 1939. During this event, 70,000 female party members, clad in an array of different uniforms, were passed in review by the Duce as they marched past in neatly arranged cohorts.

The uniforms that party women were now allowed to wear, however, were deliberately kept quite distinct from those worn by men. Most importantly, women were still not permitted to wear the most emotive and symbolically significant part of the men’s uniform, the element that for men embodied the uniform itself and their identity as Fascists – the black shirt. The new women’s uniforms, instead, had white blouses which were worn under dark blue tailored suits. Even in uniform, therefore, women were still marked as outsiders. Moreover, although this was a period when trousers were becoming increasingly acceptable for at least some daring upper-class women, the FF uniforms did not include them: all versions of the uniform had skirts.

The main reason for the lessening of opposition to the idea of women in uniform in these years was undoubtedly the changing nature of the party. In the 1920s, when party membership was fairly low, uniforms had served to distinguish party members, who saw themselves as the new elite that had brought the regime to power, from ordinary Italians. In the 1930s, however, during the reign of Achille Starace as Party Secretary, the party became an instrument of mass mobilisation and all Italians were urged to sign up. Starace’s aim was to recruit the entire nation into the party, so that uniforms now
became a tool to reshape the mentality of not just party activists but the whole population. This is clearly the reason why women were now allowed to wear them, for women too, like men, were seen as targets of this totalitarian mobilisation. Women’s uniforms became acceptable in this context albeit with the proviso that the more militaristic, virile, aspects, particularly the black shirt, should remain strictly reserved for men. Apart from this caveat, uniforms for women were put on the same footing as those for men, governed by the same petty rules and regulations.32

One immediate benefit for the regime was that female teachers could now be seen in party uniform. Wearing a uniform was the simplest way to visually denote loyalty to the ideals of Fascism and many teachers, particularly in primary schools, were female. From 1934, all teachers, whether they liked it or not, were required to wear a party uniform at work, making them an effective symbol of the authority and prestige of the regime for millions of children.

Now that recruitment was encouraged rather than merely tolerated as it had been previously, the 1930s saw a huge expansion of party membership among women. This was greatly assisted by the creation of special FF sections for peasants and workers. Both of these sections, however, were given only the most minimal form of uniform, just badges and scarves.

The ‘uniform’ for women belonging to the Rural Housewives Section (founded in 1933 as part of the Fascist trade unions and then absorbed into the FF the following year) was an ivory-coloured neckerchief made of a mix of the ‘autarkic fabrics’ of rayon and jute. It was printed with a red trellis border, wheat-coloured fasci littori, a colourful bunch of wildflowers and stalks of wheat (a reference to the regime’s ‘battle for wheat’) and, repeatedly, the word DUCE in red lettering.33 At rallies and on other ceremonial occasions, ‘rural housewives’ were supposed to wear local folk costumes with their neckerchiefs around their shoulders. Dressing farmwomen in ‘traditional costumes’ was reassuring, demonstrating the supposedly unchanging nature of the rural world. They also had metal badges featuring an ear of corn on a tricolour background. Unlike in Nazi Germany where folk costume - the dirndl - was promoted to urban and middle-class women (albeit with limited success),34 urban Italian women were not specifically encouraged to dress up as peasants in this manner, although there were occasions when middle-class girls from the youth organisations wore folk costumes at the annual ‘Grape Fair’, organised by the regime’s mass leisure organisation, the Opera Nazionale Dopolavoro.

In 1937, a section for workers was added (‘workers’ being defined quite broadly, including factory workers, outworkers, domestic servants and working-class wives).35 The members of this section, the Sezione Operaie e Lavoranti a Domicilio (SOLD), had a similar scarf. As the organisation’s monthly newsletter, the tedious and highly propagandistic Lavoro e famiglia, enthused, it was drenched with emotive, symbolic elements:

the most beautiful things are depicted – the black of the glorious Blackshirts, sanctified by the blood of our Martyrs, - the Fascio Littorio, symbol of the power of imperial Rome, yesterday, today, tomorrow and forever, - and the word DUCE, repeated so many times, when the Leader is acclaimed, the Leader who has known how to return Italy to its imperial heights.36
On political occasions like rallies, members of the workers’ section often appeared wearing their neckerchiefs over work-based outfits. During the Great Rally of Women Fascists in 1939, they wore factory overalls, in different colours according to the firms they worked for. As Lavoro e famiglia described it,

they all also wear the characteristic kerchief and badge, and the word Duce – which stands out in white on a black background on the kerchief – shines in the sun like a passionate cry of devotion and tells the Founder of the Empire of the faith of these loyal female collaborators in the prosperity of our industries and the national wealth that work brings.37

