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Land of Women: Basilicata, Emigration, and the Women Who Remained Behind, 1880-1914

Victoria Calabrese

The Graduate Center, City University of New York

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LAND OF WOMEN: BASILICATA, EMIGRATION, AND THE WOMEN WHO REMAINED BEHIND, 1880-1914

by

Victoria Calabrese

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in history in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, The City University of New York

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This manuscript has been read and accepted for the Graduate Faculty in History in satisfaction of the dissertation requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

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THE CITY UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK
ABSTRACT

Land of Women: Basilicata, Emigration, and the Women who Remained Behind, 1880-1914

by

Victoria Calabrese

Advisor: Mary Gibson

Between 1880 and 1914, millions of Italians emigrated to all corners of the globe in hopes of earning better wages and forging a better life for themselves and for their families. This dissertation examines the role of the women left behind in the Italian region of Basilicata when their husbands emigrated, and the political, social, economic, and legal changes they experienced in their absence. During the Liberal Period, women had few political rights, and married women were dependent on their husbands, but being left on their own put them in a unique position. I argue that the Southern Italian women who remained behind were not passive, powerless, or simply waiting for their husbands to return, but played a role above and beyond that of their subordinate legal role. They were living in a transnational society, and were exposed to ideas, people, and customs from all over the world. They were consumers handling money, citizens appealing to state agencies for assistance, mothers raising young children, and de facto heads of households, despite not having legal authority. My research demonstrates that emigration allowed these women to become integrated citizens in a newly unified Italy. They had increased social, economic, and civic responsibilities, which challenged societal norms and perceived stereotypes of Southern Italians. Overall, this dissertation uses emigration to show how Italian women in the Liberal Period acted beyond their traditional role and in doing so became modern citizens in the Italian state.
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To my parents, all other family and friends who have supported me during this journey. Thank you.
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Chapter 1: Introduction

In December of 1883, Lucrezia Alberti, a woman from the small town of Viggiano, in the Southern Italian region of Basilicata, appealed to the mayor to issue her a passport for America. She told him that her husband had emigrated to South America eight years prior, and she had not heard from him in five years. He left promising to continue to provide for the family in his absence, as was his marital duty, but he had not kept his promise, which Lucrezia said saddened her. She explained to the mayor that she was a struggling mother with three young children, and because her husband was not sending money to support the family, she often was forced to work as a servant. However, she often did not find work and thus on some days the family went without eating. Lucrezia went to the mayor to request a passport so she could travel to America to search for her husband. Yet, despite the hardships of the family, Lucrezia could not be issued a passport because she was a married woman and needed her husband’s authorization. This put her in a bind. It must have taken a lot of courage for her to go to the mayor, possibly already knowing she did not have her husband’s authorization and was likely to be turned down. The mayor responded to her request stating that a passport could not be granted, and she was advised to write to the Foreign Ministry (Ministero degli Affari Esteri) with a request to locate her husband and ask him to send money home.¹

Lucrezia’s story is only one of many that demonstrates some of the ways women and families in Basilicata were affected by emigration between 1880 and 1914. This story also touches upon many of the key topics that will be discussed in this dissertation: emigration, Basilicata, gender roles, changing attitudes and customs, and women left behind. During the

¹ Archivio di Stato di Potenza, Atti di Pubblica Sicurezza, Cat 6, #43.
time period covered in this dissertation, 1880-1914, a married woman in Italy depended on the financial support of her husband and his legal role as head of the household. When men emigrated, women were left on their own to bear the burden taking care of the home, raising the children, and managing family funds. In some instances, married women, with few legal rights, appealed to the state to oblige their husbands to fulfill their legal duties. This dissertation will address the implications of emigration on the women left behind, and the great amount of change women experienced during this absence.

Background

Migration:

Migration existed within Italy for centuries. Leslie Page Moch, a migration historian, was one of the first to argue that Europeans were never sedentary. This, of course, includes Italians as well. In the 18th and early 19th centuries in particular, migration in Italy was largely internal and seasonal. Yet by the late 19th century, emigration to places much farther became a feasible option. Steamboats made the transatlantic journey a lot faster and a lot cheaper than ever before. The growing network of railroads throughout Italy and the rest of Europe over the course of the 19th century also made for quicker and easier movement. These two realities alone allowed people who were looking for opportunities outside their village a chance to travel to places farther than they could have imagined. Many scholars view emigration outside of Italy as a continuation of local labor practices and as a broadening out of existing family strategies.

Between 1880 and 1914, a great wave of Italian emigration occurred, as millions of people from all over Italy left their homes in search for opportunity and a better life abroad. This

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emigration was exceptionally strong from Basilicata, a region affected so greatly that it was the only place in Italy where the population fell between 1881 and 1901, from 524,504 to 490,705.\textsuperscript{4} Of recorded emigrants over this period of time, approximately 80% were men, many of whom were married. To use a specific example, between 1903 and 1905, 83% of migrants from Italy were male.\textsuperscript{5} This means that as men emigrated to search for opportunity abroad, many married women and their children were left behind.

Although many Italians left for good, much of this emigration was also seasonal or temporary. Important for this study is the fact that many men left their wives and children at home with the intention of returning after making money abroad. Because of the relative ease of travel, many migrants even made multiple journeys back and forth between Italy and the Americas. These migrants were referred to as “birds of passage.”\textsuperscript{6} The high percentage of returns was a unique aspect of Italian migration, as some estimate the return rate to be around 50%.

Of course, not only men left. Women and children did emigrate, but at a much lower rate. It was extremely rare for women to emigrate on their own, without a male relative accompanying them or having sent for them. Women were more likely to emigrate with their husbands or family, or as widows with their grown children. Statistics from 1905 show that 80% of all emigrants left alone while 20% left with family, and the regions with the most family groups leaving to settle abroad were Basilicata, Campania, Puglia and Sicily.\textsuperscript{8} In contrast to the

\begin{footnotes}
\item[6] Italian migration differs from that of many others occurring in this same period, such as Jewish, Eastern European, or Irish, whose migration tended to be one way and permanent.
\item[8] \textit{Statistica della emigrazione italiana per l’estero negli anni 1904 e 1905}, xiii.
\end{footnotes}
North, regions of the South, including Basilicata, experienced more families leaving, which meant that migration was more likely to be permanent, rather than seasonal.

The Italian government began keeping official statistics on emigration only in 1876. In that year, 108,771 people left Italy (19,848 transoceanic and 88,923 to Europe), and in 1905, 726,331 emigrants left (447,083 across ocean and 279,248 to Europe).9 These numbers continued to increase until the First World War. Initially, the Italian government saw emigrants as criminals, adventurers, and people trying to avoid compulsory military service. However, as the years passed and the number of emigrants continued to grow, the state could no longer ignore the phenomenon, and took on a much greater legal and social role in emigration.10

**Italy after Unification:**

Not coincidentally, emigration rates increased in the years following unification and the creation of a new Italian state in 1861. The Italian peninsula had been divided since the fall of the Roman Empire in the 5th century, and in the subsequent centuries was split into various kingdoms. By the mid-19th century, nationalism became an influential force throughout Europe, and those who dreamed of a united Italian state worked towards that goal during the period known as the Risorgimento. Unification was mostly achieved in 1861, and completed with the inclusion of Veneto in 1866 and finally Rome in 1870.

The liberal ideology that fueled the Risorgimento was challenged when it came to the realities of governing a peninsula as heterogeneous as Italy. Piedmont, a kingdom in the North of Italy, headed the unification movement and thus led the way in the formation of the new state. Piedmontese law and the Piedmontese royal family, the Savoys, were imposed on the rest of

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9 Ibid., viii.
10 Choate, 2.
Italy. While plebiscites were held to officially unify the nation, relatively few Italians had political power after unification was complete, as only a small number of wealthy male property owners could vote. Jonathan Dunnage argues that the 2% male electorate at the time had little understanding of the people they had worked to unify.\(^{11}\) As further indication of fragmentation, less than 10% of the population could use standard Italian in 1861 and most spoke local or regional dialects.\(^{12}\) The new government was challenged with attempting to govern a socially, culturally, and linguistically diverse nation.

Economic policies were some of the main causes of difficulties after unification. Austerity measures and heavy taxation made the rule of the early government unpopular, especially in the South.\(^{13}\) High tariffs hurt the largely agricultural South, and generally favored the more industrialized North (mostly the North-West).\(^{14}\) For example, a grain tariff passed in 1887 benefitted Northern industry and greatly harmed agricultural production in the South.\(^{15}\) Areas of the South, many of which depended on agriculture, suffered greatly because of these economic policies, and many Southerners began to view the newly formed government in Rome with hostility, and as a far off entity that did not much care for their wellbeing.

One effect of these economic policies was the rise of brigandage in Basilicata after unification. The Italian government considered brigands criminals and outlaws who represented a direct threat to state authority. The peasantry saw them as heroes defending their local interests. Some liken the situation in the 1860s to a civil war between local brigands and Italian troops. Writers from the South, especially Basilicata, tend to look more favorably on the

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\(^{11}\) Dunnage, 5.
\(^{12}\) Ibid., 4.
\(^{13}\) Maria Sophia Quine, *Italy’s Social Revolution: Charity and Welfare from Liberalism to Fascism* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), 41.
\(^{15}\) Dunnage, 9.
brigands, seeing them as a product of their circumstances and acting out of necessity. The future Prime Minister Francesco Saverio Nitti, from Basilicata himself, wrote that brigandage was more a result of economic troubles than a political statement. Monica Maggio, a local historian of Basilicata, argues that brigandage needs to be understood within a certain context, and writes that “it was the logical consequence of a particular socio-political moment,” particularly shaped by the conditions in the region in the post-unification period. Yet many, both then and even today, view this widespread brigandage as proof of an uncivilized and backwards society.

These were just some of the circumstances which led many Italians, especially from the South, to emigrate. According to historian Mark Choate, emigration would be one of the most important challenges facing the new nation. This challenge would be especially strong in Basilicata, the focus of this study.

**Basilicata:**

Basilicata, historically known as Lucania, is a region in Southern Italy nestled between Campania to the West and Puglia to the East. Mountainous and isolated, earthquakes, landslides, and other natural disasters are common. Some have even labeled it “a south within

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16 Francesco Saverio Nitti, “L’emigrazione italiana e i suoi avversari,” in *Scritti Sulla Questione Meridionale* Vol 1. (Bari: Editori Laterza, 1958): 358. Nitti is a political figure who had a particular interest in the Southern Question, especially as it concerned Basilicata. Nitti, born in Melfi in 1868, became a member of Parliament in 1904, and Prime Minister in 1919. During his time as a member of Parliament, he dedicated much of his energy to apprising the government of conditions in the South and working to find ways to improve them.


19 Choate, 4.

20 The name was changed to Lucania briefly during the Fascist period, but changed back to Basilicata after World War II.
the south,” almost assigning it a double stigma of backwardness or isolation. Basilicata is one of the least explored regions of Italy, and there are few historical studies on the region, especially regarding emigration. Perhaps the region is best known as being the setting of Carlo Levi’s book *Christ Stopped at Eboli*, an autobiographical account of his time in *confino*, or internal exile as a prisoner during the Fascist period.

The population was never high in Basilicata, and emigration helped reduce an already low population. In 1905, there were 490,705 inhabitants, the Italian region with the lowest

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population at the time. Even today, it has no major airport, rail lines are sparse at best, and the population is scattered among small hilltop towns. Yet, this isolated region in the periphery had one of the largest rates of emigration. It was the only region with a population loss due to widespread emigration, amounting to 10% of its population between 1881 and 1911, which led to widespread fears that towns would depopulate and no one would be left to cultivate the fields. Some emigrants abandoned their families and their home towns and never returned. Yet, many emigrants came back bringing money, new ideas, and a new outlook on life. They returned to make their lives at home better or called their wives and children to join them abroad. I have chosen to focus on Basilicata because no major comprehensive study on emigration from the region has been published.

Women:

The married women who remained behind in Basilicata when their husbands emigrated are the protagonists of this dissertation. These rural, Southern Italian women were legally limited by their prescribed subordinate gender role. Married women had very few political and legal rights without their husband’s authorization. The Civil Law Code, passed in 1865, created uniform law throughout the newly unified Italian peninsula and upheld the strong tradition of patriarchy. Many aspects of the code impacted women and placed limitations on them. For example, civil marriage was introduced with the new law code, requiring all couples to register

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22 Statistica della emigrazione italiana per l’estero negli anni 1904 e 1905, x.
23 Choate, 96.
24 Studies have been published on other regions. Some examples include: Michele Colucci, L’Umbria e l’emigrazione: lavoro, territorio e politiche dal 1945 a oggi (Foligno: Editoriale Umbra, 2012; Sarah Rolfe Prodan, Friulians in Canada (Udine: Forum, 2014); Romain Rainero, I piemontesi in Provenza (F. Angeli, 2000).
their marriage with the state, not simply at the church. Once married, a couple was bound together until death. There was no option for legal divorce in Italy and would not be for nearly 100 years. This limitation became problematic for many women whose husbands emigrated and subsequently disappeared. Abandoned women could not be remarried or gain the rights of a widow until proof of their husband’s death was definitive. When married women were left on their own, they in practice became heads of households and took on many of the day to day responsibilities that men normally had. Yet, despite their increased practical role, women whose husbands had emigrated still had few legal rights and relied on their husbands to provide for the family, especially if they had children. Husbands, however, did not always comply with their duty, and some women who remained behind had to cope with abandonment.

**Historiography**

This dissertation will be informed by three major historiographical strands: migration studies, the Southern Question, and gender. I will offer a general review of the literature on each major topic here, and will go further in depth on specific topics within the relevant chapters.

Migration studies prior to the 1970s generally focused on either emigration (point of view of the sending country) or immigration (point of view of the receiving country). These studies on migration examined immigrants as workers and laborers and took on a largely economic perspective, focusing on financial issues as the primary factor in deciding to migrate.26 Scholarly

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25 David I. Kertzer, “Religion and Society, 1789-1892,” in *Italy in the Nineteenth Century, 1796-1900*, ed. John A. Davis (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 194. Church marriages were no longer seen as valid by the state. As a result, for a short period after the introduction of the Civil Law Code, statistics show a spike in illegitimacy.

attention focused on assimilation of immigrants and the melting pot theory, especially in studies conducted from the American point of view.27

This approach began to change in the 1970s and 1980s with the emergence of the so-called new social history and a shift away from a largely economic focus. Scholars began looking at new types of sources, such as social networks and personal letters, rather than histories built merely on statistics, economics, and demographics. In addition, newer studies recognized the lasting impact of home on immigrants, as well as effects of departure on the country of origin. Caroline Brettrell’s 1986 pioneering work on Portugal showed the social and demographic effects of emigration on a specific village.28 The study took the spotlight away from the migrants and brought attention to the impact emigration could have on the home country or town. In the Italian context, William A. Douglass published a similar study about the effects of emigration on a town of Agnone in the region of Molise. Using an anthropological approach, he demonstrated how emigration affected factors such as age at marriage and family structure in the town.29

In the past ten to fifteen years, there has been another key reconceptualization of the topic as a core element of transnational studies. Rather than separately looking at migration in terms of the place left behind and the destination, scholars have begun to bridge this gap and apply a transnational approach to migration studies. These works recognize that migration was not simply linear (point A to point B), and consider seasonal migrants, birds of passage, and the

ideas that transcend national boundaries. Differing in methodology from previous studies, this new approach considers culture, place of origin, and connections and continuities among emigrating peoples.

Transnational history is generally defined as the examination of history beyond the borders of the traditional nation state. It implies the circulation and interaction/exchange of people, ideas, items, money, and institutions. Many historians will argue that transnationalism is not a new approach, but a new set of questions applied to the same areas of study. Its usefulness lies in the fact that it helps us understand historical events in a new way, not just in terms of the nation-state, but in broader historical perspective. Transnationalism grew out of comparative studies and global history, but it is not comparative because it does not necessarily compare two places, and it is not global because it does not usually include that wide of a scope. Indicative of transnationalism’s growing popularity in the 1990s, the American Historical Review published a forum on transnationalism in 1991. The Journal of American History followed in September of 1992, with a discussion entitled “Toward the Internationalization of American History: A Roundtable,” The AHR has had subsequent discussions on transnationalism: a conversation “On Transnational History” from 2006 (the first ever Conversation) and a forum on Transnational Lives in the 20th century in 2013. All of these discussions gather some of the most prominent scholars to discuss how to apply the transnational approach to their research. Thus, using a transnational approach in migration studies has allowed scholars to ask new questions about movement and interaction.

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Scholars in many areas of Italian history have begun to apply a transnational approach to their work. The 150-year anniversary of the Risorgimento in 2011 inspired a number of important studies, including one by Maurizio Isabella, who places the Risorgimento in a transnational framework and shows how a number of outside forces and ideas influenced the nationalistic events in Italy. Historian Salvatore Lupo has applied the approach to his recent study of the mafia, tracking its development in both Sicily and America. The *Journal of Modern Italian Studies* has also recently published a number of articles using the lens as well, on topics such as Fascism and migration. In employing transnationalism, scholars have shown broader historical implications for seemingly “national” events, such as the Risorgimento, and have shown that global influences can affect local attitudes and actions, an approach I use in this dissertation.

It is impossible to study migration history without considering its transnational nature, and the most recent works on migration history in Italy employ this method. For example, Stefano Luconi applies a transnational approach to Italian migration using the subject of radical politics. He shows that “immigrants live in two societies—the native and the adoptive at the same time.” He also argues that transnationalism was not possible in all spheres due to the slow speed of communication and travel back and forth (as compared to today). Another scholar, Samuel Baily, employs transnationalism by examining family connections and differing experiences of Italian migrants from one family in Buenos Aires and New York. His book traces

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the family in both locations through the processes of departure, migration, arrival and adjustment, and finally to their assimilation into new societies.\textsuperscript{37} An important aspect to his book is his demonstration of family ties and connections back to the town in Italy, which persist long after emigration. Those who remain behind are not forgotten, despite the dispersal of family members throughout the world. Newer studies, such as Baily’s, show that migrants cannot be studied simply as immigrants or emigrants. Their actions, behaviors and thoughts are a product of not only their experience in a small Italian village, but as part of a larger network of ideas, information, and people who have traveled across the globe. In sum, my work uses a similar approach and seeks to show how emigration affected all, not just migrants.

Many other scholars focusing on Italian migration have used similar methods to examine political, social, economic and cultural connections across borders.\textsuperscript{38} It is this new turn in scholarship that makes a study such as mine possible. Emigrants, and, as I argue, the women who remained behind, must be viewed through a transnational lens, as well, because the people who took part in emigration were not closed off from the rest of the world. Even though many women were immobile, they were influenced by global connections. I argue that the women who remained behind also lived transnational lives.

Italian historians have been slow to integrate migration into their national history. Until the 1970s, emigration from Italy was still a reality for many, and the study of it was either combined with older migration narratives from the early twentieth century or generally ignored by historians because those people leaving Italy were part of an ongoing phenomenon. In the past ten to fifteen years, as the flux of immigrants to Italy has increased and Italians have begun to

\textsuperscript{37} See: Baily, \textit{Immigrants in the Land of Promise}.

reflect on their emigrant past, migration studies have become a flourishing field. Now, more scholarly focus is placed on emigration, its impact, and the experience of migrants, as well as the recognition that migration was not new and is an integral part of Italian history. A key group of scholars have led Italian migration studies, including Emilio Franzina, Piero Bevilacqua, Matteo Sanfilippo, Donna Gabaccia, Michele Collucci, Paola Corti, Mark Choate, Maddalena Tirabassi, and Andreina DeClemente.

The second major historical strand informing this dissertation is the debate about the Southern Question, the problematizing of why the South was considered backwards, inferior, and out of touch with a more modern and industrialized North. As industrial expansion in the North increased in the 1880s with seemingly little development from the South, the failures of national integration became more apparent and reinforced the idea of a Southern Question. The North became equated with modernity and progress, and the South was equated with backwardness. Scholars began to question why the North was able to prosper while the South was seemingly lagging. Politicians and travelers from the North characterized the South as a homogeneous, uncivilized entity, characterized by crime, brigandage and backwardness. Many believed that Liberal ideas would help improve to the South after unification, yet twenty years after Unification, Southerners had not yet been ‘made’ into Italians. Many in the North became interested in finding the root of this disparity, and these discussions led to the birth of the Southern Question.\textsuperscript{39}

Scholars have shown that the images of a backward South solidified during the mid-19\textsuperscript{th} century.\textsuperscript{40} These stereotypes were based on a model of modernity and nationhood put forth by

\textsuperscript{40} John Davis, \textit{Naples and Napoleon: Southern Italy and the European Revolution, 1780-1860} (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006); Marta Petruceanu, \textit{Come il Meridione Divenne una Questione} (Catanzaro: Rubbettino,
elites comparing Italy and the South to other Western European nations. The main criteria for judging southern backwardness were poverty, absence of a bourgeoisie, unstable politics, and old-fashioned family practices. These stereotypes and generalizations persisted and became even more pronounced after unification, when accepted by subsequent scholars as historical truth. Yet these studies did not take into account the social, economic, political, and historical differences among Southern regions.

Challenges to these notions began to grow among scholars in the late 1980s, especially those working around the journal *Meridiana*. Piero Bevilacqua, Carmine Donzelli, Salvatore Lupo and others all questioned the validity of the major analytical category “South.” The debate took on a greater sense of urgency in the mid-1990s, stemming from the rise in popularity of the *Lega Nord* political party in Italy which pushed for a northern separatist movement. The political situation led to a growing interest and forced urgency in the reexamination of the Southern Question, leading to a number of fruitful and groundbreaking works of scholarship.

One way historians have approached the Southern Question is by considering its origins and many have concluded the idea of a lagging South was present well before unification. Marta Petrusewicz has argued the emergence of the Southern Question can be traced to the failed revolution of 1848. Disillusioned political exiles saw little hope for change or modernization under the ruling Bourbon monarchy. These elites compared the South with the North, and their writings influenced the construction of a negative image of the South. Nelson Moe also

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43 Debate about the dividing line between north and south varies—some argue it is all of Italy south of Rome, others will argue it was the territory of the old Bourbon monarchy of the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies.
44 Petrusewicz, *Come il Meridione divenne una questione*. 

examines the origins of the stereotypes, showing how writings from Northern Italians as well as those of Southerners, shaped these images, which formed in the mid-19th century. Both Petrusewicz and Moe demonstrate that Southerners themselves helped construct the image of the South as backwards, and both scholars use more than simply economic analysis to argue their points.

Traditionally, economics had been used to measure Southern backwardness, especially in terms of industrial productivity. This was one of the first areas revisionists began to critique by showing diversity in the South. Another work by Petrusewicz, *Latifundium*, shows how the socio-economic systems of a Southern latifondia were a mixture of feudal and modern practices. They were not one or the other, but a blend of both. With this study, Petrusewicz gives us an alternative way to think of modernity and the South, not as something absolute and having a specific set of characteristics, but a reality that was forged by those living there. This work also forced many to rethink how the backwardness of the South was conceived, again showing that it is not a simple black or white issue.

In one of the first scholarly compilations dedicated to understanding and to challenging assumptions about the South, Jane Schneider’s edited volume contains articles from an array of scholars in multiple fields. This work is especially important as scholars attempt to deconstruct the image of the South by stressing it as a diverse area that created its own alternate modernity. In his essay in this volume and in much of his other work, John Davis has attempted to show that it is too simplistic to judge the South based on dichotomies and generalizations based on

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45 Moe, *View from Vesuvius*.
48 Meaning that modernity did not have to be defined by a set of criteria or model originating in Western Europe, but that a society could be “modern” through different means.
economic comparisons.\textsuperscript{49} In another of his recent studies, Davis attempts to reconfigure the view of the South by showing that it was not unchangeable or backwards. Rather, the process of modernization, which began under French occupation, occurred too rapidly and was too much for the South to adapt to, resulting in a destabilized society.\textsuperscript{50} Davis also argues that much of the notion of backwardness that has been attributed to the South is a result of attempts to incorporate the region into a united Italy, rather than a measurable idea of backwardness.\textsuperscript{51} In fact, if the image of backwardness stems from the idea that the South is unchangeable and stuck in a feudal past, Davis argues that “the most fundamental problems facing southern society were the consequences of change and not its absence.”\textsuperscript{52}

The work of Davis, Petrusewicz, Schneider, and others has attempted to show the South was not stuck in a feudalistic or backward society, but it had its own unique path that should not be judged by outside standards of modernity.\textsuperscript{53} Scholars of the Southern Question have been successful in dismantling many of the stereotypes about the South, arguing that it was a complex and diverse place, yet most have neglected to integrate emigration into their arguments. My argument stems from the work of these scholars, yet incorporates emigration to add a more nuanced understanding of the complexity of the South, particularly Basilicata. I contend it is impossible to discuss the Southern Question without considering emigration, since it so greatly affected the area from the time of unification and well into the 20th century.

Scholarship in women’s studies and gender studies constitutes the third historiographical strand addressed in this dissertation, especially as the two fields relate to Southern Italy. It is

\textsuperscript{50} Davis, \textit{Naples and Napoleon}.
\textsuperscript{51} Ibid., 7.
\textsuperscript{52} Ibid., 320.
\textsuperscript{53} Piero Bevilacqua, \textit{Breve Storia dell’Italia Meridionale: dall’Ottocento a Oggi} (Rome: Donzelli, 1993); John Dickie, \textit{Darkest Italy}. 
only within the past thirty years that the separate field of women’s studies has become part of mainstream historical studies, especially in Italy. Prior, studies of the family and examinations of women in the early modern period were much more prevalent. A major shift in scholarship only began in the 1970s, parallel to the major feminist movements of the late 1960s and early 1970s. Yet, even by the early 1990s, women’s history was still somewhat of a specialist field. According to one of the pioneering Italian historians of women, Giovanna Fiume, in the 1970s, “we were obviously struggling for the legitimacy to rewrite history, seizing the opportunity to leave the ghetto of separate, merely additional women’s history, at a time when we were still standing, mostly precariously, on the lowest rungs of the academic hierarchy.”

Women’s history in Italy was slow to develop, and many areas remain unexplored. A number of influential journals and magazines did a great deal to bring the field to the mainstream. Donna Woman Femme (DWF), is a feminist magazine founded in 1977 to promote the study of women in Italy. Memoria: A Journal of Women’s History, published between 1981 and 1991, was also one of the first journals dedicated to the growing field of women’s history. The journal was a distinguished publication that aimed to provide a gendered perspective and bring women’s history to the forefront of academic scholarship. The field further developed with the formation in 1989 of the Società Italiana delle Storiche (SIS-Italian Society of Women Historians). Its journal, Genesis: Rivista della Società Italiana delle Storiche, was founded in 2002 with the intent of promoting women’s history, not just in Italy, but transnationally. In 2014, the magazine published a special issue on female migrants entitled “Donne Migranti: Tra passato e presente,” which addressed women migrants in a global context, although no article addressed women who remained behind. These journals attracted some of the most prominent

feminist scholars and have done a great deal to bring legitimacy to the field of women’s history in Italy.

There were, of course, also many pioneers who made singular scholarly contributions to women’s history. Michela de Giorgio’s examination of women since unification was one of the first of its kind, and has become one of the most important works in the field.\(^{55}\) She argues that although relegated to a subordinate position, women were still able to carve out an identity for themselves and in the process influence culture and the modernization of Italian society.\(^ {56}\) For example, she traces the changing norms in marriage, showing how over time women gained more freedoms, though limited, in areas like choosing a husband.\(^ {57}\) Her study made women the subject of history, and her approach opened the door for other studies of its kind.

Many other scholars have done important work in bringing women to the forefront of Italian history. Perry Willson, an influential historian of Italian women, includes more of a political and economic perspective in her most recent works, compared to the social and cultural focus of De Giorgio. One point made clear by Willson’s work is that gaps in our knowledge about certain areas of Italian women’s history still exist, and, as I will argue, especially in terms of emigration.\(^ {58}\) Another important scholar, Casimira Grandi, similarly argues that women in Italian history are often depicted as “subaltern, and that women’s history did not exist because they were not seen as individuals but the complement of males.”\(^ {59}\) Their role has traditionally been in the home, bearing children and caring for family members, and their work, which never

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\(^{56}\) Ibid, x-xi.