The main reason for giving poorer women such a minimal form of uniform was undoubtedly cost. As Margherita Armani (writing under her pen name ‘Emma’) noted in reply to a ‘reader’s letter’ in her monthly advice column in Lavoro e famiglia: ‘A uniform would be quite a financial burden for some categories of poor workers and the Party wished and wishes to avoid this’.38 Millions of Italian women quite simply could not afford the tailored suit worn by an FF member. In the interwar years, many Italians owned very few clothes. In 1938, for example, average annual expenditure on footwear and clothing was only L.232.7439 and many, particularly peasants, spent far less than this. In this context, the kerchiefs were a practical solution that made party membership accessible to all. In 1941, for example, Rural Housewives and SOLD kerchiefs cost 4.75 and 3 Lire respectively. In the same year, one department store was charging customers a hefty 383 Lire for an FF uniform.40 Even the badges for poorer women were cheaper. In 1941, the price of a SOLD badge was just one lira, compared to four for a PNF standard badge.

As the 1930s wore on and FF members, by now involved in a vast array of party welfare initiatives, became increasingly involved in the mobilisation for war and empire, their uniforms did become slightly more military in style (and, consequently, more like the men’s uniforms) including safari jackets, epaulettes and more military-looking caps.41 As was the case for party men, different versions began to appear, like white safari suits for summer42 and a khaki version for ‘colonial wear’. The ban on black shirts and on the wearing of trousers was, however, never relaxed. The insignia on female uniforms, moreover, remained quite different from that for men. Whilst most male uniforms included somewhere or other the fascio littorio (seen as a symbol of power, authority and justice),43 this was less often the case in women’s insignia which, instead, mainly featured the letter M (for Mussolini). A provincial fiduciaria (FF leader), for example, had a red fabric badge featuring a gold M and three gold stars indicating her rank. This meant that female hierarchs quite literally wore the cult of the Duce sewn onto their clothing, close to their hearts.44 One result of this pervasive use of the M, doubtless quite deliberate, was to associate women with very young children since the Fascist youth groups for the very youngest similarly wore the M.

Women’s uniforms were relatively straightforward compared with men’s. They had fewer of the additional elements that were gradually introduced in the 1930s for men, like peaked caps. They were, moreover, excluded from specific honours like the right to wear the prestigious sciarpa littorio (introduced in 1939), an ostentatious sash in the ‘colours of Rome’ (red and yellow), reserved for men with long service in the party and who could provide (or forge) evidence that they had taken part in the March on Rome. Eventually, as a token recognition of the role played by the FF during the war,
loyal long-serving female hierarchs were accorded their own version, but it was only a badge.45

Uniforms may have enabled female party members of all kinds to play a public role in the pageantry of the regime, but the differing uniforms for different categories of women served as a strong visual marker of the hierarchical and class-based structure of the women’s section of the party. The tailored uniforms of the FF gave their members an air of authority when on official party business, much of which involved organising things for, or providing welfare for, poorer women. Uniforms came into their own in this kind of work, particularly the many intrusive visits to the homes of the poor carried out by those who took on the role of volunteer ‘Fascist Home Visitors’, for which uniform-wearing became compulsory.46 As one commentator, writing in 1935 in the FF newspaper, noted, the fact that women at last had uniforms meant that: ‘Fascist Home Visitors will have the advantage of being immediately identifiable and more respected, because their consistently good behaviour will be reinforced by that air of increased professionalism (serietà) that uniforms always give the wearer.’47 Moreover, when a group of peasant women or workers were taken on an outing by their FF leaders, it was immediately obvious who was in charge.

What exactly the FF members and organisers thought of all this is not particularly easy to establish given that, by the 1930s, public expression on such matters was very difficult. The press was heavily censored and party women no longer held their own conferences, as they had done in the mid-1920s. Most available memoirs, moreover, are written by those who were girls, not adults, in these years. Nonetheless, it is not difficult to see how uniform-wearing might have seemed appealing to some FF members. Photographic evidence suggests that the stiff and rather severe tailored garments were not particularly flattering (although they did look much smarter on women who could afford a good dressmaker), and they certainly were not very feminine, but they could give the wearer a decided air of importance. Men may have denied them a real role in the politics of the party but, in their own specific, circumscribed sphere - mainly welfare-related activities - Fascist women were able to step out with authority and confidence. This was particularly important in the 1930s when the FF membership increasingly included a good number of lower-middle-class women, who found it harder to impose themselves, like wealthier women could, by dressing to impress in expensive, fashionable clothes. Among FF members themselves, therefore, the uniform could, in some respects, have a strangely democratising effect.

The girls organisations

Girls’ uniforms were similar to those of adult women but with a softer, less severe, cut. Whilst boys, mirroring their adult counterparts, looked like miniature soldiers in black shirts and uniforms that were increasingly militaristic as they got older, girls wore skirts and white blouses. In Fascist rallies and marches, they certainly stood out and the striking contrast between their white blouses against a background of massed black shirts was, on occasion, used to spectacularly good effect. The Figlie della Lupa (Daughters of the She-Wolf - aged 0-8), had a large M-shaped metal buckle on the white braces of their tiny uniforms and she-wolf badges (symbolising Rome) pinned to their collars.48 Older girls’ uniforms were simpler - just white blouses, black skirts
and caps, although some versions included ties. Much of the insignia for the adult hier-
archs in charge of the girls’ organisations also included the ‘M’. Like adult women, the
Giovani Fasciste (aged 18-21) eventually got safari jackets and variations on the standard
uniform for different seasons, for sports activities and for those living in the empire or
undergoing ‘pre-colonial training’. There was also a specialised version of the uniform
for female university students.

Some commentators saw uniforms as having a direct influence on the character of the
young. Paola Benedettini, for example, editor of the FF newspaper, wrote in 1932 (reffer-
ing to the Giovani Fasciste) that: ‘The uniform, which is really just a sports outfit, both
serious and becoming, helps give the girls a sense of that kind of discipline which cer-
tainly has a healthy influence on forging their character.’49 This reassuring description
was doubtless primarily aimed at parents rather than the girls themselves, but many
girls do seem to have enjoyed wearing uniforms. Zelmira Marazio (born in 1921 in
Turin), for example, later wrote nostalgically in her memoir of ‘the joy of wearing the
[Piccola Italiana] uniform: white blouse and stockings, knitted silk beret, pleated skirt,
black cape and shoes.’50 This memoir, written by a very fervent Fascist, contains
various other positive references to uniforms, including a detailed description of her
smart new outfit when she graduated to becoming a Giovane Italiana, aged fourteen.51

The appeal of uniforms made them useful in the struggle with the Catholic organis-
ations for the hearts and minds of Italian girls. And the Fascists showed that they
clearly understood this when, in 1931, as part of the ongoing dispute between Church
and regime over Catholic Action, the Catholic youth organisations were banned from
having any kind of uniform at all. The uniform ban did not, of course, completely rule
out opportunities for dressing up and stage-managed display, for this was something
the Church excelled at. In 1940, for example, 16,000 members of the Gioventù femminile,
clad all in virginal white, complete with white veils, were received by Pius XII.52

Part of the attraction of the Fascist girls’ organisations was, of course, the chance to do
sports. The regime promoted certain, gender-appropriate sports as a way of preparing
girls for their future maternal role, producing healthy offspring for the nation.53
Rather than competitive events, gymnastic displays were favoured, where girls gracefully
performed synchronised movements. For these events, they often simply wore their
normal youth organisation uniform, or a longish pleated skirt with a knitted top. Uni-
forms greatly enhanced the aesthetic appeal of these events, and they became a
popular subject for the regime’s official photographers. Images of identically dressed
and perfectly lined up Piccole or Giovani Italiane, stretching or swaying in unison,
appeared frequently in the press. As the journalist Ester Lombardo waxed lyrically in
1929:

next Spring, in 1929, a national athletics competition is being prepared for the Giovani Ita-
liane, who are so lovely in their black and white uniforms, with their wide pleated skirts,
their berets and their winter capes. They look like swallows swarming across a blue sky
... these uniforms have been recently introduced and they mean the organisation no
longer seems improvised or provisional.54