\(^{57}\) Ibid, 273-284.


ends, has been little valued. An exception is the textile industry, where women participated in the domestic economy.

60 An exception is the textile industry, where women participated in the domestic economy.
or even murder.\textsuperscript{65} One aspect missing from Seymour’s work is emigration; he does not consider emigration or abandonment as sparks for debate on the divorce law. This dissertation will consider whether or not emigration influenced lawmakers and how laws pertaining to marriage and family might have been shaped by emigration.

Overall, since the beginning of the 1970s, there has been much progress in Italian women’s history, yet there are still gaps. Many scholars who study women’s history are female themselves, and men are less likely to take up the study of women or gender. More recent work has focused on gender, and scholars have expanded the field with new and exciting examinations of the relationships between men and women at various points in Italian history. Many gaps still exist in studies on women and migration, which this dissertation addresses in examining the women who remained behind.

Thus, my work falls at the intersection of these three major historiographical fields. Migration studies, once considered a niche in Italian history, has become part of the mainstream. Women were not included in this narrative until recently, and are now seen as an integral part of migration, even if they never left home. There are also many new and interesting studies on the South that continue to critique and deconstruct the negative perceptions of the region. This dissertation will employ trends from each of these three major fields in order to show how emigration from Basilicata impacted the women living there.

\textbf{Sources and Methodology}

Because the focus of this dissertation is on rural, illiterate, married women whose husbands had emigrated, it is difficult and rare to find material that comes directly from them. Thus, research for this dissertation has been challenging. Most of the emigrants did not leave

\textsuperscript{65} Ibid, 70-80.
behind written sources. Therefore, I have used various kinds of documents to fill in the pieces of the puzzle. Women may seem as if they were silenced, but a number of key sources demonstrate women did have a voice.

My main archival sources come from the Archivio di Stato in Potenza, the Archivio di Stato in Matera, and the Archivio Centrale dello Stato in Rome. Requests women sent through their local mayors’ offices were some of the most valuable sources I have discovered. These requests were of two kinds: passport applications and petitions to find relatives abroad. Both required that women go to the mayor and send a petition to the prefect. These sources, although not written by the women themselves, do contain their voices. With the assistance of the mayor, we hear their desires, emotions, fears, and requests, and some give us a glimpse into the circumstances in which women were living. In other words, these various petitions give women a voice and offer a unique glance into their world, even if in some cases it is distorted by the mayor’s words.

Another major archival source used in this dissertation are court cases from the Corte d’Assise (Court of Assizes or High Court). While the cases themselves are interesting in their own right, many involving women and the crimes they committed while their husbands were away, including infanticide, I was more interested in the witness accounts provided with each case. These testimonies, many given by women, give us a sense of what life was like in towns where men had emigrated and women were left behind. They give us a glimpse into how the community functioned and how close neighbors were, and provide information about the networks of gossip and commentary in the town. Neighbors knew who had emigrated and what everyone else was up to. They show us what was important to the local people: family, children,
honor, economy, and community. Although these archival sources are somewhat limited, I extract the information I can to gauge women’s loyalties, beliefs, and perceptions.

I have also used a number of other primary sources, including government bulletins (ex. *Bollettino dell’Emigrazione*), statistics, and national and local newspapers, as well as local correspondence, newspapers, and reports specific to Basilicata. Additional sources give us insight into emigration and the emigrant experience, such as passport applications, ship manifests, data and government statistics. We can see how many people left, where they were from, where they were going, and when they left. These sources provide concrete and reliable information about emigration. Yet, these are top down sources, and do not shed light on the emigrants’ feelings or intentions. They offer insight into trends and practices, but do not tell personal stories.

Overall, these sources have helped fill in the gaps about what life was like for the women who remained behind. Though some of my sources are limited, I have used them to try to piece together what women were saying, doing, and thinking. Families and women experienced emigration differently, and not all went through similar situations and circumstance; emigration was complex and I use the sources to make hypotheses on what may have occurred. This dissertation focuses mainly on the relationship between women left behind and the state. Therefore, I consult mostly civil and state records. I discuss the church on a macro level and its overall views on emigration in Chapter 4, but I have not consulted ecclesiastical sources on a local level.

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66 My use of newspapers from Basilicata focuses on a small group of local newspapers. The reading public overall in Italy was mostly urban, which explains why until the late 19th century, the region was not a center for journalism or newspapers. Some of the first newspapers that arose in the region were political, mainly in the years after unification. At the turn of the century, as literacy rates were slowly rising in the region, journalism began to diversify and papers were founded which reflected the various interests and political opinions of the population. See: John Davis, “Media, Markets and Modernity: The Italian Case, 1870-1915,” in *The Printed Media in Fin-de-Siecle Italy: Publishers, Writers and Readers*, eds. Ann Hallamore Caesar, Gabriella Romani and Jennifer Burns, (London: Legenda, 2001): 16.
This dissertation will use a transnational approach to examine the sources discussed above. There has been much debate in academic journals and forums about the transnational approach, including issues such as what exactly it entails, its effectiveness, and how to apply it to historical inquiry. Nancy Green, in thinking about French History, has looked at transnational history as opposed to microhistory and asks if it is possible to do an in-depth history of a specific location without considering external factors.\textsuperscript{67} Chris Bayly contends the category is not very useful in studying areas before 1914, when the world was still characterized by empires, not nations.\textsuperscript{68} Historian Wendy Kozol adds, “immigration histories, for instance, examine how circular migration, kin networks, and communication technologies reconfigure the concept of the border as a stable marker of national identity. Such considerations in turn have opened up historical inquiries into the complex and often conflicted identifications that diasporic communities have with ideals of “citizenship” and of “home.””\textsuperscript{69} Sven Beckert writes that transnational history can be political, cultural, or intellectual. As he writes, “it is one of the strengths of transnational history to embrace this methodological diversity.”\textsuperscript{70} Each of these scholars adds something to the debate and views transnationalism in a unique way, and this dissertation employs a number of their ideas.

Migration history is inherently transnational, as the people involved in emigration live in two worlds. I argue that Italians are “more transnational” than other groups who emigrated during the same period. Migration was generally linear with small percentages of return migration, but this unique aspect of Italian migration makes those who remained behind even more present in a transnational atmosphere. They were influenced by ideas and people from

\textsuperscript{67} Nancy Green, “French History and the Transnational Turn,” \textit{French Historical Studies} 37, 4 (Fall 2014): 551-564.
\textsuperscript{68} “AHR Conversation: On Transnational History, \textit{American Historical Review} (Dec 2006), 1442.
\textsuperscript{69} Ibid., 1445.
\textsuperscript{70} Ibid., 1454.
abroad, even if seemingly isolated in a small village. Despite remaining in one place, women were affected by people and ideas from abroad, had increased access to money, and lived in a society where people had travelled all over the world. I view these women not as isolated and distant southerners, but as women in an ever increasing transnational society.

I will also use transnationalism to think about modernity and the Southern Question. As Isabel Hofmeyr contends, transnational histories “have certainly complicated understandings of modernity by radically extending our sense of the range of people and the array of sites involved.” I approach this study by examining how aspects of modernity extended into areas largely considered “backwards.” By applying a transnational approach to rural areas, we can see the connections that existed beyond borders, and how modern elements were introduced to a largely traditional society. This approach also challenges the North/South dichotomy that is ever present in Italian history. Applying transnationalism to migration studies allows us to consider the impact of migration both at home and abroad, and examine both migrants and those who remained behind.

Yet, in addition to a transnational focus, I also employ a national focus, and argue that emigration cannot be disconnected from Italian history. Many aspects of emigration deal directly with the nation, nation building, the economy, laws, civics, and government agencies. So while there are benefits of taking the borders of the nation state out of migration studies and simply using a transnational focus, we cannot ignore the crucial role of the Italian state in this account.

Another important theoretical framework for this dissertation is modernity and backwardness. Historians have much debated what exactly “modernity” means. An AHR Forum dedicated to the discussion included nine takes on modernity, each historian bringing a different

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71 Ibid., 1456.
perspective to how it is defined.\textsuperscript{72} I understand modernity as a set of Western European ideals stemming from the Enlightenment, which those nations proclaimed as normative, thus rendering others weaker and inferior in comparison—a Eurocentric view of the world that marginalized others. As Dipesh Chakrabarty notes, these labels imply judgements; “if someone is ‘modern,’ then he or she is so with regard to somebody who is not. That ‘somebody’ may come to be seen as ‘backward’ or ‘premodern’ or non-modern or waiting to be made ‘modern’ consigned, as I put it in \textit{Provincializing Europe}, to the ‘waiting room of history.’”\textsuperscript{73} Although the Italian South is part of Europe, it is also part of the periphery. One is reminded of Larry Wolff, who wrote not of the geographical, but of the ideological split between Eastern and Western Europe.\textsuperscript{74} In effect, the area was defined in the same sense as Edward Said defined \textit{Orientalism}- by contrast. Scholars like Nelson Moe have shown the idea of a backwards Italian south was created in contrast to a more industrialized north.\textsuperscript{75} Chakrabarty’s work critiques the categories and concepts of modernity invented by the West during the Enlightenment. This dissertation also challenges the concept of modernity, arguing our definition must extend to include people and societies not normally considered modern.

One final methodological note on periodization—this dissertation covers the time frame between 1880 and 1914, the period of a great wave of Italian emigration. I use 1880 as a starting point based on available data, and growth of emigration in the twenty years after unification. I use the start of World War I as an end date, as transatlantic migration was disrupted, although it did not completely cease, because of the war (even though Italy would not join until 1915). I

\textsuperscript{72} “AHR Roundtable: Historians and the Question of Modernity,” \textit{American Historical Review}, 116, 3 (June 2011).
\textsuperscript{75} Nelson Moe, \textit{View from Vesuvius}.
consider it an appropriate end point because in the post-World War I period, the rise of Fascism in Italy combined with severe restrictions on immigration by the government in the United States greatly impacted and slowed migration. Large scale Italian emigration did pick up again until after World War II, but that phenomenon is out of the scope of my sources and the arguments of this project.

**Chapter Outline**

I will lay out my argument over the next seven chapters of this dissertation. The subsequent chapters will discuss life in Basilicata, the process of emigration, the role of women in the process, the changes and challenges they experienced as wives who remained behind, and will end with a discussion of what occurred when men returned.

Chapter 2 provides an overview of life and society in Basilicata. The region, which has not been the subject of much historical inquiry, was one of the hardest hit by emigration. This chapter examines what life was like in the region, and explains some of the reasons why many saw it as backwards and uncivilized. It addresses the historiography of the Southern Question, and in line with studies dismantling old stereotypes, I argue that the troubles in Basilicata were largely environmental, rather than characteristics of the inhabitants. Large scale emigration from the region shows people were not passive, but attempted to change their lives and improve their conditions. This attitude was also apparent when the people rejoiced over Prime Minister Giuseppe Zanardelli’s visit to the region in 1902, as it showed government interest in improving the conditions there. Stereotypes of backwardness and passivity were simply not true, and this chapter in particular will help correct many of the assumptions of the Southern Question.
Chapter 3 addresses the emigration process and the factors that went into making the decision to emigrate. The majority of those who emigrated were poor agricultural workers or day laborers. The chapter examines their background, the requirements needed to emigrate in terms of passports and other documents, and who could not emigrate. The chapter then looks at emigration in the context of the Italian Liberal period. The Italian government upheld the freedom of its citizens to emigrate, although it did not view emigrants favorably early on. As migration increased, it slowly changed its response and warmed up to emigration, considering it as a way to relieve social and economic tensions in many regions. Major legislation regarding emigration was passed in 1888 and 1901, each law giving the government a more extensive role in the emigration process and offering more protections for its citizens.

The fourth chapter focuses on Italian women and provides a general overview of the position of women in Italy during this period. After reviewing the scholarship on Italian women and migration, I examine the typical life cycle for a woman in Basilicata. I begin by discussing childhood and youth, and then adulthood, which included marriage, widowhood, or even celibate life. I end the section with a discussion motherhood, one of the most important roles for women. In examining each part of the life cycle of women, I include how emigration may have altered or impacted their traditional role. This chapter will also briefly discuss the role of the Catholic Church and how it offered support to women who had remained behind. A major aim of this chapter is to demonstrate the restricted legal role of women in this Liberal Period, and to lay the groundwork for the rest of the dissertation, which argues that while on their own they acted on many levels despite these limitations.

I get into the heart of my argument in Chapters 5 and 6, where I discuss specific circumstances about the women who remained behind and the various changes the experienced
as a result. Chapter 5 looks at civic and economic responsibilities that women took on. They had a closer relationship to the state than ever before, interacting with the mayor, petitioning the government for assistance, requesting passports, and searching for their husbands abroad. The individual stories highlighted in this chapter show that despite their legal limitations, women took on a greater civic and everyday economic role in the absence of their husbands. They knew their rights and what was due to them by their husbands, and petitioned the state to uphold these marital responsibilities. Migration allowed women to accept remittances, handle money, become consumers, and manage their family’s income.

Chapter 6 looks at changes in community and society for women, as well as shifts in family and gender roles. As a result of emigration, women were motivated to learn to read and write, took on roles as de facto heads of households, and relied on extended family and the community for assistance. Many also suffered with their husbands gone, raising children on their own with little or no support from abroad. As I will show, women desperately petitioned the state, and through an examination of the language used in these petitions, I consider the tactics used by the women and the involvement of the mayor. I also look at the emotions felt by many of these women who remained behind, and how their legal circumstances may or may not have changed their attitudes and mindsets about family, responsibility, and gender roles. This chapter also addresses how motherhood and childbearing were altered as a result of emigration, and how women took on the new position of both parents. Not only focusing on how life changed, this chapter also considers aspects of society that persisted, including the strong honor culture that characterized the Italian South. This chapter argues that while changes occurred, many traditional aspects of life remained, and society became a mixture of tradition and modernity.
The penultimate chapter, Chapter 7, discusses the circumstances that occurred when men returned, or did not. It begins by giving an overall assessment of emigration from Basilicata, including a discussion of some of the major economic and demographic effects, by the end of the period covered in this dissertation and by the start of the First World War in 1914 (in Italy 1915). I address the growing fear among many in Basilicata about too much emigration and depopulating towns. When husbands returned, whether it had been after one or multiple voyages abroad, they were no doubt changed, as they had exposure to diverse ideas and cultures from abroad, and brought those new mindsets home to their wives. Some men returned home to bring their wives and families abroad for good. Thus, the chapter also discusses emigration for women, whether it occurred accompanies by their husbands or they were called from abroad and had to travel alone. I then discuss the reality of abandonment for those women whose husbands never returned. Because of the limited autonomy of married women, these abandoned wives had few legal options without their husbands present. Out of desperation, some of them turned to illegal emigration. Women emigrating on their own, though illegally, is the ultimate sign of their agency and taking control of their lives and circumstances. Overall, the chapter demonstrates the complexity of how the women who remained behind experienced emigration, and that the changes that experienced with emigration continued after migrants returned.

Chapter 8 is the concluding chapter and ties up the various pieces of the dissertation and sums up the major arguments. In wrapping up, I evaluate the overall role of the Italian state in emigration, especially in comparison to other contemporary emigrating groups. I also discuss the implications of a study such as this on further studies of emigration, Basilicata, women, and the Southern Question. I end the chapter by proposing areas for future research which would expand upon the conclusions made in this dissertation.
Overall Arguments

The major argument of this dissertation is that by looking at the role of women who remained behind, the changes they experienced, and new roles they took on, we can dismantle stereotypes of Southern Italian women from Basilicata as passive, uncivilized, backwards. Women were modern, living in a transnational society, and not disconnected or isolated from the world despite living in a small, rural, Southern Italian village. Through their interactions with state institutions, they forged a new role as active citizens. Women were not hidden away in the private sphere; the state had a unique relationship to emigration and to the women who remained behind. Whether receiving remittances or completely abandoned, emigration challenged women to become more independent, stand up for themselves, and claim their due in the eyes of the state.

Although emigration required people leaving Italy, it ironically also helped the process of making people from all regions of the peninsula Italian. Women who remained behind became integrated citizens in a newly unified Italy. Even though they were legally dependent on and subordinate to men, emigration modified these legal circumstances. When their husbands were not physically present, the state replaced the men in caring for women and children. Thus, I use emigration as a lens to study gender, the role of women, and a major time of change.

Another major argument of this dissertation is that emigration was a modernizing force. While modernity is a cultural construct, a term with layers and no one set of criteria, emigration did bring about new ideas, attitudes, and mindsets, not to mention economic and social changes. It changed women’s lives at homes, family patterns, economic activity, interaction with government agencies, and many other aspects of how they lived their lives. Women were at the
forefront of the changes experienced as a result of emigration. Emigration changed all involved, not just those who left, but wives, mothers, children, and even the community.

This dissertation also argues that emigration should continue to be integrated into and considered a major part of Italian history, and those connections should be explored further. Emigration was a phenomenon with deep implications, and thinking of it in this way will help reframe many social, political, economic, and legal issues in a new way. Children, family, marriage, economics, and nation building, all integral parts of Italian history in this Liberal Period, were highly affected by emigration. Migration was a process that affected both ends. I also argue that Basilicata should be looked at further, not just in terms of unique aspects of emigration from the region, but because of many other important contributions to Italian history.

Overall, this dissertation aims to integrate emigration to the national processes of the Liberal period and examine how it affected the lives of women in Basilicata. Although many were leaving, emigration led to great changes at home, especially regarding society and gender roles in Basilicata. I mean to show the deep implications of emigration in Basilicata, and use the phenomenon in order to shed light on and explain events that were happening to the women in the region. The phenomenon of emigration had a profound effect on society at large and shaped Italian cultural formation in ways that continue to fascinate.
Chapter 2: Before Leaving: Life in Italy and Basilicata after Unification and During the Period of Major Emigration

“qui non si può vivere”¹
“here, one cannot live”

The Unification of Italy in 1861 led to the creation of a single Italian state, yet also exposed many regional divisions, especially between North and South. The process of building a new nation from a number of fragmented and culturally diverse regions proved difficult for the new government. Massimo D’Azeglio is often quoted as saying in the years after Unification, “We have made Italy, now we must make Italians.” Whether or not he actually stated this is not clear, but the idea behind his quote holds true. Local loyalties, historical divisions, and in some areas, resistance to government rule, were early challenges for the new Italian government. Ironically, during the period of “making Italy,” millions emigrated.

This chapter examines Basilicata between 1880 and 1914, and offers a glimpse into why the region had the largest rate of emigration per population. It begins with an overview of the history of Basilicata and the development of the Southern Question. Since the years leading up to Unification, writers, thinkers, politicians and others viewed the South, especially Basilicata, as backwards and uncivilized, as opposed to a more modern and industrialized North. These stereotypes began to take shape in the mid-19th century and visitors to the region, social scientists, historians, and even Southerners themselves perpetuated them. Recently scholars have been working to dismantle these stereotypes, move away from labels like backward or modern, and portray a more sympathetic and nuanced view of the South. This chapter will address that historiography as it specifically relates to Basilicata and attempt to further piece apart inaccurate

and outdated stereotypes of the South. I will then use a number of primary and secondary sources to depict life in Basilicata in the years leading up to and during mass emigration. Building on primary sources including health reports, government statistics and accounts of visitors, this chapter will give an overview of the socio-economic realities of the region. I will then discuss Prime Minister Giuseppe Zanardelli’s visit to the region in 1902, and use the reaction of the Lucanians (inhabitants of Lucania or Basilicata) as a way to rethink stereotypes of passivity and isolation. While the eventual special law for Basilicata (passed in 1904) may not have done much to improve life in the region, Zanardelli’s visit and the events surrounding it offers further proof of the inaccuracy of Southern stereotypes.

In giving a background on Basilicata, this chapter aims to shift the focus of the Southern Question from the people to the land, and situate Basilicata as a disadvantaged and unlucky region. On the surface, based on the views of outsiders, Basilicata fits into the negative images of the South. Yet, as this and the subsequent chapter will show, upon closer look, the people were not backwards, passive, and uncivilized; uncontrollable circumstances were the cause of their misery. The primary sources used in this chapter, many of which come from those living in the region, show a people who were patriotic and identified as Italians, yet they were unhappy with the conditions of their region and wanted change. The fact that thousands of people decided to emigrate is proof enough that the people of Basilicata were looking for ways to improve their lives.

The stereotypes of an uncivilized and backwards South also imply it was not modern. For many intellectuals at the time and even scholars today, modernity is associated with Enlightened ideas, democracy, capitalism, and industrial societies. This chapter, and this dissertation as a whole, will use emigration to argue that modernity is not a simple black and
white concept. It is even erroneous to use the terms backwards or modern as absolute, as modernity is a construct that has many layers and facets. Emigration, among its many effects, introduced new ideas, led to increased circulation of money and consumerism, gave people incentive to learn to read and write, and brought them into a national community by forcing them to take advantage of state bureaucracy. In other words, emigration brought typical aspects of modernity to places largely considered backwards, and it created a population of transnational people in the hills of many of the small towns of Basilicata. While the Lucanians may have been living in poverty by outside standards, they had formed their own sense of modernity. Emigration, thus, was a factor that led to change in the region and its impacts help disprove inaccurate stereotypes about the South.

Basilicata: “una provincia sconosciuta”

Located on the arch in the boot of Italy, Basilicata is one of the least known regions of Italy (even today), and information about of the region is often tainted by stereotypes related to the Southern Question. The southern part of the Apennines falls in Basilicata, making much of the land mountainous and hilly, but also creating a landscape of picturesque and characteristic hilltop towns. In 1881, Basilicata was the least populated region of Italy, with 524,504 inhabitants. By 1894, the population increased to only 545,021. The population was also spread throughout the region and not concentrated in one main area, with many villages having only a few thousand inhabitants. In the province of Potenza, there were forty nine inhabitants for every square kilometer (compared to 61 in Cosenza, 73 in Catanzaro, and 95 in Reggio.

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2 Cited in: Francesco Campolongo, La Delinquenza in Basilicata (Roma: Unione Cooperativa Editrice, 1904), 16; According to Direzione Generale della Statistica, the region with the next lowest population in the same year was Umbria with 602,634. The region with the highest population was Lombardia with 4,007,561. (Source: Archivio Crispi-Roma, Fasc 749-Emigrazione).
Calabria), showing the sparse population of Basilicata.³ There is no major city in the region, the closest being Naples (in the Campania region) to the west and Bari (in the Puglia region) to the east. Potenza, the capital of the region, never had a large population, with only 20,343 inhabitants in 1881, which actually fell to 16,163 by 1901.⁴ Potenza was a small and isolated capital city, and at the turn of the century, the towns of Matera, Avigliano and Rionero in Vulture had larger populations.⁵

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⁴ Cited in Pietro Lacava, “Sulle Condizione economico-sociali della Basilicata,” *Nuova Antologia* (Marzo-Aprile 1907), 111. The population of the region as a whole also fell in this period.
Many of the towns were established and are located on the tops of mountains or steep hills. While picturesque, some could only be accessed on winding dirt roads, making communication and the exchange of ideas difficult. Basilicata was not a stop on the traditional Grand Tour, made by wealthy Northern Europeans as both an educational experience and for pleasure, and most travelers or outsiders did not enter the region, mainly because of difficulty travelling through the mountainous landscape. Outsiders who did travel to the region in the 18\textsuperscript{th} and 19\textsuperscript{th} centuries were mostly anthropologists, or those interested in studying local people and customs.\textsuperscript{6}

Despite much unfamiliarity about the region, even today, Basilicata has a rich history. Greek colonies, part of Magna Graecia, were established by the 7\textsuperscript{th} century BCE along the southern coast of the Gulf of Taranto, off the Ionian Sea, most notably at Metapontum (Metaponto). Artefacts from the region, especially Greek pottery, show the ancient Lucanians were part of an intricate network of trade and communication within the Mediterranean. When the Romans expanded and gained control of the region by the 3\textsuperscript{rd} century BCE, they called it Lucania and established various colonies, most notably Potentia (Potenza), Grumentum (Grumento), and Venusia (Venosa—birthplace of the famous Roman poet Horace). The Romans also built the well-known Appian Way through the region to Brindisi in the southern tip of Puglia. By the fall of Rome in the 5\textsuperscript{th} century CE, the area, like much of the Empire, was largely Christianized. Throughout the Middle Ages, Basilicata was the least populated area of Italy.\textsuperscript{7} During this Medieval period, it was pervaded by Byzantine culture until the invasion of the Normans in the 11\textsuperscript{th} century, when feudalism was introduced to the region. Little is known about


the region in the early modern period. In the 18th century, it became part of the Kingdom of Naples, ruled by the Bourbon monarchy. In 1799, a number of towns in the area of Potenza were the center of resistance to the Bourbon monarchy, as people in various villages fought for republicanism and against the forces of Cardinal Ruffo and the Sanfedisti. While they eventually were defeated, local folklore still recognizes their heroic resistance. In 1806, the Kingdom of Naples fell to Napoleonic forces, which ruled until 1815, when the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies was established. After the Risorgimento and the push for Italian unification, Basilicata joined the Kingdom of Italy on August 18, 1860, but the transition was not initially smooth. Brigandage (banditry) became widespread in the years following unification, 1861-1868. Brigands from the region, including the (in)famous Carmine Crocco, took action against what they felt were injustices of the nobility, as well as the new state, against the poor peasantry, destroying property, wreaking havoc, and causing what many label as a civil war in the South after Unification. Many believed that the local church supported brigands, and Lucanians themselves seemed sympathetic to the cause. In the post-Unification years, the state also sold church land in Basilicata, which were often communal lands shared by many. The new owners were usually wealthy aristocrats, often absent, and closing off their lands to communal use. So with the exchange of ownership came a building resentment for the church, the aristocracy, and the new state.

One of the most popular cultural portrayals of the region is in the well-known novel by Carlo Levi, *Christ Stopped at Eboli*. Written in the mid-1930s and published after World War II, 

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8 Carmine Crocco (1830-1905) was born in Rionero in Vulture (Basilicata) and became one of the most well-known brigands, known for his guerilla-like tactics. While many of his activities disturbed law and order and caused trouble for the newly unified Italian state, locally he is considered a folk hero.
it is not meant as a historical account of the region, but as a memoir of his time as a political prisoner during the Fascist period, when the region was used as a place of confinement (confino) for those considered threats or enemies of the Fascist state. His stay in the small town of Gagliano (Aliano) and his observations of the people and customs paint a stark picture of life in a place that he described as “denied by history and by the State.”¹¹ He portrays the region as cut off from the state, but he also stresses that the state did not understand the people inhabiting the region. Being from Turin, Levi was tainted with many of the aforementioned stereotypes of the South and the people living there. While at times he was sympathetic, the negative depiction of the region as backwards tends to dominate, thus building on preexisting stereotypes and perpetuating them to a larger audience.

**Historiography**

As outlined in the Introduction, Basilicata plays a key role in the Southern Question debate. The negative image of the Italian South was built up over the course of the 19th century and became especially apparent after Unification. Recent scholarship has done a great deal in trying to dismantle these stereotypes and add complexity to the North/South divide. While in the introduction I gave a general overview of the historiography of the Southern Question, this section will discuss the historiography as it specifically relates to Basilicata.

Politicians and travelers from the North and South often characterized Basilicata and the Italian South as a homogeneous, uncivilized entity, characterized by crime, brigandage and backwardness (though Basilicata is a region without a mafia). Many Italian elites believed that upon Unification, liberalism and capitalism would help “civilize” and “modernize” the South. When this did not seemingly happen, scholars, intellectuals and elites blamed the South and

labeled it as backwards. The criteria for these studies based “civility” on economic success and industrial capitalism. Yet these critiques did not take into account the social, economic, political, and historical variations that existed within the Southern regions. Furthermore, these stereotypes are based on a model of modernity and nationhood put forth by those comparing Italy to other Western European nations.