Sport for girls and women, however, was a contentious issue. Some of its opponents
argued it was a foreign import, inappropriate for Italy, or focused on how ugly ‘grimacing
sportswomen’ were, or how it ‘masculinised’ them. But at the core of much of the
hostility lay anxieties about clothing - how young female athletes were dressed. Their supposed immodesty provoked considerable disquiet, particularly from the Church\textsuperscript{55} but also from many parents and even some Fascists. In 1932, for example, Fidal (Federazione italiana di atletica leggera - a Fascist organisation that had taken over the pre-existing organisations in this sector) sought to contain the ‘moral risks’ in the following manner:

The athletes should never, for any reason, go beyond the sports ground perimeter without putting on long trousers and they should only remove them for the actual game. Shorts must not be too short, and shirts should have sleeves. Any athlete who breaks these rules will be disqualified …\textsuperscript{56}

In 1933, there was a particularly heated debate in the columns of the Catholic Osservatore Romano and the official newspaper of the Italian Olympic Committee Il Littoriale. Catholic anxieties focused particularly on the public nature of sporting events and the publication of photographs of skimpily clad young sportswomen.\textsuperscript{57} Such protests, however, had little effect, and members of the youth organisations, particularly the ‘gufinite’ from the regime’s student organisation, increasingly wore quite modern sports garments. Many of the most modern images of women engaged in sports under Fascism feature the students of the elite Accademia Femminile Nazionale di Educazione Fisica in Orvieto. Founded in 1932, this was the party’s own female sports academy. Numerous photographs of the Orvieto students appeared in the press and indeed many of the most iconic images that now appear on the internet to illustrate the new wave of enthusiasm for female sports in this period, or to exemplify the more modernising aspects of Fascist policy towards women, are, in practice, images of the Orvieto students. This prestigious institution prepared its students to become leaders of the girls’ organisations or school PE teachers. The students had an extensive range of outfits for their various sporting activities, including shorts, swimming costumes and feminine, floaty, short dresses for rhythmic gymnastics.\textsuperscript{58} For political rallies and other public outings, such as attending weekly mass, they wore stylish dark blue suits (designed by a top Roman dressmaker) and white blouses with distinctive wide collars. These uniforms were important in building up the prestige of the institution (and implicitly of the party itself). Many of the testimonies later collected from ex-students had very positive memories of the uniforms and described them as ‘beautiful’. One former student recalled that: ‘When the Academy students went out as a group into Orvieto, beautiful and very orderly in their uniforms, and singing, the whole of Orvieto watched from the streets and windows.’\textsuperscript{59} Wearing them reinforced the pride that many of the students undoubtedly had in the Accademia. One remembered: ‘…and, well, I liked it, I showed off. When I came home to Verona, I went around in my uniform, etc., and everyone looked at me.’\textsuperscript{60} Elisa Lombardi, the director of the Accademia during the 1930s, even recounted, when interviewed in 1995, that when she had visited one of her students who was dying, the girl ‘made me open the drawer where her uniform was ready for her death, because she wanted to be in uniform’.\textsuperscript{61}
Sewing uniforms

Women did not just wear uniforms. They made them too. In the interwar period, unlike in some other European countries where ready-to-wear garments were by now quite common, most Italians wore clothing made by seamstresses, tailors or sewn by women at home. Uniforms were no exception. The printed scarves for peasant and working-class women and all the insignia were mass produced and sold directly to members through local party offices, but uniforms were not provided in this way. The wealthy could get them made up by a seamstress or local department store, but many women made them at home, if necessary by remaking or dyeing other garments. Home dressmaking was common in this period and sewing a frequent activity for many women, one of those borderline activities typical of women’s ‘leisure’, which were both recreational and productive at the same time.