Social scientists studying Basilicata in the 20th century fed into stereotypes of the South. This “old scholarship” is best exemplified by the work of Edward Banfield, a political scientist, who wrote about a two-year period between 1954 and 1955 during which he stayed in an unidentified town, which he called Montegrano. He explained life in the town and the behavior of the people with a theory he called “amoral familism.” He postulated that poverty and backwardness persisted because people were so devoted to the good of their nuclear family that there existed the “inability of the villagers to act together for their common good.” This amoral familism, according to Banfield, impeded their economic and other progress. Furthermore, he believed he had identified their worldview; “the southern Italian is a despairing fatalist. He believes that the situation is hopeless and that the only sensible course is to accept patiently and resignedly the catastrophes that are in store.” (He must have been unaware of the large scale emigration occurring from the town, or chose to ignore it because it did not fit his theory.) Despite his bias, Banfield’s account became one of the most popular scholarly portrayals of Basilicata.

Contributing to the same views of the region, anthropologist John Davis spent time in the town of Pisticci in the 1960s. Many of his observations were informed by stereotypes, like those of Banfield, of backward people who did not practice modern social customs. He noted that

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13 Ibid., 155.
14 Ibid., 36.
women had little independence until they were married. Only afterwards could they interact with other women.\textsuperscript{15} Like Banfield, Davis stressed the importance of kin and family, as well as the crucial role of honor in society, especially as it concerned women. He also noted that there was little emigration from Pisticci. Overall, Davis views the town as a grim and gloomy place, isolated, with customs that persisted from centuries past.

In another anthropological study of the region, Ann Cornelisen visited Basilicata in the 1970s and is one of the first scholars to consider gender in her observations. She lived among the women of the region, conversed with them, and got to know them, giving readers insight into their lives, problems, and thoughts. In her account, most of the men emigrated to the North or other European countries for better paid work, while the women were left to maintain the household. Cornelisen had a more sympathetic approach than Banfield and Davis, yet still described Basilicata as a bleak region;

“bare and mountainous, with villages, some very large, perched precariously on high slopes or even cloudy little pinnacles, where, generations ago, it was decided they could best defend themselves from the invaders and malaria of the valleys below…machinery is of little use and would only turn up more rocks than clay. Long since the topsoil has been washed out to sea by torrential rains, and that people still persist says much for the secret powers of optimism and more for the determination to live.”\textsuperscript{16}

Cornelisen showed that women of Basilicata lived difficult lives, and for many there was little hope of improvement or change. Yet, emigration, even in the 1970s, was still a way to improve their lives. Cornelisen wrote about one woman who finally decided to move to the North in search of work, who later told her “only the fools stay down there!”\textsuperscript{17} While Cornelisen’s book gives an in-depth look at the harsh realities of life in the region, its overall tone is bleak and depressing. She does give agency to women of the region as no scholar had

\textsuperscript{17} Ibid., 77.
done prior, yet her view of them is informed by preexisting stereotypes. One of her main points was that those who improved their lives did so by leaving the region. While her work is dated, my aim for this dissertation is similar to that of Cornelison in her study— to give agency to women who are otherwise silenced.

Banfield, Davis, and Cornelisen are three of the most well-known examples of scholars applying condescending stereotypes in their examination of Basilicata. Yet, their works are valuable as they were some of the first anthropologists to study the region in-depth. For historians, works from the past twenty years have approached the Southern Question from a new perspective. Revisionist scholars began to challenge older conclusions by looking at more than just the socio-economic conditions of the South to explain its position. New studies challenge our understanding of modernity and aim to show the South as complex.

Much scholarly work has been done on breaking stereotypes and shifting the image of backwardness of the South. Yet, Basilicata is still a region that is relatively ignored in historical studies on the South, and even Italy as a whole. In recent years, few historical works on the region have been published, especially in the Liberal Period. There have been a number of recent publications on the region during the Fascist period, but overall Basilicata still relatively ignored by historians.18 Most recently, the journal *Forum Italicum* published a special issue in August 2016 entitled “Lucania Within Us: Carlo Levi e Rocco Scotellaro,” yet the focus is more on the aforementioned authors than on the region itself.19

As will be discussed in the next chapter, many gaps in the historiography relating to migration from Basilicata still exist. Newer works incorporate many of the new trends discussed

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above, such as including women, transnational connections, and recognizing the impact on home, but still lack specific examinations of Basilicata. This lack is exemplified in a new volume edited by Michele Colucci and Michele Nani on labor migration, published in 2015. It is one of the most recent publications on Italian emigration, yet does not include any example from the Italian South, let alone Basilicata.

This dissertation then fills a major dearth in scholarship on Basilicata in the Liberal Period. I also add to the work of scholars who have attempted to argue that the South was a complex and modern place, but who have neglected to integrate emigration into their arguments. I argue that emigration was a central aspect of the Southern Question and the topic can be used to disprove stereotypes and show the complexity of society. This case study about emigration from Basilicata will do just that, and will argue that Basilicata was a unique region that should not simply be grouped with the rest of the category “Italian South.”

**Life in Basilicata**

In order to understand the reasons for the wide scale emigration from Basilicata, it is crucial to examine what life was like for those living in the region at the turn of the century. Yet, the task is difficult because there are few secondary sources, and so I must rely on the existing primary sources, statistical data, and the writings of those who left first-hand accounts. The rest of this chapter will rely on the observations of a number of outsiders and visitors to the region, both from Italy and elsewhere. Europeans such as William Beauclerk, Karl Wilhelm Schnars, François Lenormant, and others cited in the chapter travelled to the region in the 19th century, a time when Basilicata was not a popular destination, or easily accessible for that matter. Their

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writings offer invaluable observations about their experiences. I also consult government sources, such as Parliamentary Debates related to the special law for Basilicata in 1904, health reports from government inquiries, as well as reports from government agents writing for the *Bollettino dell’Emigrazione*. Newspapers of the time help piece together information about the conditions in the region, especially *La Stampa*, which ran a special series on Basilicata as an ignored region in October 1887. Contemporary journals, such as *Nuova Antologia*, also offer direct examinations of the region. For a different point of view, I use sources that come from people living in the region. The politician and Prime Minister Francesco Saverio Nitti (1868-1953) was born in Melfi (in Basilicata) and wrote a great deal about the problems of the region. Before going into politics, he studied law and worked as a journalist, focusing on problems of the South and writing about emigration. He was elected to parliament in 1904, and became the Prime Minister in 1919. While in office, he pushed for reforms, such as modernization of infrastructure, industry, and energy, in all of Italy, including the South. Nevertheless, his writings show his cynicism about the usefulness of special laws to fix the problems in the South, and express his view that liberal measures would solve many problems in the country as a whole.²¹ Besides Nitti’s writings, perhaps the most telling sources used in this chapter are the memorandums written by citizens of each town explaining their situation and needs prior to the arrival of Prime Minister Giuseppe Zanardelli in 1902.

Each of these sources has its benefits and drawbacks. While most of them give us a unique glimpse into what life was like for common people, they must be examined with caution because they tend to be biased and subjective. Outsiders had preconceived notions of the South, which affected their view of the region, while insiders may have exaggerated the severity of their situation in an attempt to get more government attention, assistance, or sympathy. One major

drawback is that women are hard to find in these sources. They generally are not included or discussed on their own, and are often grouped together as a whole with men. Despite their drawbacks, these sources provide invaluable information on a region many knew (and know) little about.

**Economics/Land Ownership**

Basilicata has not always been one of the poorest regions in Italy. In Roman times, the land was covered in forests and used for pasture. However, forests were eventually cut down to make room for grain production and farming. Both before and after large scale emigration of the late 1800s and early 1900s, much of the land was dedicated to agriculture. Some of the main crops were food items, such as cereals, like wheat, oats, and barley, lemons, almonds, figs, and olives. Vineyards for growing wine grapes were also widespread. Despite deforestation over the centuries, large areas of forest and mountainous regions could not be cultivated. Some of these lands were used for pasture, although pasturage had decreased in the 1860s and 1870s due to brigandage and sale of church property. Cattle, sheep, and pigs were the most common animals in the region.²²

Small landholders owned most of the land in the region, especially in the mountainous areas of Potenza and Lagonegro, many of which employed day laborers.²³ Latifondi generally did not exist in these areas, in contrast to the large landed estates in parts of Sicily and Calabria.²⁴

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²² Beauclerk, *Rural Italy*, 33.
For the most part, the region survived on subsistence agriculture, and as a result, very little cash circulated.\(^\text{25}\)

The sale of church property, mentioned above, interfered with the use of lands for *usi civici*, a practice with feudal origins that continued in Basilicata. These lands were communal lands which peasants had the right to use for grazing, growing, gathering, and collecting wood. Use of communal property was still common in Basilicata in the late 19th century, and many peasants relied on these lands for survival.

According to a report from the Prefect of Potenza to the Ministry of Health (*Direzione Generale Sanità*) in Rome, the state of the countryside (*stato della campagna*) was reported as being “good” in most towns.\(^\text{26}\) This clearly was not an accurate assessment. Some towns were worse off than others, but for the most part farming was mediocre to good at best. Emigration made the situation worse, as the few areas that were able to produce crops were often abandoned as farm laborers migrated, leaving the fields uncultivated. The town of Montemurro reported that farming was “in decay due to the great emigration.”\(^\text{27}\) Trivigno also similarly reported that they had “barren countryside” and that it had been abandoned by heavy emigration.\(^\text{28}\) Thus, emigration made a bad agricultural situation worse.

The people of Basilicata lived in small towns, and those working in agriculture generally walked to work, waking up each morning before dawn and carrying any tools to the fields.\(^\text{29}\) A typical day generally lasted ten to twelve hours, with workers making around 1.60 to 1.70 lire, in

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\(^{26}\) Archivio Centrale dello Stato. Direzione Generale Sanità, Busta 344, 1899 Basilicata (Potenza).

\(^{27}\) Ibid.

\(^{28}\) Ibid.

\(^{29}\) “Tornando dalla Basilicata,” *La Stampa*, Oct 26, 1890.
addition to occasional allowances such as food, drink, and produce.\textsuperscript{30} Many of these day
laborers did not own land, and also migrated to nearby towns and regions searching for seasonal
work. Thus, in Basilicata, it was not uncommon for male laborers to travel to other villages or
be away from their families for an extended period. In this sense, migration was not new, but the
destination and the earnings changed. Although compared to other regions, wages were
relatively higher because labor was scarce, people from Basilicata still emigrated. In fact,
emigration was higher from regions with small landowners who relied on wage laborers
(\textit{braccianti}) rather than those with large estates and latifondi, where work was more secure and
landowners provided protections for the family and a system of social welfare.\textsuperscript{31} Nonetheless,
emigration led to rising wages and a shortage of labor in Basilicata. There were even occasions
when workers migrated to Basilicata from other regions of Italy to work, especially during key
cultivating seasons, because of the higher wages and more work opportunities. Many of these
workers came from surrounding areas, such as Puglia, but others also came from Northern
regions.\textsuperscript{32}

Little to no industry existed in Basilicata. According to the statistics from 1905 to 1907,
1,917 industrial establishments existed in Basilicata, with a total of 4,834 workers.\textsuperscript{33} These
numbers are very low compared to neighboring regions. For example, in Calabria there were
6,749 industrial establishments with over 31,000 workers, and similarly in Puglia 6,310
establishments with over 37,000 workers.\textsuperscript{34} Travelers to the region also observed the absence of
industry. François Lenormant, a Frenchman travelling in Melfi, observed that there was little

\textsuperscript{30} “Un lembo ignorato d’Italia: La Basilicata, VI,” \textit{La Stampa}, Oct 3, 1887.
\textsuperscript{34} Ibid.
industry in the area and most people dedicated themselves to farming and agriculture. Francesco Saverio Nitti, a native to the region writing in 1910, wrote that “our immense region does not have one single industry, not a single office, not a single industrial company, not even a motor in a factory however modest with fifty to one hundred workers. Machines are unknown.”

Little industrial activity in the region also meant fewer worker organizations. In 1907, there were only 3 labor unions with 242 members. In contrast, Calabria had 15 unions with over 4,000 members, and Puglia had 59 unions with over 37,000 members.

A small number of large landowners lived in the region. This local aristocracy was mostly absentee, whether it was to escape malaria in the summer, to avoid harsh winters, to educate their children elsewhere, or to escape the isolation of the region. The Lucanians criticized the aristocracy for not showing interest in investing in new agricultural techniques, which impeded production. Farmers used old tools, had few modern plows, no fertilizers, did not practice crop rotation, and lacked modern machinery.

Outside observers noted that the local aristocracy was absent and did not seem interested in the land. Lenormant saw that disinterested landowners did not care to improve the conditions or invest money in the region. He wrote that, “in no other region do we feel the results of the total disinterest of the landed aristocracy, who live in the big cities of Naples and Rome, where they own impressive palazzos, lavish villas with all the sophistication of refined luxury, and who, instead of dealing with their vast landholdings, avoid visiting them and entrust them to the

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care of administrators…They avoid any cost of improving the property, in which, as has been said, they are completely disinterested.”

William Beauclerk, a British diplomat traveling in the region, also observed the lack of investment in new technology, writing that, “the earth is almost entirely left to work its natural resources, artificial manures and scientific farming not having been hitherto introduced.”

Thus at the turn of the century, the region, still largely agricultural, relied on outdated farming techniques, lacked any form of industry, and had a largely disinterested local aristocracy.

**Diet and Health Conditions**

Because Basilicata was largely agricultural, the regional diet was based on local products. Meat, a standard of class and wealth, was reserved for special occasions. Lenormant described the general diet of the people he encountered as scarce and not very substantial. He noticed much of their diet consisted of cheese, chestnuts, legumes such as peas and beans, and fresh vegetables, such as cabbage and tomatoes. They ate little meat, but he noted “the lack of meat is to some extent offset by a good dose of wine.”

William Beauclerk also observed that they ate “bread, oil, and vegetables form the staple commodities of their diet, and wine is not wanting.”

Health reports submitted by the Prefect in Potenza to the Ministry of the Interior (Ministero dell’Interno) in 1899 demonstrate a great deal about the social and health conditions of the region. Some of the most alarming health statistics cited in these reports were in regard to drinking water. A sampling of eighteen random comunes from the health reports shows that half did not have a source of fresh, running water in 1899. Two of the nine that did had just received

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41 Beauclerk, 26.
42 Lenormant, “Caveant Consules!” 148-149.
43 Beauclerk, 35.
it in the past decade.\textsuperscript{44} These conditions were slow to improve. In 1908, the town of Albano di Lucania still did not have a source of fresh drinking water. Residents had to walk three kilometers to get fresh water, and carrying it back was difficult, usually requiring the help of a mule cart.\textsuperscript{45} Even Carlo Levi, who was in the region almost forty years after these health reports were compiled, spoke of how long it took for towns to gain access to fresh water. In Gagliano (Aliano), he described: “a small spring, which until a few years ago was the only resource in the countryside.”\textsuperscript{46} Thus, while the people of the region may have had a subsistence diet based on and local products, many did not have access to fresh water, which indubitably led to health issues.

Malaria was a major health concern throughout Italy in the 19\textsuperscript{th} and early 20\textsuperscript{th} centuries. In 1900, over 15,000 people died of the disease and thousands more were afflicted by it.\textsuperscript{47} The Italian government paid much more attention to malaria in the early 1900s, especially during the Giolitti period, advocating health precautions and pushing for the distribution of quinine, a remedy for malaria. As reported by health surveyors in Basilicata, malaria was rare in most towns, but present in the countryside, and when it did occur it tended to be in specific locations or at a specific time of year. The highest risk was during the summer months (July-September).\textsuperscript{48}

When people did get sick, many towns had few resources to assist the ill. Health reports show the number of doctors and surgeons practicing in each town were few, if any. For example, the town of Picerno had a population of 4,401 in 1899, but only three doctors and two midwives. A town of similar size, Vietri in Potenza, had no doctors and no midwives. Spinoso, a town of 2,656, reported having no doctors and having “una vecchia” (an old woman) as a

\textsuperscript{44} Archivio Centrale dello Stato. Direzione Generale Sanità, Busta 344, 1899 Basilicata (Potenza).
\textsuperscript{45} Rossi, 1552.
\textsuperscript{46} Levi, 68.
\textsuperscript{47} Frank Snowden, The Conquest of Malaria in Italy, 1900-1962 (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2006), 89.
\textsuperscript{48} See: Snowden, The Conquest of Malaria in Italy.
midwife. Potenza, with a population of just over 16,000, only had twelve doctors and four midwives. The health reports also indicated that few towns had a dentist, and most had only one or two pharmacies. Potenza had eight. These numbers show the decrepit state of healthcare in the region and give insight into why the death and infant mortality rates were so high.49

**Education and Illiteracy**

Much of what outsiders saw as backwards about the region was the lack of education and the high illiteracy rates. According to the 1881 census, 87.3% of the population was illiterate, a number that only improved to 79.2% by the 1901 census.50 Female illiteracy was even higher. Part of the reason for high illiteracy rates and poor schooling was because the burden for providing education fell on the communes. Laws requiring schooling were not carried out in Basilicata. Reports from *La Stampa* state that although the government advocated for education and even sent teachers to some communes, no town built adequate school buildings, the location of schools often changed from year to year, and parents did not send children to school.51 The article also reported education was worse for women, and many from agricultural or poor families did not educate their daughters because women were destined to work in the home, first for their families and then for their husbands. Beyond elementary education, by 1887 there was a Liceo (high school) in Potenza and one in Matera, Technical Schools in Matera, Melfi and Masico, and an Art School in Potenza.52 Education more often than not depended on economic status. Upper class families sent children, both boys and girls, to school outside of the region, in Naples or other major cities.

52 Ibid.
Isolation

Many communes were isolated, disconnected because no rail line ran through the town, and because the roads themselves were in deplorable condition. It was only in the 18th century that main roads began to be built across the region, connecting it with Naples to the West, Puglia to the East, Abruzzo to the North, and Calabria to the Southwest. Yet many areas were still disconnected and inaccessible. After travelling through the region in 1902, Giuseppe Zanardelli noted that many communes lacked roads for mules to travel on. Others were impassible during rain and storms, thus entirely isolating some towns during bad weather. According to a report to Parliament, in 1902, thirteen communes were completely isolated and required the construction of roads connecting them to the main network.

The lack of railroads contributed to the isolation. Up until the 1880s, Basilicata was largely disconnected from the rail network of the rest of Italy. It was only between 1880 and 1900 that over 1,250 miles of railroad were constructed in region, making it more accessible for travel and facilitating emigration. Yet, this rail system did not (not does it today) connect all parts of the region. Because of the mountainous terrain, building rail lines to certain towns and villages was difficult, leaving them disconnected and isolated.

Perhaps because of the difficulty of travel, few accounts of travelers to the region exist, especially when compared to other areas of Italy. As I will discuss in the pages ahead, Zanardelli had difficulty travelling at some places on his tour of the region. Much of the theme in Carlo Levi’s writing focuses on the fact that the people were insular and the region was out of

54 Atti Parlamentari, Camera dei deputati, XXI Legislatura, II Sessione, Relazione della commissione, seduta del 2 febbraio 1904, 2.
55 Ibid., 67.
touch with the rest of Italy. He wrote that, “the peasant lives, in misery and in the distance, his immobile civilization on barren soil, in the presence of death.” He also wrote of the disconnect between the people of Basilicata and the government in Rome: “for the peasants, the state is farther away than the sky.” Although Levi’s trip to the region occurred in the 1930s, many of his comments portray the feeling of isolation in the region during the years of large scale emigration at the turn of the century. Levi’s words also give a sense of how people outside the region viewed it- as dark, unknown, desolate, and isolated.

**Natural Disasters**

Other environmental factors, such as earthquakes and landslides, influenced the lives of people in the region. A number of recent studies have examined the effects of the environment on Italian history. Many of these scholars have argued that environmental issues have played a key role in shaping certain aspects of Italian history, as people were forced to contend with nature. People of Basilicata experienced a number of environmental realities that shaped their history and even contributed to wide scale emigration.

Basilicata is prone to earthquakes, and over the years earthquakes and their consequences have taken thousands of lives and have had disastrous effects on some towns. A major earthquake hit the region in 1857, which destroyed a great deal of property and caused over 10,000 deaths in Basilicata and in neighboring Calabria. Many villages had to be completely rebuilt as a result, a process which was slow at best, and often towns and buildings were left in ruins for years because the people could not afford to rebuild.

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57 Levi, 1.
58 Ibid., 70.
Landslides were another common phenomenon in the area, partially due to earthquakes. Zanardelli noted in his 1902 visit that of the 124 comunes in Basilicata, over half were prone to landslides. These disasters have also caused widespread loss of life and destruction to houses and buildings. In 1888, a crowded train traveling from Naples to Potenza was crushed by a landslide. Nineteen people were killed and fifty-five people were injured in the disaster. Many hilltop towns were often faced with the threat of a landslide. In 1901, an “immense rock” swept away part of the town of Acerenza, outside of Potenza, killing at least fifteen people. In 1907, the people of Montemurro were “feeling in panic” as a landslide threatened to wipe away a large area of the village. According to reports “the roar of the avalanches was heard for a considerable distance.” The whole town was devastated, leaving as many as 5,000 people without homes. The town of Craco is one of the most striking examples of the effects of landslides. Largely built on top of a steep hill, the town was abandoned completely in 1963 because of earthquakes and the constant danger of landslides. Today deserted streets and crumbling buildings serve as a reminder of the potential damage nature could cause. These threats were a constant cause of fear for the thousands who lived in the small hilltop towns.

Other Observations

While accounts of the harsh realities of the region abound, many travelers or visitors found beauty in Basilicata. Crawford Tate Ramage, who traveled through the region in the 1820s, reflected on the countryside and observed a vista of a volcano which he described as more

60 Atti Parlamentari, Camera dei deputati, XXI Legislatura, II Sessione, Disegno di Legge, seduta del 27 giugno 1903, 9.
beautiful than that of Vesuvius.\footnote{Crawford Tait Ramage, “A dorso di mulo, tra il canto delle alloidole, nell’area del Vulture,” in Viaggiatori stranieri in terra di Lucania Basilicata, ed. Giovanni Caserta (Venosa: Osanna Edizioni, 2005): 49.} Karl Wilhelm Schnars, traveling a few decades later, made a similar observation about the beauty of the countryside, writing “landscape painters, several of whom one meets in Sorrento and Capri or those who are eternally painting Vesuvius, the Blue Grotto, and the house of Tasso, never came to this area that offers rich material for beautiful landscape paintings.”\footnote{Karl Wilhelm Schnars, “A Vietri, nelle osterie, regnava un gran chiasso,” in Viaggiatori stranieri in terra di Lucania Basilicata, ed. Giovanni Caserta (Venosa: Osanna Edizioni, 2005): 109.} Another traveler, Arthur John Strutt, compared the countryside and mountain vistas to the North, saying “the scenery is not very different from that part of the Apennines that we both like, between Bologna and Florence: the same barren hills, the same valleys, and the same solitary aspect.”\footnote{Arthur John Strutt, “A Lauria, una vecchia acida e grossa,” in Viaggiatori stranieri in terra di Lucania Basilicata, ed. Giovanni Caserta (Venosa: Osanna Edizioni, 2005): 54.}

Observers also commented about the people they encountered in their travels through Basilicata and expressed sympathy towards them. Schnars described the people of Avigliano as “extremely kind and generous.”\footnote{Schnars, 96.} Maxime du Camp lamented the ignorance of the people in Castelluccio and the desire by the ruling class to keep the masses ignorant. He observed that few children go to school and education is looked down upon as if a person is betraying the paese.\footnote{Maxime du Camp, “A Castelluccio, la scrittura era un’invenzione del diavolo,” in Viaggiatori stranieri in terra di Lucania Basilicata, ed. Giovanni Caserta (Venosa: Osanna Edizioni, 2005): 122-123.} François Lenormant, travelling in the 1880s, wrote that the peasants work hard all day long for a low salary with little hope of ever being able to save enough money to better their lives or condition.\footnote{Lenormant, 150.}

In a survey of rural Italy in 1888, William Nelthorpe Beauclerk, painted a picture of rural society in Basilicata. He noted the houses were poor and unhealthy. Children slept in the same
bed as their parents.⁷² Yet, while surveying the regions of both Basilicata and Calabria, he noted “the peasants are less miserable than in the North of Italy, they are genial and kindly in disposition.”⁷³ Nitti also recognized the difficulties that existed in the region, but wrote to his peers that “he who has not seen up close the condition of laborers of the provinces of Southern Italy does not have an exact idea of the great poverty that forces them to leave their village.”⁷⁴ He was one of the only state officials in Rome who could offer personal insight into the conditions of Basilicata. In 1924, Nitti helped establish a magazine “La Basilicata nel Mondo,” which was an attempt to improve the image of the region and provide a more sympathetic view of it for outsiders.

The first-hand accounts of scholars, social scientists, and travelers, as well as official statistics, reflect a grim and often condescending indication of what life was like for ordinary people in the region, as many of these sources are not truly objective. Yet, first-hand accounts from the communes themselves offer a closer look at life for the men and women of the region and show that Lucanians did not passively accept their miserable circumstances.

**Preparation for Zanardelli’s Visit**

Basilicata received the attention of the national government when Prime Minister Giuseppe Zanardelli visited and toured the region in 1902.⁷⁵ Zanardelli, originally from Brescia and 76 years old at the time of his trip, was already an accomplished politician. This was the first time a Prime Minister not only brought attention to the region, but visited the region personally. Before his visit, the South was relatively ignored by Rome, and the government did

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⁷² Beauclerk, *Rural Italy*, 35.
⁷³ Ibid., 24.
⁷⁵ Zanardelli was Prime Minister from February 1901 to November 1903 and was part of the Historic Left.
little to address the problems of the region. Notable exceptions were Pasquale Villari, a
politician who wrote about the realities of life in the South, and Leopoldo Franchetti and Sidney
Sonnino, politicians who traveled to the South in the 1870s to perform an unofficial survey of the
region. Reports of the horrible conditions and the large impact of emigration inspired these
visits. The government could no longer ignore the various problems and difficulties facing the
region.

Prior to the arrival of Zanardelli, representatives from each comune composed a
memorandum that explained the state of the town and what type of help or resources it could use
from the government. These memorandums are a valuable source for learning what living
conditions were like in the small towns of Basilicata. At the same time, it would be wrong to
take them at face value, as they were written by people who wanted money and attention from
the government. Most of the authors of the memorandums, whether the mayor or a group from
the town, beg the government for funds to help improve local conditions. Some of the most
frequent requests were for better railroad service and road connectivity, money for public works,
lower taxes for property owners, the establishment of agrarian credit funds, reforestation and
protection against landslides, aqueducts to bring fresh water to the comunes and a better postal
service. The commune of Potenza requested funds in 1902 to bring fresh water to the railroad
station, showing not even public buildings in the region’s capital had access to clean water.
Many of these basic needs were still lacking in the region, well after the turn of the century. The
requests from these memorandums give us insight into how the people of Basilicata reacted to
their surroundings.

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Most of the region survived off the land, so naturally many of the memorandums address issues concerning agriculture. The memorandum from Avigliano was quite long, and was written by the mayor, G. Monaco. In it, he asks Zanardelli to remember the suffering people of Basilicata, especially in Avigliano, which he notes was the largest and most important agricultural town in the province.\textsuperscript{77} He specifically asked for funds to open an agrarian school (\textit{scuola agraria practica}), saying that “the only hope for the economic resurgence of the region is in agriculture.”\textsuperscript{78} Teaching the masses modern agricultural techniques would improve economic conditions and thus raise the morale of the people. He argued that these improvements would help put a stop to “the depopulation of our province” (referring, of course, to emigration).\textsuperscript{79}

An added memorandum by the people of Avigliano further discussed the need for capital to improve agriculture. They wrote that “our population is exclusively agricultural: the majority living in poor houses, due to the lack of capital, which impedes the development of agriculture, because here, as everyone knows, outdated agricultural methods are still used.”\textsuperscript{80} They added that an agrarian school would help improve conditions in the town, since no such institute existed in all of Basilicata.\textsuperscript{81}

Sentiments about the poverty of the region were also expressed in the requests. The people of the town of Calvello referred to Basilicata as “our province so forgotten” and wrote that it was in desperate need of rehabilitation.\textsuperscript{82} A memorandum from Genzano di Lucania

\textsuperscript{77} Avigliano was in fact the city with the largest population in the region with 18,313 inhabitants in 1901. Matera was the second largest city with 17,237 and Potenza, the capital of the region, had 16,126 inhabitants.
\textsuperscript{78} Archivio Centrale dello Stato (ACS). PCM-Presidenza Zanardelli-Basilicata, Busta 1.
\textsuperscript{79} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{80} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{81} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{82} Ibid.
referred to Basilicata as “this poor, miserable region.”**83** Relating his town to others in the region, Domenico De Angelis, mayor of the town of Palmira wrote that, “the conditions of this comune are identical to those of the most miserable and unhappy places in the region…the same economic depression, the same abandonment of agriculture, the same feelings of loss of energy and degrading misery.”**84** The memorandum continued to outline some of the main problems of the comune and the region as a whole. The mayor explained that “the problem of economic, administrative and moral redemption is too large and complex, and the region so desperately needs credit, viability, water, education, justice.”**85** Many other towns expressed their hope that Zanardelli’s visit would lift morale and lead to improvements of which the region was in desperate need.

Potenza, the capital of the region, was not immune to the troubles of the rest of the region, and itself was not easily accessible. Demonstrating how bad production was in the city, the mayor of Potenza wrote that he would not ask Zanardelli for help with the construction of roads because there was little to transport. In a separate memorandum, the workers of Potenza (masons, blacksmiths and carpenters) wrote on their own, stating that they were out of work because jobs were not available.

Yet, despite the hardships and difficulties of the region, many may have been exaggerated or embellished to get the attention of outsiders. Perhaps these tactics were effective, since a similar tone was used in each memorandum. A further aspect in many of the memorandums was the use of patriotic language. Writers knew what they wanted and how to ask for it. Despite strong regionalism and difficulties after unification, a sense of Italian

**83** Ibid.
**84** Archivio Centrale dello Stato (ACS). PCM-Presidenza Zanardelli-Basilicata, Busta 2.
**85** Ibid.
patriotism came through in the memorandums. Almost all give a history of their town and often include pieces of history to “prove” that the people are patriotic and devoted to Italy. For example, the memorandum from the town of Calvello ended with the lines, “only the good hand of the Illustrious Zanardelli can truly stop the fatal path of this miserable comune, one of the first to raise the cry of vengeance in the uprisings of 1821, 1848 and 1860, sacrificing our best sons on the altar of the homeland.”86 Forty years after unification, the people of Basilicata saw themselves as part of Italy. These sentiments show that the people of the commune, or at least those who wrote these memorandums, were not isolated and felt connected to a larger Italian state.

Many comunes also referred to their prosperous past, and how over time, the land and their fortunes had changed. The memorandum of Potenza stated: “from our fields which were once fertile and happy, a cry of pain is raised, which echoes miserably on the other regions of Italy!...from our hills once rigorous and flowering now barren and deserted, take the hand of the thousands of workers who lack bread! 87 The case of Potenza is just one example of how the fertile lands of the past were no longer producing enough to live comfortably or earn profit.

No comune in any of the memorandums reported that it was doing well or prospering. Again, this may have been because the inhabitants wanted assistance, but all listed grievances and needs. Almost every commune expressed it was in need of aid, connectivity, or clean water. In addition, almost all mentioned that a major effect of the difficulties of the region has been emigration. In many cases, emigration made a bad situation worse, as those most able to work (and possibly help improve conditions in the region) were those who left.

86 Archivio Centrale dello Stato (ACS). PCM-Presidenza Zanardelli-Basilicata, Busta 1.
87 Archivio Centrale dello Stato (ACS). PCM-Presidenza Zanardelli-Basilicata, Busta 2.
Along with memorandum from the comunes, a number of organizations and private citizens also wrote their own letters to Zanardelli informing him of the conditions and needs of the region. A memorandum from the Conte Nugent, a property owner from the town of Irsina, wrote one of the main needs not only of Basilicata, but of all the South, was education and teaching the people mutual trust and cooperation. He wrote that everyone on their own is weak, but if people cooperate they are stronger. Another memorandum from the Comizii Agrarii di Potenza, Melfi e Matera asked for justice and fairness in the collection of taxes and the distribution of money for public works.88

Demonstrating through their memorandums the poor conditions of the region, many of the towns begged Zanardelli to visit and observe for himself what life was like. The mayor of Potenza asked Zanardelli to come and see the poverty and misery of the people and the region. Many of the comunes also expressed their happiness about Zanardelli’s visit, saying that it gave the people hope that improvements would be made and their lives would change for the better. The mayor of the town of San Chirico wrote that the news of Zanardelli’s visit “has opened the hearts of all to a new hope.”89

These memorandums show that the inhabitants were not passive or accepting of their conditions and circumstances, but hoped for change. They recognized the overwhelming hardships that plagued the region and the difficulty of improving conditions. They saw Zanardelli’s visit as an opportunity to let the government in Rome know about how the region was suffering, and their requests show that they wanted change. The memorandums demonstrate it was the circumstances and surroundings which caused their poverty and misery, not the attitude or mindset of the people. Lack of access to water and healthcare, lack of well-

89 Archivio Centrale dello Stato (ACS). PCM-Presidenza Zanardelli-Basilicata, Busta 2.
maintained roads, and outdated agricultural techniques were just some of the problems which were out of the people’s hands. They needed outside assistance to be able to improve their conditions.

The memorandums also challenge the stereotype that the region was disconnected from the government or the rest of Italy. The people were aware of and anticipated the impending visit of Zanardelli. The fact that people from almost every comune wrote a memorandum upon learning that Zanardelli would tour the region shows the enthusiasm and optimism about the power of the government. Lucanians were excited about the visit and the prospect of change, and the people knew that the only way change was possible was if the state was involved. In addition to the patriotic language used in many of the memorandums, these documents show the people of Basilicata were not isolated and silent, but felt connected to a larger Italy and had faith and confidence in their government to intervene.

Zanardelli’s Visit

Zanardelli left Rome to tour Basilicata, along with reporters, deputies, and invited guests, from September 18-30, 1902. He travelled through the region in a horse drawn carriage, and where necessary by mule, which was the only way to access some of the isolated locations. During his visit to individual towns, Zanardelli spoke to local inhabitants and took notes. Some of the towns visited were Corleto Pericara, Piana dell’Agri, Matera, Rionero in Vulture, and Potenza, his last stop. Upon his arrival in each town, the people greeted him warmly, 

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notably with a: “rain of applause, with which the people of Lucania celebrate their champion.”

Yet, despite having researched and read about the region prior to his visit, Zanardelli was surprised by the conditions he encountered.

Even before his visit ended, Zanardelli promised government intervention and action. In a speech given in Potenza before heading back to Rome on September 29, 1902, Zanardelli noted that “twenty one communes were without any carriage road, the condition of housing was sad, (and) fifty five municipalities complained of lack of healthy drinking water.” During the same speech, he promised two new rail lines would be constructed in the region in order to achieve better connectivity. The New York Times commented that this was the ideal opportunity, for the “question of the southern provinces of Italy is soon to receive serious consideration and patriotic treatment.” After the almost two week visit, Zanardelli and his entourage boarded the train in Potenza to return to Rome.

In an address to Parliament once he returned to the capital, Zanardelli reported on his visit and explained that he had wanted to visit the region himself to see how bad the conditions were. He traveled to many towns and spoke directly to the people living there, asking them about their circumstances. According to Zanardelli, in Basilicata there was “an absolute absence of flourishing urban centers, of any manufacturing industry, of strong agricultural production, all of the things which create and maintain public and private prosperity.” After seeing the region and witnessing its conditions first hand, Zanardelli noted that it was not hard to see why the region was in decay and in need of urgent government attention.

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92 Ibid.
93 Giasi, “Rileggere Zanardelli,” 36.
96 Ibid.
97 Atti Parlamentari, Camera dei deputati, XXI Legislatura, II Sessione, Disegno di Legge, seduta del 27 giugno 1903, 1.
He pointed out that the region had very particular characteristics which made it an exceptional case. One of the main causes of its condition was the geography. Landslides, deforestation, and primitive farming methods, without modern machines or technology, were major factors that contributed to its poverty and prevented change.

Poor output of small industry also hurt the region’s economy. Some of the main local industries were dairy, wheat and pasta production, forest industries, and various others. Low production would not be easy to mend, since the region imported more than it exported and did not have the raw materials or the necessary infrastructure and to build up industry. Emigration had also hurt the region, because, as Zanardelli noted, it “has taken away the best part of the population, those who are able, robust, and good workers, so the local workforce is scarce and deficient, and proprietors recruit adventurous workers from Calabria and Puglia.”

Zanardelli also pointed out that Basilicata was the only region in Italy where the population had declined over the past ten years, with a decrease of 47,700 inhabitants, mostly due to emigration. He lamented what the land had become, noting it was sad to see the squalid and deserted landscape in a place where “the flourishing cities of Magna Graecia once existed.” This harkening of a most prosperous past may have given some hope that it was possible for conditions to improve.

Zanareddelli’s visit led to the creation of a special law for Basilicata in 1904, which presented ways to overcome many of the obstacles facing the region. The law had various sections, each addressing a different concern. The first section addressed agrarian administration.

98 Ibid., 4-5.
99 Ibid., 5.
100 Ibid., 3.
101 Atti Parlamentari, Camera dei deputati, XXI Legislatura, II Sessione, Relazione della commissione, seduta del 2 febbraio 1904, 2.
102 Ibid., 3.
and credit, and provided means for the establishment of various credit agencies for local farmers, which aimed to reduce moneylending at exorbitant rates and provide affordable credit to small property owners. The construction of homes was the subject of the second section, which also included provisions for agricultural improvement. Section three proposed reforestation, which had been requested by the inhabitants. The next section called for improving the hydraulic system of the region, mainly to correct the paths of rivers and streams in order to prevent future landslides. Providing funds for improved railroad and road communications was the subject of the next section, as some towns at that point were still completely isolated. The law also allocated funds to complete a rail line from Bari to Matera and Ferrandina, and continuing to Padula, in the Western part of the region. The sixth section was dedicated to reducing landslides and improving the health of inhabitants, which Zanardelli labeled as an urgent task. The government was to allocate 5,000,000 lire for the prevention of landslides where inhabitants were threatened the most. These funds would also be used to provide fresh water to comunes that still did not have it. The next section proposed tax benefits to those landowners who were willing to partake in reforestation. Finally, the law called for the opening of secondary schools in the region in order to push for compliance with mandatory education laws.\textsuperscript{103}

Zanardelli hoped the provisions set out would slow emigration and allow for the flow of work and goods within the region.\textsuperscript{104} The law also aimed to improve the health and well-being of the inhabitants, addressing the need for clean water, medical care, and education. Zanardelli anticipated this law would initiate “a new era for Basilicata.”\textsuperscript{105} He knew it was not going to improve everything definitively, but he was optimistic it would lead to change for the better.

\textsuperscript{103} Atti Parlamentari, Camera dei deputati, XXI Legislatura, II Sessione, Disegno di Legge, seduta del 27 giugno 1903, 6-11.
\textsuperscript{104} Ibid., 11-12.
\textsuperscript{105} Ibid., 12.
Unfortunately, Zanardelli died in December of 1903 and did not live to see many of his proposals and the law named for him implemented. The law was approved by Parliament on March 31, 1904.

Despite the interest of Zanardelli in the region and the government’s attempts to improve conditions, the law did little to change the overall conditions, and thus poverty and emigration continued. Delays and bureaucratic hurdles slowed implementation, and many of the plans and projects funded by the law were never came to fruition. Francesco Saverio Nitti, as well as others in Parliament, criticized the Zanardelli law. Speaking as a government official from Basilicata, Nitti was the most outspoken and said that the law promised a lot but did little. He contended that the main problems in the region were water and reforestation, and the proposal lacked adequate funding and provisions for these improvements. He argued that in Roman times Basilicata used to be a huge forest, and in order to prosper again, it should be turned back into one. Therefore, he pushed for reforestation of the region. Some progress finally began after 1908, with the building of hydraulic systems, reforestation, the construction of roads, and the building of aqueducts in 52 comunes. Despite Nitti’s and other’s criticisms of the law, Zanardelli’s visit brought attention to the region and made both the government and the rest of Italy aware of the conditions there. Yet, because conditions were slow to improve, the best hope for many was to emigrate.

As the phenomenon of emigration grew, and reports from the regions of the South to the central government described less than desirable conditions, the government again turned its interest to the South. Between 1904 and 1910, Parliament conducted an Inquiry into the

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107 Ibid., 539.
Conditions of the Peasants in the Southern Provinces and Sicily (*Inchiesta sulle condizioni dei contadini nelle provincie meridionali e nella Sicilia*), this time surveying the whole Mezzogiorno. Workers from the government traveled to various comunes in each region, interviewing inhabitants and asking them about their lives and the conditions there. Testimonies were given by a range of citizens, from the mayor, notaries, and doctors, to farmers, local laborers, and even people who had emigrated.109

After the investigation of the regions of the South (included were Sicily, Campania, Calabria, Basilicata, Puglia, Molise and Abruzzo), the surveyors submitted proposals to Parliament advising it on suggestions for a special law for the South. The inquiry, completely separate from Zanardelli’s visit, drew many of the same conclusions and offered similar suggestions for Basilicata (which was coupled with Calabria in the final report). It suggested that the state seize and maintain public works. Plans for reforestation were needed to reconstruct the territory. Fiscal incentives were needed to help small landowners, including reduced taxes. The proposal also suggested increasing the fight against malaria, making quinine more available and educating local doctors.110 The surveyors also noted that emigration was a major force in the region that would be very difficult to halt.111 Similar to the special law for Basilicata, the results of this inquest led to little change.

**Conclusion**

109 The notes from this inquest are conserved in the Archivio Centrale dello Stato in 5 buste. Unfortunately, the testimonies from Basilicata or Calabria were not included in the files. However, I was able to take relevant information from the final report which made proposals to the government based on the observations of the chroniclers.

110 Snowden, *The Conquest of Malaria*.

This chapter has given an overview life in Basilicata during the years of the major wave of emigration and gives context as to why many may have wanted to leave. Government officials, travelers, and some scholars looked upon the South as backwards and uncivilized, static and passive, living in an isolated and timeless world, following outdated customs and traditions. Life in the region was less than ideal. Brigandage and other realities, such as difficult connectivity, poor agricultural output, landslides and lack of fresh water or healthcare, made life volatile, and for some, dangerous. Many may have felt that emigrating was their only hope for survival.

After this survey of Basilicata in the years of mass emigration, the region may come across as a grim or miserable place, and thus seem to support arguments for the Southern Question. Despite the rough circumstances, we have to be careful not to equate poverty, poor agriculture, and limited connectivity to backwardness. Many of the difficulties that plagued the region were not the fault of the population, but a combination of unlucky natural circumstances, lack of concern by the local aristocracy, and little government attention or investment. Much of what occurred in the region was out of the control of the people, who did their best to cope with their surroundings. Part of what refutes many of the stereotypes of the Southern Question is that many Lucanians decided to emigrate. Taking this step is important proof that they did not passively accept their circumstances, as the stereotype would suggest, but chose to take action to improve their life and condition.

A chapter on Basilicata would not be complete without discussing the region today. Over 100 years after the time period discussed in this dissertation, Basilicata has become a success story, and the image of the region has changed drastically. The region has seen economic growth, particularly with oil production and manufacturing, including the opening of a large
FIAT plant in Melfi. In recent years, agriturismo has become popular in all of Italy, including the many towns of Basilicata. Tourism is on the rise, not only to rural areas, but also to the beautiful beaches that line the Southern coast of the region on the Ionian Sea (and still offer a peaceful escape from large, commercial tourist developments on the Italian coastline). Potenza is the capital of the region today and is still a relatively small city, but it is Matera that has received much attention in recent years. The Sassi, or ancient caves carved into the mountainside just outside the city center, were inhabited by people until the 1950s, when the government forced them out of the impoverished conditions. The Sassi had a reputation for being a place of crime, poverty, and deplorable living conditions, where families and animals lived together in windowless caves. In the last 50 years, the image of the Sassi has changed immensely. In 1994, they were declared a UNESCO world heritage site, and today they are the home to many boutique hotels, shops, and restaurants. Matera has also been selected as the 2019 European capital of culture. Despite these major changes over the past 100 years, the population of the region is still sparse. There is little opportunity for young people in small towns, and many still migrate to Northern Italy or abroad to find work.
Chapter 3: To Leave or Not to Leave: The Emigration Decision and Process

Migration had been a reality in Italy for centuries, well before the great wave of emigration that began in the late 19th century. In Basilicata, laborers migrated seasonally to nearby towns or provinces looking for agricultural work. After unification in 1861, internal migration in the South slowed, mainly due to brigandage and the resulting difficulty and dangers of travelling. The promises of Liberalism and the newly unified state also gave people hope that the new government would enact policies that would improve their lives and stimulate the local economy. By the 1880s however, higher grain prices, as well as taxes and other economic pressures, led many to leave Italy in search for better wages.¹ Large scale Italian emigration truly began about twenty years after Unification. In most cases, this relocation was not permanent, but a temporary solution in order to earn more money. Although travelling a lot farther to find work, many emigrants still intended to return home after they had earned and saved money. Thus migration was not a new phenomenon in Basilicata, and the decision to leave was one that had been considered before.

The previous chapter focused on the region of Basilicata and the conditions, which were largely natural and often out of the control of its inhabitants, that led to emigration. This chapter will also provide context on emigration and consider emigrants as both subjects making a decision to leave, and objects who were the focus of attention by outsiders, especially government officials. Thus, the aim of this chapter is twofold: to explain the decision to emigrate from below, meaning who was emigrating from Basilicata, factors that led to the decision to emigrate, and where they generally went; and then to describe the process of

¹ The agrarian crisis of the 1880s resulted from increased competition in wheat markets and tariff wars. By this period, steam ships were used to transport goods, so competition from wheat growers, especially in the U.S., influenced government policies.
emigration as viewed from above, such as how emigrants obtained a passport, the government response to the growing phenomenon, emigration laws and the perspectives of both local and national political officials. By framing the chapter in this manner, I juxtapose how emigration was experienced by actual emigrants (emigrants as subjects) with how it was seen by others (emigrants as objects).

Because of high rates of illiteracy, there are not many primary sources which directly express the reasoning and thinking about the emigration decision. Even less material exists from women who remained behind and experienced their husbands and family members emigrating. Because these sources are lacking, this dissertation uses other types of sources. Thus, much of my analysis of the emigration process comes from statistical data provided by the Italian government (Direzione Generale di Statistica). I also rely heavily on articles from the Bollettino dell’Emigrazione, which sent reporters to Basilicata to interview Lucanians, including migrants. Other contemporary sources used in this chapter include the newspaper La Stampa, the magazine Nuova Antologia, and a report published by the Immigration Commission in the United States, detailing specifics about Italian immigrants and providing information about their situation in Italy. When analyzing emigration from the legal or political perspective (from above), there are a wider range of sources. Passport requests of prospective emigrants portray their voices as well as those of officials granting the passports. The Bollettino dell’Emigrazione offers valuable reports, statistics, and correspondence between government officials about the status of emigration to countries all over the world. While in many cases the authors are condescending, many give first-hand, valuable insight into the difficulties and problems facing emigrants. The writings of Francesco Saverio Nitti, also used in the previous chapter, are a valuable source, albeit somewhat biased because he was from Basilicata. While Nitti represents a voice from
Rome, he may have a more sympathetic viewpoint than politicians from other regions.

Parliamentary records and discussions involving emigration further show how the government perceived and assessed emigration in this period. In addition to the primary sources listed above, I consult relevant secondary sources in this chapter to help fill in factual gaps.

By discussing emigration specifically from Basilicata, one of the goals of this chapter is to refocus our image of emigration, including not only those in motion, but those who remained behind. Examining the process, the factors that went into making the decision to emigrate, the government response, and the shift in how emigration was perceived demonstrates that emigration greatly impacted the place of departure and all of the people who were involved in the process. This and the following chapter will show that women were not quiet bystanders, and that emigration was often a family, not an individual, decision.

**Historiography**

Studies of emigration usually fall under the larger umbrella of migration studies. For decades, migration studies have focused mainly on the people in motion and their experiences in the new country. Recently, a great deal of new scholarship has begun to change our understanding of emigration, both in general and specifically from Italy. Many of these studies have gone from being overarching, to specific, taking into account factors such as the women and children who remained behind, and cultural effects of migration. I provided a general overview of the historiography of migration studies in the Introduction. The historiography in this chapter will focus on some of the most recent works, as well as the inclusion of Basilicata in migration studies.
The most recent shift in the historiography of Italian migration involves incorporating emigration into the larger narrative of Italian history. A large two volume edited text, *Storia dell’Emigrazione Italiana* demonstrated the growing importance of including emigration in Italian historical studies.² Published in 2002, the two volume work examines various aspects of Italian emigration, from leaving Italy to arrival abroad. It includes studies from some of the most prominent Italian scholars of emigration, such as Piero Bevilacqua, Andreina de Clementi, Emilio Franzina, Matteo Sanfilippo, Franco Ramella, and Paola Corti, among others. One of the main themes of the work has been to shift how emigration is understood in the national context, discussing not only the economic benefits, but also cultural, social, and religious implications. Many of the authors argue that emigration was key in the formation of Italian identity. The contributions to the book tend to be about specific topics, like rural emigration, remittances, or return migration. While the text is an impressive attempt at a comprehensive study of Italian emigration, it does not contain a great deal of specific regional information, especially about Basilicata.

One of the most influential writers on Italian emigration over the past decade and one who has done a great deal to reframe the story of emigration has been Matteo Sanfilippo. Much of his work argues that Italian national history and the history of emigration need to be reconciled.³ Emigration is often mentioned in passing by historians of Liberal Italy, with no real detailed analysis of its social, political, economic or cultural effects on the new nation or the Liberal government.⁴ According to Sanfilippo, traditional historians do not study migration

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⁴ An example can be found when reading Harry Hearder and Jonathan Morris, *Italy: A Short History* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001). There is no mention of emigration during the chapter on Liberal Italy. It is only mentioned in a short paragraph in the Chapter on fascist foreign policy.
because they think it is part of the history of the receiving country. Studies were either dedicated to Italian history or emigration, and once emigrants left they were no longer considered part of Italy. This separation is gradually beginning to disappear as the fields of study combine, and newer works look more closely at how deeply emigration really impacted Italy.

Other scholars also use this premise in their work, and argue that emigration is part of the national history, and the experience of emigrants cannot be ignored. Paola Corti and Maddalena Tirabassi show that even though emigration was not prevalent in scholarly debates, it was present locally in letters, diaries, testimonies and private writings. The memory of migration is also alive in many towns, as there has been a permanent connection to people and places abroad. So while scholars tended to overlook the large scale effects of emigration, local communities could not ignore the impact it had on their communities. My work continues this pattern and demonstrates a connection through the people, especially women, who remained behind, a topic still largely unexplored in the study of Italian emigration.

Because of wide scale Italian emigration, scholars have pondered whether the Italian migration can be labeled a diaspora. Samuel Baily uses the term in his study of emigrants in Argentina and the United States. Yet, Stefano Luconi argues that the term diaspora is not applicable for Italy because the characteristics do not fit with the general definition of diaspora.

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7 The term diaspora has come to be used as any dispersal of people. However, some scholars argue there are a number of key characteristics that indicate dispersal is in fact a diaspora. See Robin Cohen: Global Diasporas: An Introduction (New York: Routledge, 2008).
He points out that with the growth of diaspora studies in the past few years, it has become popular to apply the term to any movement of peoples. Yet, most Italians were not forced to leave and did not leave for political reasons, but economic, and most emigrants returned, and thus the Italian model does not conform to some of the key criteria of a diaspora. Donna Gabaccia expresses a similar viewpoint. Italian migrants do not fit the definition of diaspora; they were not exiles, they were not fleeing political persecution, they had choice over their decision to leave, and they were not “victims.” She concludes that we cannot say one large Italian diaspora occurred, but many small and temporary ones, such as the period studied in this dissertation. Furthermore, for many Italians, emigration was not permanent, and many returned to Italy. According to Gabaccia, the predominance of men emigrating shows intent to return.

In addition, despite the spread of Italians all over the globe, a close connection to home still existed for most migrants.

Recent studies of Italian migration have also followed a larger trend of focusing on transnational individual experience rather than on the emigrant group as a uniform mass. For example, newer studies on emigration include gender, children, and rural life, and use an individualized, rather than a collective approach, recognizing varied experiences. A recent edited volume by Ruth Ben-Ghiat and Stephanie Malia Hom uses the term “mobilities” to describe movement, migration, and colonialism in modern Italian history. The works in the volume start with the premise that Italian history should be studied transnationally because of the various types of movement in and out of the peninsula.

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10 Luconi, “Italian Migrations and Diasporic Approaches,” 158, 163.
12 Ibid.
13 See Linda Reeder, Widows in White: Migration and the Transformation of Rural Italian Women, Sicily, 1880-1920 (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2003); Corti and Tirabassi, eds., Racconti dal Mondo.
As is apparent already through this study, Basilicata has been one of the forgotten regions of Italy, both historically and historiographically. Because of its small population and lack of fertile land, it has tended to remain in the backdrop, both in histories of Italy as a whole and in regional histories. Despite a recent plethora of migration studies, even some with a regional focus, little has been written about Basilicata. Many times, the region is grouped together with histories of neighboring Campania, Calabria, and/or Puglia. While there are a number of local magazines and journals that examine the region, no scholarly work examines emigration specifically from Basilicata.\textsuperscript{15} Perhaps because compared to other regions, the overall number of emigrants from Basilicata was rather small. Yet, the scope of emigration from the region was so great that it merits its own study. This dissertation corrects this void and relate the migration experience in Basilicata to the larger Italian experience, as has been done for many other regions.

Overall, the study of migration has become increasingly popular in the field of Italian history, so much so that it has gone from being a niche field to becoming incorporated into mainstream Italian history. Emigration is not portrayed as shameful or as an escape option for criminals, but as a brave decision that involved a great deal of risk and danger, and that produced positive consequences for Italy.

But while the history of emigration has become incorporated in studies on Italian history, the history of recent migration into Italy is a more contentious topic that historians are just beginning to examine. In Rome, as well as many other regions and smaller cities and towns throughout Italy, emigration museums have opened, commemorating and celebrating the past, and showing how emigration helped families survive and build national identity. Paola Corti claims that politics has also influenced our memory of migration. Many of these museums focus on emigration, not migration, thus leaving out the new wave of immigrants to Italy, which in

\textsuperscript{15} Some examples are: *Basilicata Regione Notizie*, *Basilicata nel Mondo*, *Lucani nel Mondo*. 
recent years has caused much debate. The National Museum of Italian Emigration (Museo Nazionale dell’Emigrazione Italiana) in Rome is one major example.\textsuperscript{16} This museum focuses on the millions of Italians who emigrated, and does not acknowledge the new role of Italy as a receiving nation. This void perhaps is an indication that Italians are not ready to embrace foreigners and immigration as part of their national identity.

Migration has become a divisive issue in present day Italy, and scholars have used this as an opportunity to open up debates and inquiry on migration. As Corti and Sanfilippo point out, Italy has always been a crossroads of various migratory movements, both immigration, emigration, and internal migration.\textsuperscript{17} This is a reality that continues today and should be reflected on in historical studies of Italy. Because of the current migration crisis occurring in Europe, and the centrality of Italy in that situation, many newer works examine immigration to Italy and the integration of them into Italian society.

**The Emigrant Experience: Leaving Basilicata or Staying Behind**

“chi è scontento, se può, va in America, se no si rassegna a soffrire”\textsuperscript{18}

“he who is unhappy, if he can, goes to America, if not he resigns himself to suffering”

Italian emigration patterns changed from the beginning of the 19\textsuperscript{th} century to the early years of the 20\textsuperscript{th} century. In the early 19\textsuperscript{th} century, emigration was limited to skilled workers and was small in number. Late in the century, emigration boomed after the agricultural crisis of the 1880s. Government protections favored proprietors and hurt small landowners, thus affecting

\textsuperscript{16} Paola Corti, Temi e Problemi di storia delle migrazioni italiane (Viterbo: Sette Città, 2013), 128-130.

\textsuperscript{17} Paola Corti and Matteo Sanfilippo, L’Italia e le migrazioni (Rome: Laterza, 2012), vii.