In this context it is perhaps not surprising that sewing, including the sewing of uniforms, became one of the many party activities for women. It featured, for example, in the ‘Perfect Housewife Competition’ organised for ‘rural housewives’ in Arezzo in 1936, in which one of the skills the 820 contestants were tested on was their prowess in making a black shirt. Many FF members and Giovani Fasciste, moreover, stitched children’s uniforms in local party headquarters for distribution to poor children at the annual Befana Fascista (Fascist Christmas) ceremonies. Uniforms were also made by FF-run workshops, where middle-class organisers supervised the work of unemployed women. Middle and upper-class women usually had the necessary skills for this as needlework was still seen as an important part of their education. The workshops were a continuation of a Great War ‘welfare activity’ when middle and upper-class female volunteers had run workshops where impoverished female relatives of serving soldiers, recruited according to need rather than skill, had sewn and knitted garments for the armed forces. Deemed to be receiving a form of welfare rather than being in real employment, they were poorly paid. The members of the early FF, some of whom had been involved in such war work, quickly set up their own workshops. The FF-run workshops made various items, including layettes for new mothers to be distributed by ONMI, the regime’s maternal and infant welfare organisation, and sports outfits for the party’s summer camps for children, but one of their core activities was the production of uniforms, particularly children’s uniforms for distribution at the Befana Fascista. In Treviso, for example, there was a workshop which made ‘various garments to give to those in need (ordinarily or at the Befana Fascista) as well as sports outfits and uniforms for the poorest Fasci.’ Likewise, in Pavia, a workshop produced a range of garments including party uniforms. Such workshops, which had a training element and were always presented as welfare rather than normal employment, were quite widespread. In 1937, a survey carried out by the party (which covered all but seven provinces), listed about 200 of them. Over 50 of the party’s Provincial Federations had at least one and a handful of provinces had a good number. Bari, for example, had 19 and Aosta 10. Venice had the most with six in the city and 47 in the province. During the Ethiopian war and then the Second World War, many of the workshops began also to make uniforms for the armed forces.
**Militarisation and war**

As noted above, women’s uniforms did get slightly more military-looking as time went on. The most striking example of this were the outfits worn by the young women on the party’s ‘colonial preparation’ courses (which ran from October 1937 onwards). On occasion, they were seen marching in rallies dressed head-to-foot in khaki, shouldering guns and wearing solar topees.\(^71\) However, despite the fact that they offered opportunities to learn things like camping skills and some of the young women even learned how to shoot (although ostensibly only for self-defence)\(^72\) such courses were primarily intended to train women for a traditional role as wives and mothers albeit in the new setting of the empire.

The situation changed, however, during the Second World War when a few thousand women who rallied to the Repubblica di Salò (Mussolini’s puppet republic under the Nazi occupation of northern Italy) became the first Italian women to wear actual military uniforms. They were members of the SAF (Servizio Ausiliario Femminile - Women’s Auxiliary Service), instituted 18 April 1944.\(^73\) These young women wore uniforms in the same grey-green colour as male soldiers (or khaki in summer). They also had grey-green berets sporting a badge in the shape of a red flame, and insignia, worn on the shoulders, denoting their rank. They still, however, had skirts (which had to come a modest four centimetres below the knee) not trousers. A few of the auxiliaries (those in the service of the Guardia Nazionale Repubblicana or the Brigate Nere), were, at long last, allowed to wear black shirts.\(^74\) Zelmira Marazio, for example, remembered wearing a black shirt as a member of the Brigata Nera Ather Capelli. She wore this together with a safari jacket and a skirt that she herself had remade from a pair of the Brigade’s khaki trousers.\(^75\) Such homemade improvisations, however, were unusual for the auxiliaries were deemed real soldiers (indeed they received military pay) and, as such, their uniforms were issued by the Armed Forces Ministry. There were some instances of rogue bands of the Brigate Nere where women simply wore men’s uniforms, including trousers, but these were far from the norm, since all auxiliaries, in any armed formation of the RSI, were supposed to be subject to the SAF regulations.\(^76\)