\textsuperscript{18} Gabriele de Rosa, “Introduzione,” in Storia della Basilicata, eds. Gabriele de Rosa and Antonio Cestaro (Rome: Laterza, 2006), xxiii
the wages they could pay their workers and pushing more to emigrate after the 1890s. Before 1900, a majority of Italian emigrants left from Northern regions, such as Veneto, Friuli, and Piedmont. Generally, most emigrants from the North went to other European countries: Germany, France, and Switzerland. This migration also was largely temporary. Only after 1900 did the South overtake the North in the total number of people emigrating per capita. Southern Italians tended to go to the Americas. Overall, the top destination countries were the United States (5.6 million), France (4.2 million), Switzerland (3.9 million), Argentina (2.9 million), Germany (2.4 million), and Brazil (1.4 million.) The rate of migration also grew during the period between 1880 and 1914. Basilicata was among the Southern regions that would eventually send millions of emigrants to the Americas and all over the world.

Fig. 3 - Districts of Basilicata

Fig. 4 - Present Day Provinces of Basilicata

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In Basilicata, emigration began in large scale in the late 19th century and picked up even more after the turn of the century. The heaviest emigration came from the western part of the region, in the mountainous area surrounding Potenza, and in towns in the districts (circondario) of Lagonegro and Melfi. The eastern part of the region, especially in the area near Matera, had a lower rate of emigration, due to more favorable climate and somewhat better agricultural conditions.

Who Was Leaving

Emigrants from Basilicata were mostly young, working-age males, many of them either newlyweds or only married a few years. They were illiterate laborers who survived on daily wages. These men often had their own families which they had the obligation to support, and knew that going abroad to work would most likely allow them to do that. Despite the separation and the long journey, they believed they would be able to provide for their family better than if remaining in Italy. Emigration was a family decision made between husband and wife. Ideally, the husband would emigrate to work, with full intentions of returning, and in the meantime the wife would stay behind, care for the family’s interests and receive money that the husband sent in remittances.

Generally, men accounted for about 80% of Italian emigrants. This pattern holds true in Basilicata as well. Between July 1880 and June 1881, the district of Lagonegro had 1,280 emigrants (83% male and 17% female), and the district of Potenza had 1,440 (74% males and 26% females). In Basilicata, more emigrants left alone than with families (men both single and

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21 Archivio di Stato di Potenza, Pubblica Sicurezza, Cat 6, #40. – The district of Matera had a different ratio: of 201 emigrants 66% were male and 34% were female.
married). In 1905, 68.86% of emigrants left alone, while only 34.14% left with families. This may indicate the intention to return home after a period of time. In terms of age, 82.4% of all Southern Italian immigrants to the United States between 1899 and 1909 were between the ages of 14 and 44.

Most emigrants were from the countryside: day laborers and peasants. For example, in 1905 out of 17,009 emigrants from Basilicata, 10,035 were agricultural workers. These unskilled laborers depended on their wages to survive (did not own land) and would take on a variety of jobs in the places to which they emigrated, from agriculture to industry. In northern Europe, Italians worked in industrial factories and in mines. In Brazil, emigrants helped cultivate coffee on former slave plantations (slavery was abolished in Brazil in 1888). In North America, migrants did everything from farm work, mining, factory work, to digging the subway tunnels in New York City.

Italian emigration differs from that of other groups in the same period in that it was not always permanent. Many migrants planned to stay abroad for a determined amount of time and then return home to Italy. In fact, many even went back and forth multiple times. These “birds of passage” as they were called, were similar to seasonal migrants who travelled within Italy, except they now made a longer transatlantic journey, facilitated by the use of the steamship. Birds of Passage went abroad for certain seasons, saved money, sent remittances home, and then returned. For example, in Argentina and Uruguay, landowners depended on Italian workers who

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26 Corti and Tirabassi, eds., Racconti dal mondo, xi.
arrived in October and left in February or March when the harvest was finished. This pattern of following labor opportunities was similar to historical patterns in Southern Italy, where laborers would often travel outside their town or region temporarily to find seasonal work.

While many of the people leaving Basilicata and Italy overall were poor, others were property owners, who saw their ablest workers leaving and returning with more money made from higher wages. Landowners were thus encouraged to give up their land holdings and become wage laborers, showing how much more laborers were making in America than landowners in Basilicata. A report in the Bollettino dell’Emigrazione points out the unusual phenomenon; “it is no longer the poorest social classes leaving the country… (but) especially small property owners, who leave their poor possessions to go abroad as wage laborers.”

Other small landowners emigrated to improve their social position, knowing that in America they could make higher wages, then return to Italy and buy more land, improve their home, and afford new luxuries. A senator from the town of Corleto Perticare noted that, “a shepherd lives better than a schoolmaster.” Thus emigration disrupted the social hierarchy within local villages.

Another article in the Bollettino dell’Emigrazione observed that even people who were unskilled or had no profession could go to America and make a fortune. The reporter told the story of fourteen-year-old Filomena, who spoke to him with wide eyes full of hope about America. She said that even people who had no experience or skills could go to America and make money, including a former coworker of hers. This colleague was a seamstress who was always scolded for her lack of ability and carelessness. Yet when this coworker went to

America, within two months she was making more than double what Filomena was making. Her story may have been an exaggeration, but it demonstrates the high hopes people had about finding success abroad and the relative ease with which they expected to achieve it.

Women were only a small percent of those emigrating, and a majority of those who emigrated did so with their husbands. The Italian government only began keeping statistics on emigration in 1876. According to numbers collected by the Department of Statistics (*Direzione di Statistica*) between 1876 and 1900, 81% of emigrants were males, and 16% of those were under the age of fourteen. This shows a large majority of emigrants were adult males, leaving without their wives and children. In that same period and in the first years of the 1900s, women made up at most twenty to twenty-five percent of emigrants, and in most cases, they were joining their husbands or other family members abroad. Except for some regions in the North where women emigrated to other European countries for work, women rarely emigrated on their own. The mentality of a patriarchal society deemed it inappropriate, and many feared women traveling on their own would become deviant or fall into an immoral lifestyle if not protected. Thus, most females emigrated under the protection of a male relative. Their emigration was also more likely to be permanent, as they would usually join their husband or family who had already settled abroad. Yet, even if the migration of women was closely tied to men, their inclusion in studies of emigration is crucial, and their experience merits analysis. This migration, no matter

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34 This sentiment was shared by the Americans, as female passengers arriving on their own were held in detention in New York at Ellis Island until a male relative came to pick them up in person.
the causes or reasons, changed their lives, and their experience was vastly different than that of men.

**Reasons for Emigration**

The state of agriculture was one of the main reasons for emigration from Basilicata. Farmers used outdated, if not antiquated, techniques, which led to poor yields. Feudal remnants also persisted, as the transition to a capitalist economy was only beginning to take place in Basilicata. Combined with the state of the land, which was described as “sterile” and insufficient, people either had to resign to a life of uncertainty or emigrate.36 Originally from Basilicata, Francesco Saverio Nitti wrote that despite emigration being tough, people left because they knew what they had to endure could not be worse than life as it was.37

Basilicata was one of the least densely populated regions of Italy. In many areas, agricultural production was also low, resulting in fewer opportunities for work. The laborers who remained behind thus became more demanding and wages became more competitive. Lack of able workers forced small landowners to raise wages, even for women. In contrast, laborers had a hard time finding work and wages were not competitive because of the large number of available workers in many other regions of Southern Italy. In Basilicata, peasants struggled to make enough to support their families and live off their labor. The situation was similar in the North, yet many wage laborers were able to move to nearby cities and find work there, especially in factories. In the Southern mainland, Naples was the only big city in the area, (Bari to the east

was a smaller city) and work was difficult to find there because of poverty and lack of major industry in Naples itself. This pushed many southern Italians to emigrate to America.

Small landowners were particularly hurt by emigration and had reason to leave themselves. Not being used to manual labor and often not wanting to leave or sell their land, small landowners either emigrated or remained in Italy while many of their strongest and best laborers left for America. Yet, those who could, decided to emigrate since they would save more working abroad. For the landowners, selling their land was difficult, because few were interested in buying it. Thus many times, small landholders were forced either to cultivate their own land, or abandon it. Large landholders also suffered. Because of lack of workers, they often had to leave much of their land uncultivated, thus decreasing their own profits.

Even when landlords paid higher wages, the land was often infertile, and earnings were not enough to retain workers. In addition, work was seasonal with laborers working for a few months at a time. In other words, their work was not fixed or secure. Emigrants reported that work was easier in America. A man being interviewed by a surveyor Adolfo Rossi for the Bollettino dell’Emigrazione explained that in Basilicata, laborers had to wake up at dawn, and walk up to seven miles along mountainous terrain carrying their tools. By the time they arrived at work, they were exhausted. Workers did not have to travel as far each day in America, and in addition, they earned more money. The emigrant told Rossi, “the farmer cannot resist the temptation to go. This is what is called the contagion of America.”

Perhaps the most influential reason for emigration was hearing success stories of others. Rossi also interviewed an emigrant from Albano di Lucania who returned to the town to bring his parents and sister to America. When asked why he had emigrated, he responded saying:

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38 Rossi also travelled through Basilicata as part of the Commissione d’Inchiesta per i Contadini
“here I was poor and ragged, I went around barefoot and earned fifty cents on the days which I could work. In New York, as a simple barber I earned twelve to fourteen dollars a week. Then I had my own shop. Before leaving I sold it for $500 and now I will return to New York to open an even better one.”

Emigrants told stories of success and prosperity in America when they returned, surely inspiring those who may have been contemplating emigration. In Laurenzana, a town hard hit by emigration, the mayor reported that initially people left because of misery, but “now it is the spirit of imitation and the hope of savings.” Many thus left because they heard of the successes of their family, friends, and neighbors and wanted to have the same luck.

Emigration agents travelled into towns to try to convince people to emigrate. The law sanctioned licensed companies (Comitati Comunali e mandamentale per l’emigrazione) to send representatives to the various towns to provide information to and recruit prospective migrants. Over 3,000 Comitati existed in all of Italy, with the largest number in the region of Potenza with 123. Yet, these agencies were less effective in convincing people than word of mouth. By 1908, the mayor in Pignola reported that there was no longer a need for emigration agents to come to the town. Every family had relatives or friends in America. Emigration was pervasive even in small and seemingly isolated towns.

Yet, some decided not to emigrate. A man interviewed in the town of Latronico discussed why he chose to remain, despite not earning enough for daily expenses and having his wife and four children sleeping in one room with two beds. He explained that he did not have the money to pay for the journey. He then asserted that not unlike many others, he just could

40 Ibid., 1555.
42 “Allegati alla relazione sui servizi dell’emigrazione” Bollettino dell’Emigrazione, n.7 (1904): 235.
43 Rossi, “Vantaggi e danni dell’emigrazione nel mezzogiorno d’Italia,” 1556.
44 Migrants often borrowed money from friends or relatives to pay for the initial passage abroad.
not leave his wife and small children. While many may have been willing to leave their families for the opportunity to give them a better life, others did not want to take the risk.

It is difficult to recreate or even imagine the thought process of prospective emigrants. Surely they had seen their family members, friends, and neighbors emigrate, and had witnessed the monetary and material benefits of that decision. They must have evaluated their own situation and calculated the costs and benefits of emigrating themselves. Indeed, they saw women, children and the elderly left behind, and probably wondered how their departure would affect their own family. It could not have been an easy decision for anyone. The idea that someone, who may have never even left his own village, could travel across the ocean, had to be disconcerting. Yet, many saw the reward as being well worth the inherent risks.

Process of Emigration

Before leaving, emigrants were required to go through the process of obtaining the correct paperwork in order to be issued a passport. Without a passport, an emigrant was not able to buy a ticket or receive a boarding pass from a shipping company. The need for a passport also discouraged people from flocking to Italian port cities, only to be turned away because they could not emigrate. This regulation also prevented migrants from being turned away at the port of immigration or at their final destination. Passports were needed to leave Italian ports, but were not always required by the port of entry. For example, before the Quota Act of 1924, which severely limited immigration, a passport was not required to enter the United States.

Applications for passports were handled on the local level. Prospective emigrants would first request from the local mayor (sindaco) the nulla osta (no objection in Latin), a certificate

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45 Rossi, 1575.
confirming there were no objections to emigration and granting permission for a passport to be issued. According to a letter from the prefect to local mayors, the *nulla osta* “attests to the good conduct and that the migrant has the means to travel to and from the desired place.”

The mayor was responsible for granting a *nulla osta*. The applicant also needed to provide a birth certificate, be able to demonstrate he was not a criminal, and certify that he was not obliged to complete military service. He would then make a written or verbal request to the prefect for a passport. In order for the prefect to issue the passport, he needed the completed passport request from the migrant and the *nulla osta* issued by the mayor. Once the correct paperwork was submitted, if approved, the prefect issued the passport. Until the 1901 law, a passport cost 2.40 lire, but after the law was passed it was free and valid for three years.

The prefect was a key local figure involved in the process of emigration. He issued passports but also received warnings against emigration to certain places, and passed that news along to local authorities. For example, in 1879 the prefect of Potenza issued a warning against emigration to Greece because of word that people could not find jobs and were living in misery and poverty. The prefect also communicated regularly with Rome, keeping up-to-date with the latest information and news regarding emigration. After 1901, government officials could stay better informed through the memos and publications from the Commissariato Generale dell’Emigrazione, and its primary publication the *Bollettino dell’Emigrazione*.

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47 Archivio di Stato di Potenza, Pubblica Sicurezza, Cat. 6, Busta 40.
48 Ibid.
49 Ibid. The introduction of compulsory military service for all young men was an important change after Unification. Once a young male reached eighteen years of age, he was required to report to the local military office, where he would be examined and given a designation based on his ability to serve. Many looked upon this as a way to ‘make Italians,’ to forge a sense of nationalism and create unity among younger generations. This imposition was, however, resisted by many Southern Italians for a long time.
51 The 1901 law will be discussed later in the chapter.
52 Archivio di Stato di Potenza, Pubblica Sicurezza, Cat. 6, Busta 40.
Not everyone could easily obtain a passport. Married women needed the permission of their husbands. Usually, the male head of the family obtained a passport which was valid for all members. Women also had important information about their civil status in their passport.

According to the *Bollettino dell’Emigrazione*:

“it is necessary that on the first page of the passport, after the name of the holder, there follows an indication of her marital status: if she is single or married, and whether or not her husband is deceased. This indication is essential because in some foreign countries women are rejected when they disembark if they cannot prove their marital status. The United States for example, rejects pregnant women who cannot prove they are lawfully married.”

These laws pertaining to women follow a paternalistic pattern and were meant to prevent them from becoming a public charge or turning to prostitution. In some cases, a spouse could oppose the issuing of a passport to the other spouse, and if the objection was legally sound the nulla osta would be suspended. Thus, spousal objections were another potential obstacle to emigration.

Not all men received passports either. As mentioned prior, young men with military obligations could not emigrate. In addition, men with personal debts or obligations were not issued a passport. One man from Potenza, requested a passport in 1881, but was denied because he had debts and still owed payment for forest damages from 1877. People who were owed debts could inform the mayor and prevent him from issuing a passport to the debtor. A man from the town of Sasso Castalda wrote to the mayor telling him not to grant a nulla osta for two individuals because they were indebted to him. In this particular case, the nulla osta was not granted and the passport was not issued.

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54 “Atti del ministero degli affari esteri e del comissariato dell’emigrazione,” *Bollettino dell’Emigrazione*, n.9 (1905): 709-710.
55 All men had to report for military duty at 18 years of age.
56 Archivio di Stato di Potenza, Pubblica Sicurezza, Cat. 6, Busta 40.
57 Ibid.
Overall, because of restrictions and legal limitations, the number of passports released was far fewer than those actually requested. For example, between 1911 and 1912, 290 people in the province of Potenza requested a passport for Argentina. Of those 290, only 156 were finally issued, a bit more than half. These numbers are low compared to other regions. For example, in Bari (Puglia) 562 passports were requested for the same period for Argentina and 433 were granted. In Catania (Sicily), 483 were requested and 336 granted. And in Reggio Calabria (Calabria), 247 were requested and 154 were granted.\textsuperscript{58} These numbers also demonstrate that overall fewer people were emigrating from Basilicata, as its population was lower than neighboring regions.

Registers were kept in each commune with information about the number of passports issued and to whom. These books are a key source in counting the number of emigrants from each town. However, these registers do not take into account emigrazione clandestina. Clandestine emigration was defined by the Italian government in 1903 as “he who ‘with lies and deception’ embarks at a foreign port eluding Italian regulations which control emigration.”\textsuperscript{59} Although there may have been a number of reasons why someone would illegally attempt to emigrate, some of these emigrants could have been criminals escaping justice or young men trying to escape military service. In 1904, the Bollettino dell’Emigrazione warned that the exact number of clandestine emigrants cannot be counted, but there were many.\textsuperscript{60}

Besides inaccurate numbers because of emigrazione clandestina, passport registers may also have multiple entries for one person. Someone could have applied for and have been issued a passport, but decided not to leave and reapplied at a later date. “Birds of passage,” those who traveled back and forth between Italy and another country, required a new passport every three

\textsuperscript{58} Archivio Centrale dello Stato. Polizia Giudiziaria, Busta 290.  
\textsuperscript{59} Falvella, “Flussi migratori della Basilicata,” 90.  
\textsuperscript{60} “Tutela e protezione degli emigranti,” Bollettino dell’Emigrazione, n. 11 (1904): 47.
years. In addition, when browsing through passport registers, it is also impossible to know whether or not emigrants planned to stay abroad for a short, temporary time period, or remain abroad permanently and settle there. Prospective emigrants were asked at the time the passport was issued what their intentions were, but the answer was not always accurate or could have changed. The only way to tell whether or not people were leaving temporarily or permanently was to count who returned.61 Migrants may have also intended to return, but for one reason or another changed their minds while abroad and never came back to Italy.

Once the passport was issued, emigrants had to travel to the port of departure. For Lucanians, that port was most likely Naples. By 1910, Naples was the largest port of emigration in Italy, with twelve steamship companies servicing it.62 From Potenza and towns in the western part of Basilicata, migrants could travel to Naples by railroad. The building up of infrastructure in Basilicata aided emigrants in traveling to their port of departure. Prior to 1860, bad railroad connections were an obstacle to the development and use of the port of Naples by residents of Basilicata.63 Government investment led to improved rail lines by the 1860s, especially in the South, in an attempt to connect rural towns with urban centers and the rest of Italy. New rail lines facilitated travel within Basilicata during this period. By the late 1860s, a rail line was completed which connected Metaponto, Potenza and Eboli, and ran to Salerno and Naples.64 By 1880, the railroad connected Naples, Salerno, Potenza and Metaponto, and five years later a line was completed connecting Taranto, Metaponto and Reggio Calabria.65 The journey for many

emigrants traveling from Basilicata to Naples for departure became much quicker. Once in Naples, migrants would wait for their ship’s departure in boarding houses which were supervised and subsidized by the government.

Before boarding the ships, officials completed manifests and conducted medical examinations. Anyone boarding steerage on a ship going to the United States underwent a medical exam. Italian doctors, working for the United States Public Health and Marine-Hospital Service, conducted these exams at the port of departure. The Americans took these extra steps to ensure only healthy immigrants were coming into the country, and the Italian government permitted these doctors to examine emigrants because they were interested in protecting their citizens. Ship companies were even more willing to comply, because if an immigrant was denied entry into the United States, the steam liner was required to pay for the return voyage.66 (Similar procedures were carried out at the ports of Palermo and Messina, which became a departure point for emigrants after 1905, but not at Genoa. People wishing to emigrate had to go to one of these four ports.) Once the manifests were filled out and the passengers received medical clearance, they boarded their ship for America.

Deciding Where to Go

Once Italians made the decision to migrate, the next important step was to choose where to go. In fact, social connections were a major factor in determining where migrants went and what they did. A report conducted by an Immigration Commission in the United States reported that in 1908-1909, 98.7% of Southern Italian immigrants to the U.S. reported they were joining a

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friend or relative already there. These social connections led to chain migration, where people from abroad would send messages and advice back home about work and living opportunities. Clusters of people from the same Italian village in Basilicata lived together in a certain city or neighborhood abroad. For example, people from the town of Avigliano went mostly to New York. Migrants from Cancellara went almost exclusively to Buenos Aires, from Anzi to Cleveland, from Potenza to Denver, from Pignola to Mexico, from Grumento to San Francisco, and from Trivigno to Chicago.

Migrants from the same village often pursued similar professions. For example, eighty percent of the emigrants from Laurenzana were shoe shiners in New York and other big cities in the United States. The town of Viggiano is known for suonatori ambulanti (street musicians) who played the harp and other instruments. People from the town, including children, were found all over the world playing in the streets and peddling for money. At first, these musicians were a majority of the emigrants, but by the early 1900s farmers and entire families also left.

Language barriers, cultural barriers, and economic barriers prevented many emigrants from simply risking it. Thus, they relied on friends, relations and paesani for advice and guidance. Many times, people who had already emigrated and had some success would help others deciding to leave. They would loan family and friends money to pay for their passage, and help them find work and lodging at their final destination. The amount that emigrants relied on each other cannot be underestimated. Everyone was not simply out for himself. Emigrants communicated their experiences to one another, traveled together, worked together, and lived together. Southern Italian values of community are certainly seen in emigration characteristics and patterns.

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67 Ibid., 59.
68 Rossi, “Vantaggi e danni dell'emigrazione nel mezzogiorno d'Italia,” 1562.
69 Ibid., 1565.
In the past, scholars have argued that wages were the major deciding factor in determining the place to which people emigrated. While this argument may seem logical, the data and sources show selecting a destination was more complicated. Enrico Moretti has argued that social connections were more important to emigrants than economics in determining where to migrate. He claimed that migration was a social phenomenon, not an economic one. Emigrants chose where to go not based on high wages or availability of work, but on pre-existing social networks. He shows that large wage differentials had existed between the United States and Southern Italy for almost twenty years prior to large scale emigration. Because of this, Moretti argues we cannot attribute economic reasons as the main cause of emigration. Moretti is correct in arguing that not purely economics motivated emigrants, yet he fails to consider other factors that may have affected emigration, such as the political situation in Italy before unification, and the difficulty of trans-Atlantic travel before the 1860s. In sum, there is no one reason why people migrated. Based on statistics, migration trends, passport registers, and socio-economic conditions, the decision to emigrate was multifaceted and differed from family to family.

As for the destination, emigrants from Basilicata, similar to many Southern Italian migrants, tended to go to the Americas rather than France, Germany, or other European countries, which were preferred locations for northern Italian emigrants. According to the U.S. Immigration Commission, 90% of emigrants from Basilicata, Calabria, Campania, and Sicily went overseas. Steam powered ships for transporting emigrants were in use by the mid-1860s.

making the journey to America quicker than ever before (about 10 days) and cheaper than going north to Europe. By the 1870s, it cost Southern Italians less to travel to America by ship than to France by land. The ports of Naples, Palermo, and after 1905, Messina, all serviced passenger ships carrying emigrants. Genoa also serviced passenger ships and until 1900 it was the busiest Italian port. With the shift to large scale emigration from the South, by 1901 double the amount of people left from Naples than Genoa. After 1900, only about 35% of emigrants left from Genoa. By the turn of the century, Naples and Palermo were the busiest ports servicing emigrant passenger ships. As mentioned before, most people from Basilicata went through Naples, which became a thriving port city as a result of emigration.

Italian immigrants went to countries in South America, including Argentina, Brazil, Peru, Chile, Venezuela, and Bolivia. South America was a practical destination for many emigrants because the language barrier was easier to overcome. For Italians, learning Spanish or even Brazilian Portuguese (both Romance languages) was easier than English. In many areas of South America, finding work in agriculture or in industrial jobs was relatively easy for Italian laborers. Favorable legislation passed in many South American countries also benefitted immigrants. Both Brazil and Paraguay had laws encouraging immigration and offered to pay for travel and lodging until immigrants arrived at their final destination. Argentina and Uruguay also had favorable laws which gave immigrants land and loans at very low interest. For the people of Basilicata, Argentina and Brazil were the top destinations. In the late 19th century, thousands boarded ships headed for South America. According to the Commissariato Generale

73 Franc Sturino, Forging the Chain: A Case Study of Italian Migration to North America 1880-1930 (Toronto: Multicultural History Society of Toronto, 1990), 61.
74 Michele Colucci, and Matteo Sanfilippo, eds. Guido allo Studio dell’Emigrazione Italiana, (Viterbo: Sette Città, 2010); 33-34.
76 Ibid., 240.
dell’Emigrazione, of the 10,797 emigrants leaving Basilicata in 1900, 47% went to the United States, 29% went to Argentina and 24% went to Brazil.77 By 1888, still early in the great wave of Italian emigration, 65% of immigrants in Argentina were Italian, 42% of immigrants in Uruguay were Italian, yet only 9% of immigrants in the United States were Italian.78 Thus, South America appealed to many Italians, especially before the turn of the century.

The conditions in Argentina were ideal for welcoming immigrants. The country had a growing industrial economy, and vast expanses of land to distribute. In the years before Italian unification, many migrants from Liguria and other Northern regions had gone to Argentina. This began to change after Unification, when more and more Southern migrants began arriving. The Republic of Argentina established friendly relations with the newly formed Kingdom of Italy and promised to protect immigrants in its country. In the 1860s and 1870s, Argentina experienced a period of expansion, and laborers were needed to build infrastructure and to work the land.79 Argentina welcomed Italian immigrants, and as a way to entice them, a 1876 law offered them free board for a week, free train tickets to their final destination, and land to facilitate their arrival and settlement into the country.80

By 1914, two million Italians emigrated to Argentina.81 Between 1830 and 1950, over 3.5 million Italians migrated there, initially more from the North, and by the turn of the century more from the South.82 By 1925, 91,386 people from Basilicata lived in Argentina, and they made up 4.3% of the overall population there.83 A migrant from Basilicata pointed out how in

78 Ministero degli Affari Esteri, Archivio Storico, Divisione I, Sezione II, 26 Jul 1888.
81 Corti and Sanfilippo, L’Italia e le migrazioni (Rome: Laterza, 2012), 96.
82 Devoto, “In Argentina,” 25.
83 Francesco Lafranceschina, “I Lucani in Argentina, Brasile e Cile,” 75.
neighborhoods of Buenos Aires, Italy was present in its signs, stores, food, churches, people, and culture. Nicola Lisanti, a contemporary author of an article on migrants from Basilicata wrote, “it was said that in the Argentine capital, along with the scent of the sea, one breathes the air of Italy.”

Brazil also had favorable conditions by the late 19th century and attracted immigrants who wanted to settle and find fortune in the country. Italians helped slaves work in the fields and cultivate coffee. After slavery was abolished in 1888, the need for cheap labor increased. This, combined with industrialization, made Brazil an ideal destination for migrants looking for work and their own piece of land. In the first decades after unification, many from Basilicata migrated there. While overall Brazil took in fewer immigrants than Argentina and the United States, large Italian neighborhoods developed. According to statistics cited by migration historian Donna Gabaccia, between 1870 and 1920, 42% of immigrants in Brazil were Italian, although a majority were from northern Italy.

Emigrants to Brazil in the late 19th century nevertheless worked under terrible conditions, which had dire consequences for many. According to an article by Francesco Lafranceschina in Basilicata Regione Notizie, the cases of suicide and madness among emigrants were four times more frequent than those cases registered among local residents. Lafranceschina writes that “they leave to “make a fortune’ and to ensure their children a better future, but besides a lucky few who manage to assert themselves in new lands, many are doomed to suffering, and many to desperation and death.” Thus, despite a great amount of opportunity and assistance, not all immigration stories were success stories, and many were filled with adversity and failure.

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85 Corti and Tirabassi, eds, Racconti dal Mondo, xi.
86 Nitti, Scritti Sulla Questione Meridionale, 323.
87 Corti and Sanfilippo, L’Italia e le migrazioni (Rome: Laterza, 2012), 97.
88 Francesco Lafranceschina, “I Lucani in Argentina, Brasile e Cile,” 77-78.
situation was not unique to Brazil, as Italian immigrants in all locations faced challenges and hardships.