The auxiliaries may have been soldiers, albeit of the non-combatant variety (their role being mainly confined to things like typing and nursing), and subject to normal military discipline, but there were also some specifically gendered regulations which banned them from using make-up or perfume, smoking cigarettes or mingling in an uncontrolled manner with male servicemen. In her memoir, Piera Gatteschi Fondelli, who became the SAF commander, claimed that it was not the male leaders of the Republican armed forces but she herself who had imposed these rules. She remembered:

> I was strict, and I’ve never regretted it. I knew that our opponents would have found it easy to criticise us … It is not hard to imagine what would have been written, in later years, about the auxiliaries, if their behaviour had not been exemplary. So, I didn’t allow the girls to smoke, wear lipstick or trousers, or any cheeky curls straying from caps.\(^77\)

**Conclusion**

The history of party uniforms sheds interesting light on the role of women in the years of Fascist rule. Given the importance that the Fascists placed on them, the fact that women
eventually got the opportunity to wear uniforms is far from insignificant. In uniform, women could feel part of the Fascist project to transform Italy and forge a new national spirit. Uniforms also enhanced their position, and their visibility, in the Fascist Party. The right to wear them, however, was only conceded in the later years of the Fascist ventennio and, once it was conceded, it was always constrained within certain limits.

During the 1920s, Fascist men, seeing uniforms as intrinsically associated with virility and the masculine business of war, were strongly opposed to the idea of women having any kind of uniform at all. In the following decade, however, as the regime and the party changed, this changed too. Now women were at last able to be included in the visual spectacle of the regime and this helped expand their presence in the party, on a symbolic level at least. They may have marched in separate groups from the men and with their own distinct uniforms, but they did at least have a place in the same choreographed rallies and parades. They too could now stride out, identically dressed and lined up in militaristic formation. Uniforms also lent an air of importance and authority to the members of the Fasci Femminili as they busied themselves with the myriad welfare and organisational activities they carried out in the name of Mussolini and the party.

Uniforms were supposed to be visual markers of the wearer’s loyalty to the regime and, indeed, they did function as such, but they also underscored the deeply class-based nature of the Fascist women’s organisations. Clothes, of course, had always been markers of social distinction, but the differing uniforms of different types of female party members served only to reinforce such distinctions. In the FF itself, uniforms could be a social leveller, in that they created a context where a wealthy countess had to dress more-or-less identically to an impoverished primary school teacher, but the differing ‘uniforms’ of the FF sections for poorer women were visual reminders that some party members were more important than others. Dark-suited middle and upper-class women were clearly in charge of the neckerchief-wearing workers and peasants.

The specific design of women’s uniforms also served to underscore the limitations of the political role that women, even middle and upper-class women, were allowed to play during the Fascist ventennio. Many elements of the men’s and women’s uniforms were quite similar. Both, for example, included safari jackets by the late 1930s. But, however proud and self-important an FF member might feel in her tailored outfit and the symbol-laden badges she wore stitched or pinned to it, the fact that she was never allowed to wear what was seen by male Fascists as the single most important and emotive part of the uniform served as a constant reminder of her marginalisation and subordination to the men of the party. Throughout the entire Fascist ventennio, it was men, and men alone, who could enjoy the puffed-up importance of being referred to as ‘camicie nere’.

Notes
2. This was also true in Nazi Germany, where, despite campaigns against cosmetics and French and Jewish influence in the fashion industry, urban women were ‘among the most elegantly


6. On women’s mobilisation in the Great War much has been written. See, for example, Stefania Bartoloni, Donne di fronte alla guerra. Pace, diritti, democrazia (Rome-Bari: Laterza, 2017); Emma Schiavon, Dentro la guerra. Le italiane dal 1915 al 1918 (Milan: Mondadori Education, 2018).

7. Two examples of this, according to a report in La domenica del corriere in 1915, were Luigia Ciappi, a primary teacher from Bologna, and Gioconda Sirelli, a poultryseller from Milan. (Michela de Giorgio, Le italiane dall’Unità a oggi. Modelli culturali e comportamenti sociali (Rome-Bari: Laterza, 1992), 222.)


9. The squadristi were members of the ‘action squads’, violent paramilitary gangs who attacked political opponents in the civil war that brought Fascism to power.