While a high percentage of Italians migrated to South America in the years prior to 1900, after the turn of the century the number of emigrants traveling to New York and cities in North America began to increase and overtake the numbers from South America. Millions of Italian migrants, and thousands from Basilicata, went to the United States. Since its founding, the U.S. has been a country of immigrants, and the Italians began coming in large numbers by the late 1800s. In the 19th century, the U.S. had few restrictions on immigration. In 1875, a law prevented known convicts from entering the country, and a 1882 law prohibited entry of anyone who was likely to become a public charge (ex: criminals, the mentally ill, single women travelling alone). By 1891, officials fearing the arrival and spread of infectious diseases added a medical exam for arriving immigrants.89 Ellis Island, which opened in 1892, was the most well-known point of entry for immigrants to the United States, although steam ships carrying Italian immigrants also went to Boston, Baltimore, Philadelphia, New Orleans, and many other ports. Upon arrival, the Bureau of Immigration divided Italian immigrants into two races: Northern and Southern, stigmatizing Southern Italians and categorizing them as racially inferior to Northerners. If they passed the medical exam and had no other impediments, they were allowed to enter the United States. Overall Italian immigration to the United States peaked after 1900. According to the Statistical Review of Immigration, in 1880, 12,354 Italian immigrants arrived to the U.S. By 1890, that number was up to 52,003, by 1900 the number was 100,135 and by 1910 there were 215,537 yearly Italian immigrants to the U.S.90 By 1900, 1/4 of all Italian

90 Ibid., 137.
immigrants were living in New York, but large Italian communities existed in New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Ohio, Massachusetts, Illinois, and Louisiana.  

**Government Response and Legal Limitations**

Italian laws regulating emigration changed drastically over the course of the late 19th and early 20th century, from barely any oversight to complete government intervention in the process. Yet one constant throughout this period was a commitment to Liberal principles and individual liberties, which included freedom to emigrate. The increasing number of emigrants, the enormous economic benefit of emigration because of remittances, and the budding interest of the state in the millions of citizens who were leaving the country, especially in the post-unification period, were major causes for the government’s radical shift.

In the years after Italian Unification in 1861, the government was still trying to incorporate the diverse regions of the peninsula into one state. A lack of knowledge and a great deal of misunderstanding about the South persisted. Thus initially, the state did not look favorably upon emigration from the South, and many viewed it as an escape for criminals and vagrants, especially brigands. Others argued that emigrants were young men who wanted to escape compulsory military service. Officials felt that it tarnished the image of the new state. According to historian Richard Bosworth, emigration undermined the government and tested its legitimacy.  

In the years following Unification and before major emigration legislation, people emigrated at their own risk, and the government was not responsible for oversight.  

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91 Ibid.
was “tolerated” by the government, and it rarely intervened in the process. The state was slow to change its position. Discussions about emigration began to increase by the 1870s, as Parliament debated how much the government should intervene, but little was resolved. A circular from January of 1873 shows the attitude of the government as it encouraged prefects and mayors to dissuade emigrants and to give “suitable advice so as to discourage dangerous illusions.” In 1876, the government began keeping statistics of emigrants, and as the growing number became apparent, the issue could no longer be pushed aside or ignored by Rome. The first piece of major legislation regarding emigration was passed in 1888, and a subsequent, more comprehensive law passed in 1901. Each of these laws reflected the politics at the time and demonstrated a shift in government interest which overlapped with an ever increasing rate of emigration, especially from the Southern regions. This shift also coincided with the arrival of large sums of remittances, which many considered a possible solution to the economic and social problems of the South.

The Crispi Law, passed on December 30, 1888 (n. 5866), was the first major response by the state to large scale emigration. Francesco Crispi, himself from Sicily, played a key role in the passing of the legislation, and the law was based on his view of the positive effects of emigration, especially for economic improvement in Italy. This view on emigration was still quite rare from those in Rome at the time. The law called for government intervention in the regulation of the emigration process, even though it was not meant to encourage emigration.

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96 Francesco Crispi was Prime Minister from 1887-1891 and then again from 1893-1896. Much of his first term dealt with social and economic issues, such as the penal code, prison reform, emigration law, and an overhaul of public health and welfare. (see Christopher Duggan, “Politics in the Era of Depretis and Crispi, 1870-96,” in John A. Davis, ed, Italy in the Nineteenth Century: 1796-1900, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 174); Ostuni, “Leggi e politiche di governo nell’Italia liberale e fascista,” 310.
The law confirmed the freedom of Italians to emigrate, yet there were some restrictions. Married women needed the permission of their husbands to emigrate. Young men needing to fulfill military service obligations were not issued a passport, especially if officials suspected they were emigrating to avoid military service. If young men appeared for service and were placed in the 3rd category, they were allowed to obtain a passport, but they were obligated to be present when they were called to be examined by the military office. Criminals or those who had to serve a prison sentence were also prohibited from emigrating.

A major concern of the law was to prevent prospective emigrants from being duped by malicious agents looking to profit off their naivety. Thus, it placed controls over the activities of emigration agents.97 These agents profited off the ignorance of the emigrants, making false promises and cajoling people to pay for services never received. Others lent money to prospective emigrants and charged high rates of interest. A letter from the mayor of Savoia di Lucania to the prefect elucidated his concerns, saying that those who decided to emigrate desperately took loans from speculators who charged very high interest rates.98 The law aimed to protect emigrants in these circumstances by ensuring that all emigration agents were licensed by the government. Any agent acting as an intermediary between emigrants and steamship companies was required to obtain a license. This included emigration agents and those who sold tickets to emigrants.99 The cost of a license was high, which prevented just anyone from obtaining one, and even some who had worked in the business before the law could not afford a license to continue working.100

98 Archivio di Stato di Potenza, Pubblica Sicurezza, Cat. 6, Busta 40.
99 Legge 31 gennaio 1901 n. 23 sull’emigrazione, Art. 2.
The 1888 law aimed primarily to prevent emigration agents from taking advantage of the people. Yet, its main focus was on the initial phases of emigration, buying a ticket and transporting people to ports of departure; the protection of emigrants once they boarded the ships and departed Italian soil was left to chance. Thus, fewer recourses existed for emigrants once abroad, where citizens lacked the protection of the Italian government.

At the time the Crispi Law was passed, emigration was still very much increasing. Thirteen years later, a new law was passed on January 31, 1901, which again redefined the state’s role in emigration. This legislation was much more comprehensive, and it could be argued, more paternalistic, than previous legislation. The government took a greater role in the overall process of emigration, focusing on protecting migrants through all phases of the journey from buying a ticket, leaving the village, boarding the vessel at the port of embarkation, and arrival abroad. Coinciding with many other pieces of progressive legislation of the Giolitti era (1901-1914), the law focused on direct management of emigration by the government, protecting emigrants, and making the journey secure.\footnote{Choate, \textit{Emigrant Nation}, 60.}

The 1901 law defined an emigrant as, “the citizen who goes to countries beyond the Suez Canal, excluding colonies and Italian protectorates, or countries located beyond the Strait of Gibraltar, excluding the coasts of Europe, travelling in third class or equivalent.”\footnote{Legge 31 gennaio 1901 n. 23 sull’emigrazione, Capo 2, Art 6.} The law reiterated that emigration was free for all, except for those with military obligations, or those who had to serve a prison sentence. Passports were to be issued quickly, within 24 hours of the request, and the law eliminated many of the intermediaries that tended to fool or swindle
prospective emigrants.\textsuperscript{103} It reiterated that only those licensed by the state could advertise and sell tickets to emigrants.\textsuperscript{104}

The law also addressed the issue of emigrating minors. Schemes set up by traffickers and scammers to pay families for young children to work abroad were not uncommon in the years after unification.\textsuperscript{105} These professions were outlawed and the agents promoting them were mostly eliminated by 1900. However, the 1901 emigration law did address children workers, and made it illegal to send minors abroad for work.\textsuperscript{106}

The 1901 law shifted responsibility for emigration from the interior ministry to the foreign ministry (Ministero degli Affari Esteri), giving it power to limit or suspend emigration to certain places for reasons of public order or if there existed a specific danger posed to emigrants.\textsuperscript{107} The creation of the Commissariato Generale dell’Emigrazione (CGE) was an important part of the legislation. This agency helped emigrants in all facets of the journey, from buying the ticket in their home village to searching for work through contacts and agencies abroad, and all the processes in between.\textsuperscript{108} The law stipulated that an inspector of emigration be placed at all the ports of embarkation, Naples, Genoa and Palermo, and the carrier was responsible for any damages to emigrants.\textsuperscript{109}

The 1901 law also created the \textit{Bollettino dell’Emigrazione}, which became the means of correspondence and dissemination of information relating to emigration within the CGE.\textsuperscript{110}

Published between 1902 and running until 1928, the \textit{Bollettino dell’Emigrazione} helped workers

\textsuperscript{103} Ibid., Capo 1, Art 5.
\textsuperscript{104} Ibid., Capo 2, Art 13.
\textsuperscript{105} known as “fanciulli girovaghi”-see Chapter 4
\textsuperscript{106} Legge 31 gennaio 1901 n. 23 sull’emigrazione, Capo 1, Art 2.
\textsuperscript{107} Ibid., Capo 1, Art 1.
\textsuperscript{108} Ibid., Capo 2, Art 7.
\textsuperscript{109} Ibid., Capo 2, Art 24.
\textsuperscript{110} There was no set publication schedule with number of issues per year. Many years it was published more than once a month.
of the agency stay abreast of the latest emigration information, statistics, and warnings so they could pass that information on to the appropriate officials.

The law also made the Banco di Napoli the official institution for sending and receiving remittances. This facilitated the process for emigrants who were sending money home. In 1901, the Banco di Napoli opened a branch in New York, and within a few years the bank had over 70 affiliated branches in the Americas, Africa, and Europe.¹¹¹ This network of banks made it easy and reliable for emigrants to transfer money. Financial institutions could also keep track of the official money flow back to Italy. By 1907, over 550 million lire were sent back to Italy from abroad.¹¹² The establishment of the Banco di Napoli as the official bank of remittances was yet another way that the 1901 emigration law protected emigrants even after they had left Italy.

The 1901 legislation capped a radical shift in state policy toward emigration. Within a little less than thirty years, the state went from having little to no interest in emigration, to taking on a paternalistic and protective role. Casimira Grandi contends that in the time between the two laws, the government attitude clearly shifted, and emigration became more political.¹¹³ Samuel Baily argues that the 1888 law treated emigration as a private decision, with the role of the state as eliminating abuses, but by 1901, state oversight increased.¹¹⁴ The state took years to recognize the effects of emigration, both on its people and its economy. While initially the state was not favorable to emigration because it reflected the inability of the government to help its own people and was considered a source of shame, as emigration increased the state had little choice but to accept the reality of this nationwide phenomenon and pass legislation to intervene and assist migrants.

¹¹¹ Choate, Emigrant Nation, 61.
¹¹² Cited in Bosworth, Italy and the Wider World, 118.
¹¹³ Grandi, Donne Fuori Posto, 30.
¹¹⁴ Baily, Immigrants in the Land of Promise, 52.
By the turn of the century, fears of too much emigration also began to spread, both among local officials and those in the government. Some recognized the benefits of emigration, and government officials began to view emigration as a solution to the Southern Question. Not only did it relieve the overpopulation that drove down the wages for many day laborers in the South, but millions of lire were added into the economy, benefitting many areas of the South. Yet, at the same time, in many towns of Basilicata, it must have seemed as if everyone was leaving to test their luck in America. Migrants had little to lose in Italy and everything to gain abroad. For some, emigration was a necessity. Probably, the most influential reason pushing people to emigrate was the success stories they saw among their paesani. After leaving for America, many sent back money and within a few years even returned themselves with large savings.

Conclusion

This chapter began with an examination of the present state of historiography in migration studies as it specifically relates to Italian history and Basilicata. It then looked at the emigrant experience from two different angles: from that of the emigrants and then from that of the government. As demonstrated in this chapter, the decision to emigrate was not easy, and was filled with uncertainties and risks. Leaving the comfort of family and home required courage, resourcefulness, and strength. Yet, some factors may have made the decision easier for some: friends or relatives who were already settled and established abroad, work opportunities, support from the family at home, and the safety net of the Church and local community. These facts helped persuade perspective migrants and push them to make a decision about when to leave and where to go. Despite legal barriers and the need for legal documentation, most people were

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115 Cinel, The National Integration of Italian Return Migration, 3-4.
issued a passport if requested, regardless of profession or social status. The government view of migration changed from the years following Unification into the early 1900s, becoming much more accepting and protective of emigrants. In the midst of this evolving stance on emigration, the government steadfastly upheld the values of the Liberal period, namely freedom to emigrate, which was reflected in the major legislation of 1888 and 1901. These laws also show emigration following other political trends, such as the growing welfare state and paternalistic government protections. This chapter has shown the factors that went into making the decision to migrate. The following chapter will focus specifically on women, their role in Italy at the time, the role they played in the emigration process, and how being wives and mothers impacted their position in regards to emigration.
Chapter 4: Italian Women: Everyday Life and Emigration

Rosa Maria C. married Giovanni C in 1896 in the town of Picerno, just outside of Potenza. Like a typical late 19th century Italian married couple, they quickly began having children. A first son, Rocco, was born in 1897, but died the following year. A daughter, Lucia, was born in 1899 (she lived into adulthood). During this time, the family made a decision: Giovanni would emigrate. In 1903, he traveled to Naples and boarded a steamship for New York. Rosa Maria was left on her own, and gave birth to their third child, Maria Giuseppa, while her husband was in New York. Giovanni returned later in the year, only to depart again in December of 1904. He had returned to Picerno by late 1907, as a son, Donato, was born in June of 1908. Giovanni left the family again for New York in 1909, and returned by late 1911, nine months before the next child, Antonietta, was born in 1912. The following year, he emigrated for a fourth time to New York. Eventually he returned to his family in Picerno, and lived the rest of his life in his home village.

This story of family and emigration is a typical scenario of what wives and mothers experienced in Basilicata during this period of emigration. Rosa Maria married Giovanni at about twenty, but unlike her mother or women in earlier generations, her marriage was characterized by her husband emigrating for months at a time. He was a “bird of passage,” travelling back and forth between New York and Basilicata, working to save up and provide for his family while abroad, and then continuing to build that family when he returned. Rosa Maria had to adapt to living, raising her children, and managing the household on her own with her husband away for long periods of time. She provides the perfect example of what life was like for married women who remained behind. As seen in the previous chapter, those emigrating
went through a lengthy process from making the decision to emigrate, obtaining a passport, deciding where to go, saying goodbye to family and friends, travelling to the final destination, and possibly even returning to Italy. This process encompassed everyone, even women, as emigration was often a family decision.

This chapter will outline the role of women in Italy in the late 19th and early 20th century, and explain the position of those like Rosa Maria in this period, who had to deal with certain legal and social restrictions. It will also unravel the many layers and complexities of life and society for women of Basilicata. While emigration may have benefitted the family financially and allowed for a more comfortable life, it challenged traditional gender roles within the family and the household. As will be seen in this and the following chapters, women as wives and mothers took on responsibilities crucial to the survival of the home and family. Emigration for the thousands of married men of the region would not have been possible if it were not for their wives’ cooperation at home.

I will begin the chapter by reviewing the scholarship on women and gender in Italian history, particularly as it relates to migration. Historians, anthropologists, and other scholars have seen Southern Italian women as contributing to long existing stereotypes, yet this masks the reality of the crucial role women played both in everyday life and in the migration process. I then discuss the role of women in Italy after unification, and use the stages in their lives as an organizational tool to discuss their expected role and how emigration impacted each stage. I also discuss child migration in depth in this chapter, as it was a phenomenon that greatly affected many mothers of Basilicata in particular and adds another often unexplored dimension to our understanding of the role of women in the emigration process. Finally, I will briefly examine the
role of the church with respect to emigration and how its presence aided and supported women and families who remained behind in Basilicata.

In addition to a review of some of the key secondary sources and work of the most important scholars in the field of Italian women’s history, this chapter considers an array of primary sources. To demonstrate the legal position of women in Italy, I refer to various post-unification legal codes, including the Civil Code of 1865 and the Penal Code of 1889, as well as subsequent legislation relating to women. The *Bollettino dell’Emigrazione* continues to be a rich source for firsthand accounts of the emigration process, as well as *La Stampa, Civiltà Cattolica*, and contemporary reports from the Immigration Commission. My argument in this chapter also depends on archival material. Notary records are used to show the powers and limitations women had in terms of managing their possessions, when single, married, or widowed. This chapter also considers documents from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Prefecture of Potenza, including specific requests made by women about husbands and family abroad.

In discussing the role of women in late 19th and early 20th century Italy, a particular aim of this chapter is to address layers of assumptions about Southern Italian women. In this period, women were legally characterized as second class citizens. Thus, the women in Basilicata were doubly stigmatized both as Southern and female. I will argue that the lens of emigration is an effective tool to prove that these stereotypes and assumptions are inaccurate. My research demonstrates that women played a major role in the emigration process, and were not passive and powerless, despite their subordinate legal and social position. This chapter will also further a main overall argument of this dissertation, that even though the legal role of married women was very restricted and did not change during the period covered in this dissertation, their practical role in everyday life altered immensely due to emigration.
Historiography of Italian Women and Migration

As discussed in Chapter 1, scholars had long neglected women’s history in Italy, particularly in the modern period. Typically, studies of Italian women have focused on the early modern period (or prior), or they were incorporated into general studies on marriage and the family. With the expansion of the field of women’s history, scholars began examining the role that women played in migrations and migratory movements. This section will examine the historiography of women and emigration in Italy. Overall, this dissertation will fill a major gap in both of these areas by addressing those who remained behind, a topic that has been lacking in research, especially in the region of Basilicata.

The typical framework for migration studies had been that men left first and women followed, with little regard for those who remained behind. This had been the image of women in emigration: men are the protagonists and women follow.\textsuperscript{1} This model also assumes men made the decisions and women blindly and passively followed along.\textsuperscript{2} Newer studies, including this dissertation, are now deconstructing these old assumptions in order to show that emigration was multifaceted and each family situation differed.

Scholars have characterized emigrants as a collective group and have placed little focus on individual experience until quite recently (see Chapter 3). In showing more interest in female migration, historians have challenged the idea of women as passive in the emigration process and have shown that emigration was a family strategy and was a means for survival.\textsuperscript{3} Franco Ramella has shown that with men gone, women had to take on new responsibilities. Maddalena

\textsuperscript{1} “Introduzione” in Donne e Uomini Migranti: storie e geografie tra breve e lunga distanza, eds. Angiolina Arru, Daniela Luigia Caglioti and Franco Ramella (Rome: Donzelli, 2008), xx-xxi.
\textsuperscript{2} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{3} Jonathan Dunnage, Twentieth Century Italy: A Social History (New York: Pearson, 2002), 14.
Tirabassi concurs, arguing that women allowed men to emigrate but they administered remittances, paid debts, and even followed their husband abroad if called to do so. She argued that all members of the family were involved in this collective project, and the decision making was all about strategy. She further points out that the overall low percentage of women in emigration statistics should not be a reason to ignore their contribution to the family migration.

Casimira Grandi argued that women migrants were hidden from the “Grande Storia” and that theirs is “la storia senza voce,” meaning they have been considered subaltern and their story had not been told. Her work and the work of others, such as Andreina de Clemente and Paola Corti, intends to change this perception and to understand migration from the female perspective, whether they were emigrants themselves or remaining behind.

One perspective of new research on the female role in migration is that of women in the home, rather than as laborers or workers. Paola Corti was one of the first to write about these women in the early 1990s when she examined the effects of emigration on peasant family structure and relations. She continues to write about emigration, incorporating gender in order to understand essential elements of migration, and gauge the impact it had on peasant family

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structure and relations. Casimira Grandi also writes about those who stayed behind, arguing that return migrants had a changed relationship with the women who remained.

More recently, Linda Reeder’s work has done a great deal to add to the scholarship on the women who remained behind, who were called “widows in white.” In one of the only books of its kind, she examines the influence of emigration on women remaining in Sicily and the empowering effects it had on them politically and economically. She also argues that emigration forced women into the classroom, more so than state laws/reforms ever did, so they could learn to read and write, a crucial skill in order to communicate with relatives abroad. Reeder also argues that women had an economic, familial, and emotional investment in making the decision to migrate. She argues “women who remained in Sutera were not left behind, but rather chose to stay home and watch over the family’s interests.” Interestingly, she also found evidence of letters of women refusing to join husband overseas, showing that women did not always approve of the decision to emigrate. Reeder’s is also one of the first studies to examine rural women, a field that has little historical scholarship. Branching off from Reeder’s work, this dissertation adds to the growing recognition and inclusion of women, especially rural Southern women, as active participants in the emigration process even though they remained at home.

Another area of scholarship examines the possible negative effects of women remaining behind, both real or imagined. Donna Gabaccia points out that officials saw these “widows in

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10 Paola Corti, Temi e problemi di storia delle migrazioni italiane (Viterbo, Sette Città, 2013), 63-64; Paola Corti, “Donne che vanno, donne che restano.”
11 Grandi, Donne Fuori Posto, 12.
12 Also called “vedove bianche,” this was a label for married women in Italy whose husbands have emigrated and are living abroad. They often see their husbands rarely, so it is as if they were widowed, even if they really weren’t. See: Reeder, Widows in White
14 Reeder, “When the Men Left Sutera,” 53.
white” as more of a threat to public morality than actual widows, because oftentimes thousands of young, newly married women would be left at home without the protection of their husbands.\(^\text{15}\) Many feared these women would turn to immoral behavior, which would lead to a breakdown of morals and family structure. Yet, Gabaccia provides statistics to argue that in Sicily, illegitimate births and infanticides did not increase in this period as a result of emigration.\(^\text{16}\)

The idea of widows in white is an apt label, but as I will show later, these women were not in the same circumstances as legal widows, who had fewer legal limitations. The label also gives the sense that these women were abandoned and on their own. For many, this was not the case, as their husbands sent money while abroad and would eventually return. Many also had their natal families nearby. Thus, even studies of the women who remained behind fall into stereotyping, which I aim to avoid in this dissertation.

Newer studies on gender also focus on emotions and the intimate and the role they play in nation building. An edited volume by Loretta Baldassar and Donna Gabaccia uses this approach to add another perspective to the historiography on Italian female migrants. By focusing on the domestic and cultural, intimate activities and practices, the authors forward the idea that citizenship and belonging to the nation do not have to be forged solely in the public sphere, but women could contribute to expressions of nationalism through the practice of culture.\(^\text{17}\) This approach challenges the stereotype of women confined to the home and the private sphere,

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16 Ibid., 88.
disconnected from the state, and supports my argument that women participated in civic activities and felt a connection to the nation, even if legally denied political rights.

A survey of recent scholarship demonstrates that women’s involvement is becoming an increasingly important topic in studies on Italian migration. Women are no longer considered an invisible group or as playing a marginal role, but an active part in the decision and process of emigration, even if they remained behind. This dissertation will continue in this line of scholarship, arguing that women did in fact play a crucial role in emigration, and that their role was just as central as that of men.

**Women in Italy**

In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, women held a subordinate position in Italy as in most other European nations. They were considered weak and inferior, in need of protection and guidance from male family members, and even the state. Social customs, political structures, and legislation centered around the patriarchal idea of women in the private sphere as mothers in the home, and they were denied many of the same rights that men enjoyed. This section examines the role of women in Italy between 1880 and 1914 and does so using the life stages for southern Italian women in Basilicata. Each section also considers how emigration may have affected that phase in a woman’s life.

**Childhood and Youth**

This section will cover the lives of young girls in Basilicata from birth to marriage age, about their late teenage years/early twenties. A young girl growing up in Basilicata would typically be one of a number of children, educated to work in the home in order to help her
family and to one day have a family of her own. Few children had a childhood as we know it today. Children in the 19th century were treated like small adults, with the expectation of being useful around the house and contributing to the family economy. Although this image of children was beginning to change by the late 19th century as more attention was given to their care and upbringing, this new mentality was slow to arrive in the Italian South.18

Infant mortality was high in Basilicata, both after the first month, and after the first year of life.19 According to Anna Maria Gatti, 24% of children in Basilicata between 1863 and 1870 died before the age of one. (The number for Italy as a whole was 22%.) That number went down to 15% in Basilicata by 1921, and 12% for Italy.20 The lack of medical professionals and facilities in the region left most without proper medical care, attributing to high mortality rates. It was not uncommon for women to give birth to upwards of five to ten children, and yet for only two or three to survive to adulthood. Rosa’s family fits this pattern.

In Basilicata, married couples generally lived in a nuclear family, rather than in a larger family group, as was more common in the North of Italy. According to the Legal Code, the husband was the father and head of the household, the wife and all the children were subordinate, and he was responsible for their care and protection.

Many peasant families, whether large or small, lived in small houses with little furniture and few modern comforts. William Beauclerk, travelling through Basilicata, noted that the houses were poor and that infants and even older children often slept with their parents in the

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same beds.21 His observations show children grew up in poor peasant households and shared limited space with siblings, parents, and even animals/livestock.

If children survived past infancy, they were often not sent to school, especially if they were girls. Many were even resistant to education for girls in the region. A report on Basilicata in the national newspaper La Stampa from 1887 stated that a local prejudice against educating women existed amongst traditionalists. The article stated the general notion that “education makes women become mischievous.”22 The popular belief was that girls did not need to attend school. Women learned at home from their mothers, grandmothers, and other female relatives about what tasks needed to be performed in and around the house, skills needed to be a good wife and mother. Women in the agricultural classes worked for their families and then for their husbands.

In the years leading up to unification, the state of Piedmont began to take control of education from the church, which was traditionally responsible for education. Prior to unification, the Casati Law, passed in 1859, made primary education compulsory, and required local towns be responsible for education. This law was applied to all of Italy after unification, although illiteracy continued in many areas. In 1877, the Coppino Law required that children receive schooling up to the age of nine. Unfortunately, the law was largely ineffective in many areas of the South, where parents saw little need for sending their children to school when their

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21 William Nelthorpe Beauclerk, Rural Italy: An Account of the Present Agricultural Condition of the Kingdom (London: Richard Bentley and Son, 1888), 35.
22 “L’istruzione fa divenire la donna maliziosa.” “Un lembo ignorato d’Italia: La Basilicata, VIII” La Stampa, October 7, 1887.
labor could be used in a more productive way.23 British diplomat William Beauclerk noted another impediment to elementary education in the region: not enough qualified teachers.24

Because few children went to school, illiteracy rates were slow to decrease. In 1860, illiteracy in the region was as high as 90%, and it only dropped to 75% in forty years by 1901.25 According to the 1901 census, 74.6% of the population of the province of Potenza was illiterate, with higher rates only in Catanzaro, Cosenza, Reggio Calabria and Teramo.26 By 1911, half of the overall population of the South was still illiterate, while the national illiteracy rate was down to 38% (in Calabria it was 70%, Basilicata 65%, Apulia 60% and Sicily/Sardinia 58%).27

Attitudes about education began to change by the early 20th century when school attendance began to rise, especially for girls. In Basilicata, female school attendance went from 32 per 1000 in 1883-84, to 39.7 in 1901-02.28 Literacy rates at marriage show the effects of a rise in education. In 1872, 96.1% of women contracting marriage in Basilicata were illiterate, compared to 85.9% of men. (The average in Italy for this period was 75.3% illiterate women and 56.2% illiterate men) By 1905, this number had dropped to 77.6% of illiterate women and 61.4% of illiterate men. (The average for Italy was 43.5% illiteracy for females and 30.3% for males).29 These numbers show a changing mindset towards more education and increased literacy for both men and women in Basilicata.

24 Beauclerk, 24.
26 “Tutela degli emigrant in patria e durante il viaggio transatlantico,” Bollettino dell’Emigrazione n.14 (1905).
29 Ibid., 190.
Young unmarried daughters had a key role in the household. As soon as they were old enough, they helped their mothers with household tasks, including taking care of younger siblings. During this period, they learned many of the skills and tasks they would need to one day run their own household. Outside the home, communities were tight-knit and neighbors were usually well aware of what was going on around town. Because men commonly left the village daily for agricultural work or for longer periods to emigrate, women both young and old generally interacted in and around the house and village center. They performed household tasks, went shopping at the market, and met with friends. During these activities they would gossip, perhaps learn of local or national news, and maybe even hear about members of the village who had emigrated. Thus, within the town itself, women were part of a network of information about activities going on both in the village and around the world. Young girls would be part of this community and grow up in this atmosphere.