10. There are various published guides to the appearance of Fascist uniforms. The most comprehensive and carefully researched of these, by the film costume designer Ugo Pericoli, is Le divise del Duce: Tutte le divise e i distintivi del fascismo, dalle origini alla caduta (Parma: Ermanno Albertelli, 2010). Another useful work of this kind is Elio and Vittorio del Giudice, Italiani . . . Tutti in divisa! Uniformi, fregi e distintivi delle organizzazioni giovanili del partito nazionale fascista (Parma: Ermanno Albertelli, 1980).


22. ‘Regolamento della squadra di rappresentanza’, in ibid (same dating issues).

23. The new Statuto included the creation of two girls’ groups. The Piccole Italiane (aged 10–14) got a uniform (white knitted tops, white berets and black skirts) whilst the Gruppi Giovanili Femminili (14–18) did not. (‘Regolamento dei Gruppi Giovanili e delle Piccole Italiane’, in *Rassegna femminile italiana*, no. 2, (31 Jan 1925): 20.)


26. This circular from Augusto Turati, dated 14-5-1926, was included in an [undated] letter sent by Maria Carini, Delegata Provinciale Fasci Femminili di Treviso to her local FF organisers. (Archivio di Stato di Treviso, PNF Conegliano, b. 26.)

27. The main exceptions to this were prize-winning ‘proliﬁc mothers’ who were usually portrayed in ordinary clothing (or, occasionally, folk costumes), stiffly standing behind their many offspring, many of whom are themselves wearing the uniforms of the Fascist youth organisations. On photographic images of women in the Fascist press see Silvia Salvatici, ‘Modelli femminili e immagine della donna attraverso le fotografie della stampa fascista’, in: *ATF. Rivista di storia e fotografia*, no. 18 (Dec 1993). On women in the Istituto Luce propagandistic newsreels see Annabella Gioia, *Donne senza qualità. Immagini femminili nell’Archivio storico dell’Istituto Nazionale Luce* (Milan: Franco Angeli, 2010).


31. This does not seem to have happened in some other fascist movements. Female members of the British Union of Fascists, for example, wore black shirts like the men, although, as in Italy, their uniforms were distinct from men’s. See Antoine Godet, ‘Uniforms against democracies. The political uniform in the British and French fascist movements in the 1930s’, *Contemporanea*, 4, (2017): 587–615.

32. As one Fascist party ‘sheet of orders’ spelled this out: ‘The use of uniforms by Fascist Women is regulated by the same norms that govern the wearing of men’s uniforms.’ (Foglio di disposizioni (herafter FD) 728, 28 Jan 1937).

33. A description of the neckkerchief is included in Circolare del Segretario Amministrativo del PNF no.519 A, 7 giugno 1937–XV, ‘Fazzoletto-distintivo per le massaie rurali’. On the

34. On the dirndl see Guenther, *Nazi Chic?* ch. 4.


36. Alba Pochino, ‘Il fazzoletto distintivo’, *Lavoro e famiglia* no. 1, 2, (April 1938). There is a photograph demonstrating how to wear the scarf (knotted round the neck with the point hanging down at the front) in *Lavoro e famiglia*, no. 1, 1, (March 1938): 4.


40. Appunto per la ragioneria del direttorio (fattura sig.na Angela Fianchini), 16.10.1941, ACS, Partito Nazionale Fascista, Direttorio Nazionale, Servizi Vari, Serie II, b. 94.

41. See, for example, FD 882, 10 Oct. 1937 ‘Norme sull’uniforme femminile’ which stated that the normal FF winter uniform ‘can be substituted – from 29 October XVI [1938] – by a navy safari jacket with navy epaulettes and a golden fasce, with or without a navy cloth hat.’ On the increasing militarisation of the FF in the later years of the regime see Maria Fradossio, ‘La donna e la guerra. Aspetti della mobilitazione femminile nel fascismo: dalla mobilitazione civile alle origini del SaI nella RSI’, *Storia contemporanea*, no. 6 (1989).

42. See, for example, FD 851, 6 Aug 1937, which stipulated that ‘in summer, a white safari jacket can be worn, with white epaulettes and a golden fascio, black tie, white skirt, with or without a white straw or cloth hat’.