The role of young women would have taken on a greater significance if their fathers had emigrated, as older children helped their mothers perform household duties and raise younger siblings. By the turn of the century, children in Basilicata were used to their fathers being away for extended periods of time. They would see him as a provider and one to support the family economically through his labor. Teenage girls in Basilicata thinking of marriage would also know that if they got married, their husband might emigrate, leaving them in the same position as their mothers.
**Marriage**

Most women got married, and between 1900 and 1915, approximately 85% of adults in Italy were married.\(^{30}\) As young girls in rural Basilicata, they were under the constant care of their parents and families. This guardianship role passed to their husbands after marriage. Matches were often arranged by parents or through family connections. Marriage ages and statistics in Italy varied according to the year and the region. In general, women married younger in the South, especially in Sicily and in Basilicata. According to the Parliamentary Inquest of 1910, women in Basilicata married between 16 and 21, and men between 24 and 25.\(^{31}\) In all of Italy, the mean age for first marriage was 24 for women and 27.5 for men.\(^{32}\) Thus, women in Basilicata generally married young and began having children shortly after.

Women, especially married women, were legally inferior to men and had very few legal options without the permission of their spouses. The Civil Code of 1865 clearly spelled out subordinate gender roles. At marriage, women lost many of the legal rights they had as single women. The husband was considered the head of the family and the wife was obligated to live wherever the husband chose as the residence.\(^{33}\) Women were limited in making financial and legal transactions, such as taking out a loan or giving consent to a child’s marriage, without the authorization of their husbands.\(^{34}\)

One exception to a married woman’s limitations was the dowry, the property a woman brought to marriage, an important part of Southern Italian marriage customs. For wealthy


\(^{32}\) Livi-Bacci, 99-101.

\(^{33}\) Civil Code of 1865, Title V, Article 131.

\(^{34}\) Ibid., Title V, Article 134.
families, a dowry (dote in Italian) could include land, precious jewels, or even cash. For poorer families, dowries usually consisted of “moveable goods,” such as cloths, sheets, linens, dishes, and utensils. The dowry tied brides to their natal families, and was also to be passed directly to her children, not her spouse. These connections would remain important in this period of large scale emigration and allow wives some independence.

Notary records show the power of (mostly upper class) women and their legal capabilities in the Liberal Period. Married women made wills and left their possessions to the person they wished (usually the husband). Yet, even married women making legal transactions needed authorization. For example, each entry made in the notary records by a married woman contained the words “authorized by her husband.” However, if a woman was unmarried or widowed, no such authorization was needed or stated in the document. Some men were generous to their wives, leaving them in control of their possessions after death. A survey of wills from the town of Ferrandina between 1900 and 1909 shows that most married men who made a will left everything to their wives (if living). This shows that husbands deemed their wives capable of managing their money and property once they passed on. This same trust was placed in women by emigrating men. Many of them depended on their wives to manage their house and finances while they were away. This confidence was what allowed many men to leave, knowing they could rely on their wives to look after their interests. While the Civil Code

36 “autorizata da suo marito.”
37 Atti Notarili, Ferrandina vol 15 1888 Jan-dec 31 notaio Tommaso Morano
38 Atti Notarili, Ferrandina vol 23 1900-1909 notaio Tommaso Morano
and other laws may have been restrictive for women, in practice men trusted women and gave them the appropriate authorization when necessary.

Although many of the people writing wills were upper class (gentildonna) and/or landowners, the practices still give us a glimpse into the gender norms of the time and the allowances afforded to women. No matter the class or social position, all married women needed their husband’s authorization when using any service provided by the notary, whether it be a sale, lease, will, deposit, or any other legal transaction. The husband was usually present at the time the act was drawn up. While women did take part in some notarial transactions, a large majority of them were done by men and between men.

Although paid employment was rare for women in Basilicata, they were legally permitted to work outside the home only if the husband permitted. In the North, many women took on industrial jobs with the availability of nearby industrial centers. Fewer women worked outside the home for a salary in the South. If they did work, women’s wages were lower than men’s. They normally made 1 lira less per day on average.\(^{39}\) By the late 19\(^{th}\) and early 20\(^{th}\) centuries, regulations were placed on certain aspects of women’s work. For example, in 1907, a law was passed which restricted women and children’s work to no more than twelve hours a day, and prohibited women from working the night shift.\(^{40}\)

Overall, the Civil Code implied that women were weaker, and needed protection of men (their fathers, brothers, or husbands) for their own benefit. Yet, married women were not completely powerless. With proper authorization from their husbands, women were permitted to partake in the aforesaid activities, with certain restrictions. For example, women were banned


\(^{40}\) Ibid., 167.
from holding specific positions even if authorized to work, like those in public office (before 1919). The dowry also may have offered them some financial independence and served as an important connection to her natal family.

Married women whose husbands emigrated were still subject to the same binding laws, even if their husbands were abroad for years, or had completely lost contact. For example, a living father was needed to give consent to the marriage of his child, even if he was not present. Therefore, if he had emigrated and had not been heard from, he was assumed to be alive and was required to give his consent. Children may have had to delay marriage while an emigrant father was located abroad. This predicament was only remedied if a wife, along with male relatives, went to court and was able to declare him absent. Then, the mother would have the right to give her consent to legal acts involving the children, including marriage. The mother’s consent was enough if it could be proven that her spouse was in fact deceased. Another complication was the clause that stated a wife was obligated to live where her husband chose. If he decided to emigrate and move the family abroad, she would have little legal recourse to stop him.

Marriage was for life. Divorce was prohibited in Italy until the 1970s, due in part to the influence of the Catholic Church in Italian politics. In the Liberal Period, between 1873 and 1920 parliament considered a dozen proposed laws on divorce. Yet despite many attempts at legislation and heated debates on the issue, a law was never passed favoring it. Historian Mark Seymour argues the opposition to divorce was mostly based on the fact that only a small percentage of people actually wanted it. Although relatively a small group, not being able to

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divorce particularly limited women whose husbands had emigrated and abandoned them. Because they were not given legal autonomy or permitted to remarry until there was absolute proof of a husband’s death, in many instances, women were trapped without the option of divorce and limited in what they could do without court intervention.

Couples wanting to separate had the option to file for a personal separation (separazione personale) in certain cases, such as adultery, abandonment, abuse, or mutual consent. Persons granted a legal separation were permitted to legally live separately, but could not remarry. The option seems to have been used rarely at most, and according to Seymour, more often in the North.43 Living apart was a practical option for troubled couples, although women were still legally bound to their husbands. Court records show a number of living situations within the small communities of Basilicata. For example, after four years of marriage Annantonia Trivigno left her house in 1901 to stay with a neighbor, leaving her husband and her daughter.44 We do not know the specific circumstances, but this instance shows women did take steps to leave their home, even if it meant leaving their children. Her husband disagreed with her decision and tried to get her to come back home, but she refused.45

Emigration was another option for couples wanting to separate, and as long as the husband sent money and completed his obligations as husband and father, he could remain abroad, even though neither could legally remarry. Yet, as we will see, those situations did not

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43 Ibid., 19, 65.
44 Archivio di Stato di Matera, Corte d’Assise, Busta 194, n. 1198.
45 This is an extreme example, as her husband Domenico Tricarico would later be tried for killing Annantonia by hitting her over the head with a heavy object.
usually benefit the women, who still needed marital authorization, even if their husband was abroad or had not been heard from for years.\textsuperscript{46}

\textit{Other Single Women: Widows, Spinsters, Nuns}

While it was the path of most women to marry, not all did. Some remained spinsters, taking care of their parents or family members. Other women were sent to convents, either out of religious calling or because the family could not afford to pay a dowry for marriage. Widows also fall into this category and had more rights and freedoms than married women as well. The following subsections will consider each of these circumstances and how each experienced emigration.

\textbf{Single Women:}

Single women, or women who never married, were a very small percentage of the population in Basilicata. According to statistics, the percentage of women who were single at age 50 to 54 in 1861 was 13.5\%, and that number dropped to 10\% in 1881, and down to 7.4\% in 1911.\textsuperscript{47} These percentages are a bit smaller than the overall numbers for Italy those same years: 12.3\% in 1861, 12.1\% in 1881, and 10.6\% in 1911.\textsuperscript{48} Thus, about 10\% the women during this period remained spinsters.

While the law limited married women, single women had more autonomy once they reached adulthood. They could own property, make wills and participate in legal transactions on their own, and were not tied to the permissions of a husband. Single women who owned

\textsuperscript{46} The subject of the next two chapters is married women who remained behind, so I will explore their roles and positions more in depth in those chapters.
\textsuperscript{47} Livi-Bacci, 106.
\textsuperscript{48} Ibid.
property were free to do as they wished with it, without the need for a man to oversee their possessions. Although these freedoms may seem appealing, social norms dictated that a woman’s role was in the home as a wife and mother.

Notary records also show the freedoms single women had as opposed to married women. In a will filed in 1881 in Matera with the notary Vincenzo Tortorelli, Anna Teresa Antezza named her nephew Emmanuele her universal heir, showing women could choose who they wished to inherit their property.⁴⁹ No authorization of any kind was needed for her to file this will.

Despite more legal freedoms, single women still encountered many social restrictions. As Perry Willson points out, it was rare for single women to be alone or to live alone.⁵⁰ Most single women remained with their parents, siblings, or other family members. Willson cites statistics for all of Italy, saying that overall only 4.9% of women lived by themselves, demonstrating that even as adults, single women were rarely left on their own and instead lived with family members.⁵¹

In terms of emigration, single women had fewer passport restrictions, as married women needed the authorization of their husbands. Yet, despite this, it was rare for single women to emigrate on their own. For example, women were not allowed into the United States if they arrived at Ellis Island alone, and they needed a male relative to take responsibility for them. Single women nonetheless were also affected by the emigration of their family and friends in the community, especially if they were left behind.

⁴⁹ Archivio di Stato di Matera, Atti Notarili, Matera, 1881, notaio Vincenzo Tortorelli.
⁵⁰ Perry Willson, Women in Twentieth Century Italy (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 11.
⁵¹ Ibid.
Nuns:

Another option for single women was to join a religious order and become a nun. Despite the pervasiveness of religion, joining a convent was not an option for many women in the Liberal period (unlike earlier centuries). In fact, very little has been written on nuns in the modern era, as opposed to Italian nuns in the medieval to early modern periods. According to census numbers, there were 335 nuns in Basilicata in 1881, 302 in 1901, and 294 in 1911.\(^{52}\) These numbers show the decrease in the number of women joining religious orders in the early 20\(^{th}\) century, in contrast to the numbers in Italy as a whole, which went up during that same period.

Nuns were an important part of the community and did a great deal to support the local population. They were teachers at local schools, and acted as nurses and caretakers for the sick (especially in rural areas of Basilicata where few hospitals or even a sufficient number of doctors were present). They also ran orphanages and took care of foundlings, especially in areas of the South that had high rates of infant abandonment.\(^{53}\) Nuns also cared for women in need, many of whom were affected by emigration.

Widows:

Widows were another group of single women in Basilicata. Because of high mortality rates, widows could be both young and old. Widows had a great deal of autonomy, as they were released from the need for marital authorization, and could even authorize activities of the


\(^{53}\) Willson, 12.
children, such as marriage. To again refer to the notary records, widows did not need marital authorization when completing transactions. For example, a widow and property owner from Ferrandina, Maria Federico, drew up documents with a notary to sell her vineyard.\(^{54}\)

However, because the burden of having children was heavy for some young widows, many remarried. According to statistics cited by Massimo Livi-Bacci, 49% of widows under the age of 50 remarried in the South, as opposed to 28% from central Italy.\(^{55}\) He attributes this to the dominant pattern of nuclear families in the South, which meant less of an extended family in the home to care for widows and their children.

Widows could also choose to emigrate, if their children or other relatives lived abroad and invited them to come join them. Officials were cautious about issuing passports to widows. Although these women did not need consent from their husbands, they did need a *nulla osta* stating that there were no impediments and that they were free to emigrate. Officials were very careful about making sure women were truly free of any impediments. In one instance a widow, Girolama Violante Lapoli, was not issued a *nulla osta* because she did not live in the commune where she made the request, and the mayor could not verify for certain if her husband was dead.\(^{56}\) Women traveling alone or with young children, even if widows and legally permitted to do so, was still frowned upon by officials.

As stated above, the women who remained behind are often referred to as “widows in white.” However, some women actually did become widows if their husbands died while abroad. These women were put in a particularly difficult situation, as they had to arrange for the return of the body and ensure that the death was recorded in the civil registers. Requesting the

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\(^{54}\) Archivio di Stato di Matera, Atti Notarili, Ferrandina, vol 15, 1888, notaio Tommaso Morano.

\(^{55}\) Livi-Bacci, 357.

\(^{56}\) Archivio di Stato di Potenza, Atti di Pubblica Sicurezza, Cat 6, #42.
death certificate of husbands who died abroad was crucial, especially if a woman wanted to remarry. The only way she would be permitted to wed was with the death certificate confirming her first husband was deceased. In one instance, the Foreign Ministry wrote to a woman in Potenza to inform her that her husband died in a hospital in Bolivia. (He was actually beaten in the head with a hammer by the husband of a woman he was in love with, which eventually caused his death). It seems as if nothing was done about the matter at the time. It was only three years later that the widow, Angela Maria Perrotta wrote to the Foreign Ministry to request an official death certificate because she needed it in order to remarry.\footnote{Archivio di Stato di Potenza, Atti di Pubblica Sicurezza, Cat 6, #43.}

Widows not only requested death certificates, but also had the power to take care of legal business. For example, Beatrice Rossi of Lauria sent a request to the Foreign Ministry in February 1881 after her husband died abroad. She requested that the possessions he left there be sent back to her.\footnote{Archivio di Stato di Potenza, Atti di Pubblica Sicurezza, Cat 6, #42.} Thus, some women became widows while their husbands were abroad and were left to deal with the legal consequences of their deaths.

**Motherhood**

The societal expectation for married women was to bear children. Motherhood was one of the most important roles for women. This section examines the complexities of motherhood and shows how motherhood during this period of emigration was transnational, in the sense that many times women were separated from children and family due to emigration.

Fertility rates were higher in the South, with women in Basilicata averaging between four to six children, a number that would not decline until after World War I.\footnote{Livi Bacci, 61.} Basilicata had the
second highest birth rate among married women in all of Italy in the last decades of the 19th century, with 6.35 children per woman. With little birth control available for women, natural methods were used, and women frequently breastfed babies for up to two years, which often delayed pregnancy. Nonetheless, women generally gave birth every 18 to 24 months.

Most women gave birth in the home, some with a midwife present. Poor medical care in the region meant that few women received prenatal care or even had access to a medical facility. Records from Potenza show the lack of trained medical professionals in many small towns and villages of Basilicata. In one particular town in 1903, local officials advertised a job for a “midwife for the poor.” In 1907, another notice went out, calling for a midwife who would assist poor families for free.” This ad tells us that midwives assisted poor women. Pregnant women were not left to give birth on their own, but had assistance from professional midwives, even if they were not medical doctors. The call for a qualified midwife also indicates the commune and the prefect showed some interest in the wellbeing of women giving birth in the region.

While both spouses had the obligation to raise and educate the children, men possessed patria potestà (parental authority or custody) of their children, and only in circumstances in which they could not exercise it, was it legally allowed to pass to the mother. The law also stipulated that the father must give his consent to all legal acts regarding his children. One of the possible reasons a father could not exercise his right is if he was declared absent (assente). According to the law, after three years without news from someone, a court can pronounce that

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60 Ibid., 88-89. The lowest birth rate was in Liguria with 5.12 children and the highest birth rate was in Puglia with 6.74 children per woman.
61 Ibid., 47, 285.
62 See Chapter 2.
63 Archivio di Stato di Potenza, Atti di Pubblica Sicurezza, Cat 6, #42.
64 Civil Code of 1865, Title V, Article 138; Civil Code of 1865, Title VIII, Article 220.
65 Civil Code of 1865, Title VIII, Article 224.
person absent. If that person had children who were still minors, the mother would assume custody.\textsuperscript{66} If a father/head of the family was presumed absent and left behind children, or if a woman was abandoned, the mother could take possession of the property and exercise \textit{patria potestà}.
\textsuperscript{67} Thus, women whose husbands had emigrated had little power to authorize legal acts for their children unless the husband was declared dead or they went to the courts.

Not all mothers gave birth as married women. Some children were illegitimate and/or were given up by their families and became foundlings. Children were categorized as foundlings in official statistics until 1883, after which they were labelled either legitimate or illegitimate. Illegitimate children were most likely babies of unmarried women, but not always. These children were registered with “unknown fathers.” \textsuperscript{68} Historically, Basilicata had a low rate of infant abandonment, with under 3\% of all newborns abandoned, the lowest percentage of any region of the South.\textsuperscript{69} Single women could also take the legal action of recognizing either children they had abandoned or illegitimate children, “\textit{figli naturali}” by getting a notarized declaration.

Foundlings were another group of children who were given up by their parents, whether a single mother or a family who could not raise the child. Up until 1883, statistics on foundlings were recorded with official birth numbers. After 1884, when the wheel (\textit{ruota}) was abolished, statistics then labeled children as legitimate or illegitimate, so abandoned children were counted among the latter group.\textsuperscript{70} Unique to Italy, the \textit{ruota}, or wheel, was a contraption with which

\textsuperscript{66} Civil Code of 1865, Title III, Article 46.
\textsuperscript{67} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{68} Livi-Bacci, 70; There was also another category of illegitimate children which skewed statistics in the late 19\textsuperscript{th} century. After unification, civil marriage was recognized as an official marriage. Couples who wed in the church only would not have an officially recognized marriage, and thus their children were considered illegitimate.
\textsuperscript{70} Livi-Bacci, 70.
mothers could anonymously abandon their children. The practice was outlawed by the mid-1880s, although it did persist in many areas of the South.\textsuperscript{71}

By the last decades of the 19\textsuperscript{th} century, emigration added a new aspect to motherhood. In general, most children remained with their mothers, and in practice women helped make decisions about the fate of their children. Women being involved in the migration process is not a new area of inquiry, yet women involved in the migration process regarding their children is a relatively unexplored topic.

Children typically emigrated with one or both of their parents. The parents were responsible for requesting a passport for their children, using the same process outlined in the previous chapter, by requesting one through the mayor’s office. Once issued, child’s passport was usually tied to that of their father, who was the head of the family. After the emigration law of 1901 was passed, children under the age of 15 could no longer travel abroad without their parents.

General emigration statistics from the years 1876 to 1920 show that 11.5\% of migrants were under the age of 15 years old.\textsuperscript{72} However, the percentage of child migrants was higher from Basilicata, about 20\% in the same period, perhaps because more parents sent or took their children abroad to offer them better opportunities.\textsuperscript{73}

Some children migrated on their own, without their family or a guardian, especially in the years prior to 1901 when there were fewer legal restrictions. When migrating themselves was not an option, some parents decided to send their children abroad in an attempt to earn wages. In

\textsuperscript{71} See: David Kertzer, \textit{Sacrificed for Honor}.
\textsuperscript{72} Maria Rosa Protasi, \textit{I Fanciulli nell’emigrazione italiana: una storia minore, 1861-1920} (Isernia: C. Iannone, 2010), 27.
\textsuperscript{73} Felice Lafranceschina, “I Lucani in Argentina, Brasile e Cile,” \textit{Basilicata Regione Notizie} 94 (2000), 73.
a period where children working in the household or the fields was common, emigration was also an option for families hoping to make money from their child’s labor. David Kertzer has argued that parents sent children to be laborers or apprentices, which would mean separation from the family. Thus, he argues, allowing a child to go with a recruiter was not much of a change in mentality for parents.\textsuperscript{74} As a result, many children from Basilicata emigrated on their own as part of a group of travelling musicians, contracted by traffickers who conned parents into allowing their children to work for them.

Wandering children (\textit{fanciulli girovaghi}) or street musicians (\textit{suonatori ambulanti}) were the most well-known examples of the recruiting and exploitation of children. Traffickers came to the various towns of Basilicata and offered contracts to parents. The traffickers promised to bring the children to an agency which would care for them and teach them to play an instrument. In return for cash, either a lump sum or an annual sum, traffickers took the children from their homes and brought them to a port city. The agency then transported the children abroad, where they would most likely become street performers or musicians. The traffickers would then return to Italy to search for new “merchandise.”\textsuperscript{75} In the early years of the major wave of Italian emigration, parents in many areas of Basilicata signed contracts which in essence gave them money in exchange for the service of their children for one to three years. Traffickers played off the desperation of some of the poorest and neediest people in Italy. From the mid-19th century on, hundreds of children from Basilicata, both male and female, were brought all over Europe and the Americas to work, including cities like London, Paris, New York, and Buenos Aires. An article in a regional magazine about Basilicata notes that “many English and French cities were


overrun by an army of ‘fanciulli girovaghi’, from the communes of Viggiano, Marsicovetere, Corleto Perticara, Laurenzana, Tramutola, Calvello, Picerno...all of whom walked the streets playing the harp or the violin.”

In fact, the famous child harpists from the town of Viggiano performed on the streets of Paris and Marseilles up to the last decades of the 19th century. The phenomenon touched Basilicata in particular, yet few in depth studies have been done on these children, with John Zucchi’s book being one notable exception.

Outsiders saw the practice as a type of slave trade. It was purely profit driven, and the agents had little regard for the children. The young musicians were poorly fed, lived in terrible conditions, and were beaten and punished if they did not collect a certain amount of money daily. Children worked the streets all day long, with little rest or food. Some remained out until late at night, fearing punishment if they did not bring back a certain amount of earnings. The bosses (or padroni) closely watched the children. Yet, many went missing and never returned home. Others ran away to escape the harsh treatment. In fact, the practice quickly became the focus of criticism from both foreign officials and the public, and would soon be deemed illegal.

François Lenormant, traveling in Basilicata and writing in the 1880s, mentioned that the region was known for traveling child musicians. He wrote that “from this region, where the population is characterized by the natural gift of music ... it is from this region where the swarm of children who I met throughout Europe came, they went from city to city to beg, playing and singing.” He continued, critical of the practice:

“Hateful merchants traveling along the countryside to rake children, bought them for a piece of bread or lured them often without their parents, when they had the chance. They took them abroad and exploited them in a shameful way, pocketing the money that these

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76 Ibid., 63.
78 Ibid.
poor children received every day from people, beating them and causing them to starve to
death, often leading them also to theft.\textsuperscript{79}

According to Lenormant, the practice was well-known in the area and few attempted to keep it secret.

\textit{The New York Times} reported on the issue, saying these “slaves” were extremely visible on city streets. One article stated that many readers have probably seen them- immigrant children who begged for money and often played an instrument, prevalent around Crosby St. in New York City.\textsuperscript{80} The \textit{New York Times} explained the process to its readers: The padrone travelled throughout small Italian villages and found families in need. He offered to apprentice young children as harpers or musicians. Children were trained and furnished with equipment. The family received money up front and then the rest when the child returned, usually after three years.\textsuperscript{81}

At times, children were abandoned along the journey or escaped from the traders. When this occurred, it was impossible for them to find their way home, especially if they were very young. Often, strangers found them abandoned and the police helped return them to their parents. The police (\textit{carabiniere}) in the town of Picerno found a young girl abandoned in the train station. The report stated she was left on her own and in a condition of complete misery. Officials took steps to return her to her home in the nearby town of Baragiano.\textsuperscript{82} Children could also be taken against their will. Another police report from Tito concerned a seven-year-old girl


\textsuperscript{81} “The Little Italian ‘Slaves,’” \textit{The New York Times}, Dec 10, 1873.

\textsuperscript{82} Archivio di Stato di Potenza, Atti di Pubblica Sicurezza, Cat. 3. Busta 31.
who was found completely abandoned and claiming she was an orphan. She was also returned to her hometown.  

If traders abandoned the children or got arrested and the children were still in Italy, the government took steps to return them to their homes. This was the case with a sixteen-year-old girl from Laurenzana. Her mother signed a contract for six years and in return she would be taught to play the piano and other instruments. However, the agent was arrested in Naples because he did not have correct documentation. Officials in Naples then saw to it that the girl be returned to her home town.  

In another case, a letter from the Questura in Naples to the Prefect of Potenza informed him that two sisters, ages fifteen and six, from the town of Salandra were found abandoned in Naples and picked up by the authorities because they did not have money to sustain themselves. The girls were then accompanied back to their home town.

Deciding to sign their children off to work abroad had to be a difficult decision for parents, and one made purely out of desperation. The family made money off the agreement, and probably hoped their child would have a better life. The migration process thus affected motherhood; women became transnational mothers, with children living in cities across the globe. However, these mothers did not have the comfort of knowing their child had emigrated with their father or other trusted relatives. These mothers surely felt uncertainty, panic, longing, and desperation.

Parents who signed contracts or whose children were swindled from them had few options if trouble arose. Most likely, the child was taken out of the village, and probably even the country. Parents had difficulty getting their children to return or receiving news of them.

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83 Ibid.
84 Ibid.
85 Ibid.
One recourse for parents was sending requests to the prefecture, who would forward the request to the Foreign Ministry and then to foreign consulates to locate the missing child. This was often futile. In one instance, parents from the town of Genzano di Lucania were searching for their twelve-year-old son after he seemingly disappeared without a trace. The request gave a physical description of the boy. Replies from various nearby provinces such as Foggia and Bari were in vain. The paper trail ends at this point, but the parents kept searching for their son, although they had no idea where he was located.86 Their file ends here, but chances are their son was never found.

The Italian government began to deal with the issue of child trafficking in the 1870s. A law was passed in 1873 prohibited the trafficking of children for wandering professions (professioni girovaghe).87 A government official writing to the Prefect of Potenza wrote the law was passed “as much to pay homage to international relations between Italy and foreign states, as to destroy a social issue that has become very grave in our country.”88 Yet, the law itself did not stop the practice. Restrictions on issuing passports to minors suspected of emigrating for this purpose eventually slowed the trade. The practice also slowed when countries such as France and Britain passed legislation prohibiting child musicians in the streets.89 Another law, passed in December 1888 warned that any agent allowing a minor to emigrate for “mestieri girovaghi” will lose his license.90 The 1901 emigration law further upheld these restrictions on child workers, forbidding the emigration of minors under the age of fifteen from emigrating for the purpose of work. An article from La Stampa demonstrates illegal child

86 Ibid.
90 Legge 30 dicembre 1888, n. 5866.
migration was still an issue well after the turn of the century. A 1909 article reported many
Italian children still worked on the streets of Paris, and the paper called for the creation of
societies abroad to assist children and remove them from the padroni.91 Clearly the issue was
still a concern to officials. A 1911 law prohibited the issuing of a passport to minors under the
age of twelve unless they were traveling with a parent or guardian, or they were going to meet a
parent or guardian. Thus, it took years of legislation from both Italy and countries abroad to slow
the practice. This change shows instances of state intervention, where laws were put in place and
enforced, showing that the state was not inefficient and did not completely turn a blind eye to
troubles in the South.

Because of reforms, the practice was mostly gone by the 1880s, as more oversight and
awareness on the part of the government prevented child emigration without proper consent and
documentation. Yet, the topic came up in a 1913 article in the *Bollettino dell’Emigrazione*. The
article stated that “when one goes in the little villages, where people are more ignorant and more
credulous, boys, lured by the promise of a salary of about 200 pounds per year, enticed by the
overtures of very good treatment and loving care, by the desire to travel, to see the big cities, are
themselves pushing families to let them go.”92 The article insinuated that some of the older
children might want to emigrate, lured by the stories of big cities and riches abroad, and escape
the pressures and isolation of their small village. The article warned parents rarely receive news
of their children once they leave.

The topic of *fanciulli girovaghi* was a phenomenon that touched the lives of many
families in Basilicata. Historian John Zucchi contends that at the height of the trade in the 1860s

and 1870s, between 3,000 to 6,000 Italian children were performing in various cities around the world, playing their instruments and peddling for money.\textsuperscript{93} Mothers and families in desperate situations turned to this practice to relieve them of some of their hardships. Perhaps the practice was more prominent in Basilicata because of the poverty and desperation of many living there. Nevertheless, this phenomenon shows us another aspect of emigration. Women, thus, not only took part in the decision of their husbands to migrate, but had to agree to the contracting of their children. They not only dealt with their husbands leaving, but their children as well, adding to the emotional strain and possible stress of being left on their own, with little, if any, information from family who had emigrated.