44. Images of the various permutations of these insignia for the different ranks are reproduced in Pericoli, *Le divise del duce* 166.

45. FD 250, 11 Dec. 1941.

46. FD 728, 28 Jan 1937, for example, instructed that: ‘During home visits, Fascist Home Visitors must wear uniform’.


48. According to Patrizia Ribuoli, the uniforms for the Sons and Daughters of the She-Wolf were designed by the children’s magazine illustrator Mario Pompei, (Ribuoli, ‘Le uniformi civili nel Regime Fascista’, in Graziella Buttazzi, ed., *Vent’anni di moda italiana* (1922-1943), (Milan: Museo Poldi Pezzoli, 1981) 36.)


51. Ibid, 35. Other mentions of uniforms in this memoir include descriptions of them as ‘beautiful’ (e.g. pages 40, 243) and references to her pride in wearing one (e.g. page 182).


53. Various historians have written about the debates about female sports in this period. See, for example, Rosella Isidori Frasca, ‘L’educazione fisica e sportive, e la “preparazione materna”’, in Marina Addis Saba, ed., *La corporazione delle donne. Ricerche e studi sui modelli femminili nel ventennio* (Florence: Vallecchi, 1988).


57. On this debate see, for example, Marco Giani, 'Le scandalose “pubbliche esibizioni” di atletica leggera femminile. Una polemica fra “L’Osservatore Romano” e “Il Littoriale” (novembre-dicembre 1933)’, Clionet. Per un senso del tempo e dei luoghi no. 3 (2019).


60. Interview with Anna Maria Zanardo Fanello (b.1925), cited in ibid., 132.

61. Motti, ‘Le ‘Orvietine’ e l’Accademia’, 135


66. One early example was the FF-run workshop in the Monte Sacro district of Rome, where unemployed women made military uniforms. See the letter dated 1 October 1927 to Mussolini from Lea Gambigiani Zoccoli, FF Fiduciary in Monte Sacro, in ACS, SPD-CO, 509.006 ‘Fasci Femminili’.


68. Letter dated 8 February 1937 from the Segretario Federale Giorgio Odero to Giovanni Marinelli, Segretario Amministrativo del PNF in ibid.

69. These figures come from a table dated 5 March 1937, conserved in ibid.

70. See, for example, ACS, PNF, Situazione Politica ed Economica delle Provincie, b. 14, fasc. ‘Pescara’, sfasc. ‘Pescara Ispezioni Amministrative, Ispezione 8 luglio 1941.’


72. See, for example, M. Norto ‘Il campo precoloniale’, La donna fascista (10-15 August 1936): 6. This article includes a photograph of young women firing guns.

73. On the auxiliaries much has been written. See, for example, F. Alberico, ‘Ausiliarie di Salò. Videointerviste come fonti di studio della Rsi’, Storia e memoria, no. 15 (2006): 199–225

74. ‘Divise e gradi del SAF’. Allegato al Decreto istitutivo del SAF (18-4-1944 – n. 447). This document is reproduced in the appendices to Garibaldi, Le soldatesse di Mussolini 128-130. There is also a detailed description of the uniform in ‘Il memoriale di Piera Gatteschi Fondelli’, 45–6.

75. Marazio, Il mio fascismo 161.

76. Garibaldi, introduction to Le soldatesse di Mussolini 19

77. ‘Il memoriale di Piera Gatteschi Fondelli’, 49.
Notes on contributors

Perry Willson is Professor of Modern European History at the University of Dundee, Scotland. She has published widely on modern Italian women’s and gender history, with a particular focus on the Fascist period. Her publications include Women in Twentieth Century Italy (Palgrave Macmillan, 2010); (ed.), Gender, Family and Sexuality: the Private Sphere in Italy 1860–1945 (Palgrave Macmillan, 2004); Peasant Women and Politics in Fascist Italy: the Massaie Rurali (Routledge, 2002); The Clockwork Factory: Women and Work in Fascist Italy (Oxford University Press, 1993). Her current research focuses on women’s role in the Fascist Party.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

ORCID

Perry Willson  http://orcid.org/0000-0003-4288-2905