**Role of the Church**

The role of the Catholic Church was closely tied to both the decision to migrate and to women remaining behind. The church was a major part of the fabric of the community in Southern Italy at the turn of the 20th century. It was much more than a place of worship. The local parish often provided assistance and social welfare that was the backbone of the community. It helped the sick at a time when most communes did not even have a sufficient number of doctors, not to mention a hospital. It cared for orphans and foundlings, as well as widows, and provided shelter to the poor and needy. As part of the community, the Church also played an important role in the local economy.

The parish priest was often someone from the town, meaning he knew the people and was familiar with their family situations. The priest himself may have had family and friends who

\textsuperscript{93} Zucchi, *The Little Slaves of the Harp*, 39.
emigrated, so he could relate to the plight of his fellow villagers. Many husbands made the decision to migrate knowing that their wives would have a place to turn for support if in need.

The church was also the center of much of the cultural life, especially in the small towns and villages of the region. Churches were the center of education. It was not rare that in the sacristies of local churches, lessons were held. In addition, in the period before Napoleonic law required civil registration in 1809, the parish also served as a registry office, recording the births, marriages, and deaths of the people in their parish, and keeping track of families in the town (stato delle anime) some as far back as the 15th century.

It is difficult to reconstruct the role of the church on the local level in Basilicata. In 1887, La Stampa reported that the church had a big moral and material presence in the region, despite its rift with the Italian government. The paper also reported that local priests tended to be poor, but also members of the community. They did not sequester themselves from society, and the priests even went to the local bar and had coffee with the townspeople.

Papal encyclicals and the Civiltà Cattolica are two sources to gauge the views of the church concerning emigration on a macro level. While these sources do not give much information about local issues, they express the opinions and attitudes of the Church and its leaders. The Civiltà Cattolica frequently published information about emigration, especially notices, statistics, and various factual reports. Occasionally opinion based articles were also published. An examination of the published editions between 1880 and 1914 shows the church supported the freedom to emigrate, but was critical of the Italian government concerning emigration. An article from 1888 condemned Francesco Crispi’s government, and stated that if

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94 “Un lembo ignorato d’Italia: La Basilicata,” La Stampa, Oct 1, 1887.
95 Ibid.
the government was “honest, wise, Christian, concerned with universal well-being,” then there would be little need for people to emigrate. The same article also pointed out that Italy did not have an empire like other nations, so their emigrants went to foreign lands, making it more difficult for immigrants to adjust to life in a new country. The church feared that living in unfamiliar lands would lead to degeneration of the family, loss of the native language, and weakening of religious values.

In 1888, Pope Leo XIII issued a papal encyclical related to emigration, entitled “Quam Aerumnosa,” the first major statement a pope made addressing the growing phenomenon from Italy. In the encyclical, Leo XIII addressed the troubles and hardships of emigrants in America. His main concern was the lack of priests who spoke Italian in foreign lands. Without local priests, believers could not go to mass or receive the sacraments, which Leo XIII feared would result in young people distancing themselves from the church. The encyclical announced the opening of an institute in Piacenza, under the auspices of Monsignor Scalabrini, which would train priests to send abroad to serve in Italian emigrant communities.

The encyclical shows the concern of the church about emigrants, especially in regards to maintaining their faith after emigrating. It focused mainly on migrants going to the United States, where Protestantism was the dominant religion. Despite the pope’s encyclical, concern persisted, and an article from the Civiltà Cattolica in 1904 indicated continued alarm over the lack of Italian priests and spiritual guidance for Italian Catholics in America.

From these sources, the church seemed sympathetic to the emigrants and not interested in limiting or preventing emigration. It was primarily interested in the wellbeing of their followers.

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97 Ibid., 403.
in foreign countries and wanted to ensure Catholics could continue to practice their beliefs. Thus, the family and maintaining faith were key issues for the church, more so than the quality of life or living conditions of emigrants.

Because much of my research has been in government documents, there are few references to the Church. It is likely that parish priests took on a heavy burden to support women who remained behind, especially those without family to support them. They were surely communicating amongst themselves and with local bishops about the situation locally. More research is needed in this area, especially in church archives, to demonstrate the role the local church played in the lives of the women who remained behind.

**Conclusion**

The legal role of women did not change much between 1880 and 1914, but this was not for lack of trying. The global first wave feminist movement, which began in the late 19th century, pushed to enfranchise women (among other aims), and laws for electoral reform in Italy were often proposed in Parliament. After unification in 1861, only a small number of wealthy men could vote. In 1882, the education and wealth requirements were lowered, thus expanding the vote to more men. Between 1861 and 1888, major debates in Parliament over the issue of women’s suffrage were spurred by the growing international feminist movement. As the women’s movement gained more momentum, in 1908 the National Council of Italian Women (*Consiglio Nazionale delle Donne Italiane*) met in Rome. The organization addressed issues concerning Italian women, one of which was emigration, and the meeting aimed to generate attention for the plight of women in Italy. While the conference did not lead directly to political change, news organizations covered the event, making it well publicized. The debate for the
vote intensified in 1912, when under Prime Minister Giovanni Giolitti, universal suffrage for all men over 30 was passed. Although the feminist movement strengthened in the years prior to World War I, it was forced to an abrupt halt when war broke out. After the Great War, women in some belligerent countries were given more legal rights, in part because of the important role they played in the war effort on the home front. While women in Italy did not gain the right to vote as in Britain, Germany, or the United States, the government passed favorable legal changes in the years after the war. In 1919, a law was passed which meant emancipation in many respects for women. Entitled “Norme circa la capacità giuridica della donna” and passed in July of 1919, the law abolished marital authorization and gave women the freedom to practice (almost) any profession, exceptions being judicial and military. This was a major legal change for Italian women, as it freed many from relying on their husbands and gave them to independence to pursue professions that had been previously forbidden.

While overall the position of Italian women by the end of World War I had shifted, few of these changes were influenced directly by wide scale emigration.

During the Liberal Period, politically women were not given the right to vote, economically limitations were placed on their activity, socially they were considered the inferior sex, and legally they were assigned a subordinate position. Husbands and families closely guarded women and controlled their actions. Their social role was one centered on marriage and family; women’s place was in the home and men were responsible for providing for their

99 17 July 1919 n. 1776, Article 1 and Article 7.
100 While much of the legal permissions required of married women were lifted, they still had little legal power in the family and were still denied voting rights. The Fascist regime came to power by 1922, and with its emphasis on traditional gender roles, all hopes of female suffrage were lost. It was only in 1945, after World War II, that women in Italy won the right to vote, and not until 1974 that family law was reformed.
families. Although subordinate legally, politically, economically and socially, women played an important role in the emigration process, and as I have shown, their prescribed role was complicated by the phenomenon even if they were not the ones in motion. Emigration largely challenged the traditional roles of women, changed the value of their labor, altered their roles as mothers, and shook many of the ideals and practices of daily life in Basilicata. The following two chapters will examine in depth how emigration specifically affected the women who remained behind.
Chapter 5: Women and the State: Emigration and Political and Economic Roles

The stories of individual women highlight what life was like for the many who remained behind in Basilicata. They reveal some of the most incredible circumstances and some of the most practical means women used when left on their own. The story of Arcangela Ligami stands out as one that exemplifies what women felt and experienced when their husbands emigrated abroad.

Arcangela Ligami of Potenza was searching for her husband, Francesco Lemole, who was in America. The couple married in Potenza in 1871 and had three children; Luigi, born in 1872, Maria, born in 1875, and Rocco, born in 1877. Francesco emigrated in the late 1870s and his wife had not received news or financial support from him. Seemingly desperate and with few options available, she turned to the mayor. With his assistance, she composed a letter to the prefect, which would initiate the process of searching for her husband. She made her first request to the prefect in January 1879, stating that two years prior her husband “abandoned the family,” which consisted of herself and three children. Six months later, Ligami received an answer from the foreign consulate that reported her husband was living in Cartagena, Colombia, and had saved money to send her some assistance. The letter continued and provided some surprising news about how her husband was living: “he has a small shop of little value and lives with a black woman.” Despite the fact that he was living with another woman, the letter informed Arcangela that an agent from the consulate would urge him to return to Italy, or at least to send money to his family at home to comply with his duty as the head of the family.

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1 Stato Civile, Potenza, Atti di Matrimonio 1871 #35, Atti di Nascita 1872 #511, 1875 #356, 1877 #476.
3 Ibid.
Apparently Francesco did not keep his word, and one month later, Ligrami wrote another letter to the prefect. The mayor included a note in the margin as he forwarded her request, saying “the miserable Arcangela Ligrami...humbly exposes herself to your goodness and finds herself in the most squalid misery.” She again explained that her husband emigrated “without caring about abandoning his wife and three children.” This was the second time Ligrami mentioned the word abandoned, and she clearly was placing the full responsibility for her situation on her husband for not providing for his family. She asked for justice from the prefect, urging him to make her husband “send the money necessary to feed his own children.” This second letter also implied that she had written before and had made various requests to her husband for help/money to no avail. Four months later, she received another response, informing her that her husband said he will send her 500 lire.

The following month, Ligrami wrote yet another request to the prefect. This time she informed the prefect that her husband emigrated three years ago “for the cursed America” (la maledetta America). She again wrote that her husband “left her with three kids in the most desolate misery, without caring to send them any aid to feed his children bread.” However, by May of the next year, 1880, word came back from the consulate that her husband left Colombia and could not be located.

In June of 1881, Ligrami wrote again for news of her husband. The mayor on her behalf helped to express her desperation, writing that “your authority will excuse me if even I insist for a new search for her husband, for it is a just and holy cause of a woman who lives like she has

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4 Archivio di Stato di Potenza, Atti di Pubblica Sicurezza, Cat. 6. Busta 41.
5 Ibid.
6 Ibid.
7 Ibid.
and always will with the name of her husband on her lips.”

Apparently receiving no response, in October 1881, Ligrami wrote a fifth letter, insisting that she and her three children were living in “extreme and deplorable misery” since her husband emigrated to America. This letter gives us a closer look at her personality. She wrote:

“finally two years ago I received news of where he was and I was still ignored by him. In this time I hardly had any money from my husband that I had to earn it myself selling bread. I have been able to continue on with life miserably. But now, feeling cornered and having written at least ten letters without receiving a response, directed towards countries foreign to me, because I do not know for certain his location, I ask you to find the address of my husband and if he is alive to again implore him to support not me, but at least these poor children who demand to be saved, which I cannot do because I earn little each day.”

She continued, explaining that through a friend she sent her husband a letter directly, but he had not yet received a response, so she again turned to official means. She asked the prefect to have pity on her, and asked him for justice.

In this letter, her desperation is clear. At this point, she does not ask for anything for herself, she does not ask her husband to return, all she asks for is for money to feed her children. She paints the image, whether true or not, that she was in dire poverty and suffering greatly because of her husband’s neglect. Her anger was also expressed in the letters, as she cursed America for taking her husband away and was frustrated by not being able to locate him.

Still not giving up, she wrote another letter in March of the following year, “to know as soon as possible if he is dead or alive, and if alive to oblige him to send any aid to his wife, who with her children lives in a state of deplorable misery.” Since she did not receive a response, she wrote again in July of 1882, saying that her husband has been gone for six years now.
“without having sent a cent to his afflicted wife, who has on her shoulders three kids who are
dying of starvation.”\textsuperscript{12} She again asked the Consulate to quickly find news of her husband and
oblige him to send help to his family “while barbarically he does not think of his own
children.”\textsuperscript{13} In December, she received word that they could not find him in Rio de Janeiro,
where she thought he was, and they would search for him in Venezuela. The last piece of
information from this story arrived in a note from the Foreign Ministry from August 1883,
staying that Lemole was in a small town in Venezuela.

The file stops here, and we do not know of what became of Ligrami or if she ever saw or
received anything from her husband again. Yet, her letters and perseverance are very telling and
help frame a number of arguments for this chapter. Her husband left for the Americas and did
not send any financial assistance to his wife and children, which he legally was required to do as
head of the family. We learn from the first response that he was living with another woman in
Colombia at one point. However, it seems that this did not bother his wife. In this
correspondence, there was no evidence that Arcangela cared about her husband and wanted him
to return. Instead, she wanted him to send what was rightfully hers. She made it appear that the
family was living in dire poverty as a result of him not caring for his children. We also observe
the desperation and perseverance of one woman, and how she demanded what was rightfully
hers. She sent many letters to the prefect, and it appears that many times they were not even
answered. Still, Ligrami persisted in turning to the local authorities to assist her after her
husband emigrated.

\textsuperscript{12} Archivio di Stato di Potenza, Atti di Pubblica Sicurezza, Cat. 6. Busta 43.
\textsuperscript{13} Ibid.
Introduction

When young married men left Basilicata in search for work or fortune elsewhere, many married women were left behind on their own. These women were given the responsibility to take care of the household, manage the family funds, raise the children, and perform any tasks the husband may have left in their care. Between 1880 to 1914, Basilicata’s emigration rate was one of the highest in Italy. Because a large majority of emigrants were men (about 80%), and many of them were married, a significant number of married women were left in this situation. Emigration was so pervasive that in the 1901 census, 11,000 women in Basilicata were living without their husbands. According to Direzione Generale di Statistica, the population in Basilicata in 1901 was 492,000. Statistics from the 1901 census show that of the 124,872 families in Basilicata, roughly 20% (25,285) of the households reported the head of the family was absent or dead. Comparing these statistics to Pavia (in Lombardy), an area in the North with similar population, there were 108,700 families and the number with absent or deceased husbands was roughly 5% (5,792). From these statistics we can see a high number of women living alone in Basilicata.

Scholars have used the idea of “women who wait” as a way to label those who remained behind. Yet this label gives the impression that the lives of these women were simple and rested completely on the actions of their husbands. It perpetuates the stereotype of passivity and dependence. Newer studies, including this one, argue that women in fact took on a much greater

role as a result of emigration.\textsuperscript{18} Other scholars have labeled the women in a situation of temporary widowhood, or “vedovanza temporanea.”\textsuperscript{19} This may be a more appropriate label, yet still not completely accurate since married women did not have the same legal rights as widows. (see Chapter 4) In terms of being on their own, some may have enjoyed the “freedom” that came along with their husbands being away. Others may have benefitted socially, economically or politically from being on their own. On the other hand, many women may not have realized the potential hardships and may have struggled a great deal as a result of male emigration. The situations of these women varied, but I argue women did not simply wait for men to return, and their lives did not halt because of their husbands’ absence. Despite lack of opportunity and various restrictions, they were able to provide for their families. They made do with their situations as best as they could, and many maintained their dignity despite the rough circumstances.

This and the following chapter will discuss the effects of departure on married women, and the numerous effects it had on their lives. This chapter will concentrate on the relationship women had with the state, as well as economic changes they experienced. The following (Chapter 6) will focus largely on social changes: how community and family life were altered as a result of emigration. Although I am using these specific categories, I realize there will be overlap. As part of the political and economic discussion in this chapter, I will focus on women’s appeals to the state and their legal position when requesting passports or when requesting searches for husbands or relatives abroad. These circumstances will show that women knew their rights, especially within marriage, and knew that they could rely on the state

\textsuperscript{18} See: de Clementi “Gender Relations and Migration Strategies in the Rural Italian South.”
\textsuperscript{19} Casimira Grandi, \textit{Donne Fuori Posto: L’emigrazione femminile rurale d’italia postunitaria} (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 2008), 44.
to protect those rights. They were stepping out of prescribed gender roles and norms, as men would traditionally be the ones who interacted with the state. Women were also given much more economic responsibility when their husbands departed. They dealt with remittances, and in some cases were given legal permission to deal with specific legal and economic matters. These instances show that men trusted their wives with family funds, and even though not always legally permitted, they were often put in charge of managing money and the family’s budget. While it was not uncommon for peasant women to manage household funds, in many cases they were handling larger sums of money and spending it in the absence of their husbands.

In examining the sources and the political and economic effects of departure on women, I will also discuss the emotional impact emigration had on them. The simple fact that women took action when they felt they were being abandoned or their husbands or relatives were not complying with their duty negates the stereotype of women as passive. Furthermore, the language of their petitions shows that wives knew their rights and what their husbands were required to provide for them and their children. In the above story, Arcangela was aware of her husband’s duty to his family and she took initiative when he has seemingly abandoned his obligations. Through these petitions, we see the active steps women made to stand up for themselves, even if it meant turning to the state that at times seemed out of touch or alien to them. Although abandonment is more an exception than the norm, her story is just one of the many of this kind that may have resulted from emigration.

This chapter relies on a number of archival sources, including passport requests and the subsequent responses from government officials, and communication with the Foreign Ministry to search for husbands and other relatives abroad. Other archival sources used in this chapter are notary records, atti di procura, and statistics on remittances. Because of limitations and missing
documents, these sources are not comprehensive, and I do not claim that they are. Some only cover a small time frame at the early part of the great wave of emigration. Many also refer to South America, as many emigrants from Basilicata traveled there in the years prior to 1900. However, they give us invaluable information about the consequences of emigration on women who remained behind, which allow me to make solid claims. Illiteracy among most rural women in Basilicata at the time may have hindered communication, but it did not prevent it completely. The documents allow us to glance into the lives, situations, personalities, and thoughts of women who remained behind, offer personal stories that are hard to find in official statistics, and show some of the emotions that accompanied emigration. Although each family may have experienced emigration differently, both positively and negatively, these exchanges are some of the most direct sources we have from women of the period.

**Interactions with the State**

This first section of the chapter will look at the relationship between women left behind and the state, government officials, and agencies. As noted in Chapter 4, a father or husband as head of household represented the family in the eyes of the state, and overall married women had few legal or political rights. Emigration complicated these restrictions, as women were powerless if their husbands had emigrated and they could not contact them. Yet, in this section I will examine how women were able to interact with the state and use it to their benefit, especially in times of great need. They could in no way get around their legal limitations, but they could demand that their few rights be upheld or protected by the state. This shows a dependence, and perhaps paternalistic reliance on the state, which was there when the head of the
family was not. Thus, here we see a positive relationship with the state, one where it is nearby and able to offer services to help women in need.

One major argument of this study is that emigration helped women become citizens of a new Italian state. For the first time since unification, rural women in Basilicata turned to the structures of the new government to assist them with issues that arose due to emigration. These secular authorities could provide assistance that they could not otherwise get through social or religious means. Even though their actions may have been out of desperation, they saw appealing to the state as an option and decided to use it to their benefit. Emigration strengthened women’s connection to the state. Women on their own now contacted local mayors to assist them with requesting passports, asking for help, pleading their cases, and demanding their husbands comply with their duties. These requests show that women who were left behind were not living in an isolated and closed world, accepting of their fate. We also see largely uneducated rural women with knowledge about their rights. Women actively sought out help of the government to assist them with issues dealing with emigration.

**Requesting Passports**

Requesting passports was one of the main ways women interacted with local officials and attempted to make decisions about their own lives, even if they were not always legally permitted to do so. Women could request passports for themselves and their children by contacting the mayor’s office with their requests. As discussed in Chapter 3, in order for the request to be granted, married women needed the authorization of their husbands, and there was little exception to this provision. So, women could make the requests, but that did not mean they would be successful. Requests made by married couples together were generally granted.
Requests for passports were successful only if the correct documentation was present and the *nulla osta* was released. If these steps were taken, women generally had few impediments when requesting a passport, and they were accommodated quickly. The passport requests and the letters that accompanied them give us a glimpse into the minds and emotions of women in Basilicata. Rosa Vignati of Tramutola wanted to emigrate, and with the consent of her husband, the *nulla osta* was issued and sent by the mayor to the prefect office. Two days later the prefect issued her passport.\(^2^0\) Because she had the correct authorizations in order, there was a relatively short turnover time from making the request to receiving the passport. Another woman, Maria Rosa Troccoli, also of Tramutola, requested an expedited passport to join her husband in Marseilles, who was ill. Because her husband had given his consent, she also had no problem issuing the passport.\(^2^1\) In these cases, passports requested by married women with the authorization of their husbands were granted with little or no issue.

The husband’s authorization also applied to his children, and once a *nulla osta* was issued to a woman, it applied to her children as well. Filomena Maria Lo Sassa of Baragiano was called by her husband to join her in Buenos Aires, and thus requested a passport for herself and her four children. Since her husband called her to join him, the *nulla osta* was released without problem by the prefect.\(^2^2\) Carolina di Furtcio was given authorization by her husband to emigrate and thus the *nulla osta* was issued and she received her passport. She then later requested passports for her two children, aged six and four, a request that was granted even though it was not made at the same time.\(^2^3\)

\(^{21}\) Ibid.
\(^{22}\) Ibid.
\(^{23}\) Ibid.
Single women who had custody of their children did not need authorization and could apply for a passport for themselves and for their children. Maria Fortunato of Picerno, a single mother with a child of an unknown father, requested and was issued a passport for herself. She then asked the mayor to add her two-year-old child, Adelaide, who was a “figlia naturale” (child born outside of marriage) to the passport. The request was granted. These cases illustrate that single women had more rights than married women, including in regard to custody laws. Fathers who held patria potestà had to authorize passports for their children. Yet, single mothers who had custody did not need such authorization.

With few exceptions, the husband’s consent had to be clear to authorities issuing passports to women. In one instance, Gaetana Laurenzano of Pignola was called by her husband in Montevideo (Uruguay) to join her. She wrote to the prefect because even though her husband sent a ticket, he did not send the required documentation giving his consent. In this case, however, the prefect issued the passport, arguing that since her husband bought a ticket “there is no doubt that this woman was called by her husband so that she can join him in Montevideo.” She was issued the passport. This type of implied consent is the closest instance of “bending the rules” or granting exceptions to women.

Women requested passports for various reasons. As seen above, if her husband was abroad and called her to join him, a woman could easily obtain a passport. This shows husbands from abroad trusted their wives to be compliant and responsible; they could obtain passports, prepare themselves and their children to emigrate, and leave the village on their own.

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25 Ibid.
26 Ibid.
Some women took matters into their own hands when they had not heard from their husbands or lost contact with them after emigrating. These women, most likely knowing that they could not get a passport on their own, requested them anyway. Many were in desperate situations, and wanted to travel abroad themselves to find their missing husbands, so they turned to the state.

Women requesting passports without the authorization of their husbands were denied, no matter what reasons or excuses given to government officials. These regulations demonstrate the paternalistic and protective nature of the state.\(^{27}\) The husband had a legal duty to protect the family and the state could not interfere. When husbands were gone, the state protected women. Yet, despite their failure, many requests gave a reason as to why women wanted to emigrate and allow us a glimpse into what their lives may have been like. Rosaria Cerullo of Brienza wrote to the prefect asking for him to issue her a passport. Her husband emigrated over fourteen years prior and in recent months she had not heard from him. She wanted to emigrate to Buenos Aires to search for her husband, and she wrote that she had enough money to pay for the round trip voyage. She added that she had relatives in Argentina who would receive her, hoping to assuage fears of a woman travelling on her own. In the response, the prefect wrote that “the forwarded demand to obtain a passport to travel abroad cannot be considered,”\(^{28}\) because “married women cannot emigrate and join their husbands without expressed authorization by their husband, which is done through a legalized act at the local consulate.”\(^{29}\) This woman’s appeal seems to provide solutions for issues that might concern officials with her emigrating alone. She had enough money and a place to stay with relatives upon arrival in Argentina. So she was not likely to turn

\(^{27}\) I do not want to go so far as to say this was always the case, but I have not come across an instance where married women were issued a passport without a husband’s authorization.

\(^{28}\) Archivio di Stato di Potenza, Atti di Pubblica Sicurezza, Cat. 6. Busta 40.

\(^{29}\) Ibid.
to prostitution or become a public charge. Yet, her request was denied. In this case, we see a woman not desperate for money or aid, but desperate to locate her husband.

The need for marital authorization caused difficulties if a husband could not be located. A woman from Viggiano requested a passport, writing that her husband emigrated eight years prior. She had three young children and he did not send her any money. She said that she did not even know if he was alive. Her request was for a passport to Boston, where she had family. She was hoping that fact might convince the prefect to grant the passport, despite not having permission. However, the prefect sent his response to the mayor, saying that she needed the consent of her husband to receive a passport. He continued writing that “the mere fact of the lack of news for about five years is not sufficient to justify the likewise permission in a legal sense.”\(^{30}\) In this case, her option was to have the office search for her husband abroad, so he could grant her the necessary permission. In response, she wrote that she did not know where her husband was, as he was last in Rio de Janeiro in 1876. In this letter, she also begged the prefect for mercy, reiterating that her relatives in Boston would host her. The answer remained the same. She could not be issued a passport without the consent of her husband, unless a death certificate was presented and he was proved to be deceased. Women appealed to officials on an emotional level hoping they would overlook legal impediments. In these cases, their pleas were unsuccessful.

Another request shows us how emigration and abandonment affected women at home. A woman from Armento was desperate; she had not heard from her husband and wanted to obtain a passport to go search for him herself. She requested a passport but was unable to get marital authorization because her husband had been away for eight years. In her request to the mayor,

\(^{30}\) Archivio di Stato di Potenza, Atti di Pubblica Sicurezza, Cat. 6. Busta 41.
she wrote that she was “lamenting the abandonment and the lack of aid on the part of her husband.”31 She accused her husband of being unfaithful and wanted him to return home. Not having heard from her husband, she wanted to go find him herself. To make matters worse, she reported that their daughter, now sixteen years old, had been engaged in an illicit love affair (illeciti amori). She wanted to travel to South America to find her husband and make him return to comply with his duties as a husband. (Although the mayor had denied her request for a nulla osta, she continued making her case to the prefect.) She wrote that her mother had given her the money to pay for a round trip ticket. She also argued that she had relatives living in Argentina who she could live with and would help her find work. Yet, she had no document from her husband authorizing her to emigrate, so she could not be issued a passport. The mayor knew that she was missing the correct documentation, but forwarded the request anyway, writing that before him he saw a poor mother (una povera madre) and wanted to help her. Here we see the mayor intervening for this woman and adding his own comments to the request before forwarding it to the prefect. We also see a woman struggling to raise her family and worried about her teenage daughter. Like other women mentioned, she was also requesting a passport so she could go and find her husband herself. Despite having funds and a place to stay, she was not given authorization.

Though most women were illiterate, some were able to write their own requests. These letters were even more powerful, as we see women’s pleas firsthand in what were surely their own words. Maria Antonia Vignola, an abandoned wife from Pignola, wrote a letter herself to the prefect to plead her case. In it, she “humbly exposes” herself to the prefect, explaining her situation.32 Her husband abandoned her seven years ago without sending her any money, only

32 Ibid.
letters. She explained that she was a “poor woman with three children without the means to live.” Desperate for relief, she asked the prefect to issue her a passport so that she could emigrate to her husband in Montevideo. In the response, along with the refusal to issue a passport the prefect offered a piece of advice that was often given to women who wanted to emigrate: “it would be better if you did not venture on a long and expensive voyage without being sure of the consequences.” However, the response did mention that if she happened to receive word from her husband and he sent his authorization, she could make a new request for a passport. Here we see another woman appealing to the state to uphold the duties of her husband. She wanted to emigrate herself to search for her husband, but could not because she needed his permission. The advice given to her by the prefect shows the attitude of the government towards women who remained behind. Officials saw emigration as an adventure and not appropriate for women to undertake on their own, whether they were poor peasants or educated individuals. They would have no choice but to wait at home and to use government agencies to search for their husbands. While officials may have felt sympathy for abandoned wives, they could not do much without authorization and could not break the law. Here again we see the paternalistic attitude of officials and the need to legally protect women despite their desperation. The state was protecting women, and in a sense, taking the place of the absent husbands.

Many married women still appealed to the prefect, even if they knew it was futile. Perhaps for many it was their only hope. Rosa Picorno from Savoia di Lucania had an expired passport and wanted a new one issued so she could travel abroad to her husband. The response she received was that she did in fact need her husband’s consent again, and that if he was abroad

34 Ibid.
35 Ibid.
she would have to wait for him to call for her and authorize her trip before a new passport would be issued.\textsuperscript{36} Angela Santopietro of Balvano was also refused a passport. Her husband Angelo Nigro emigrated clandestinely and when she made her request it had been almost seven years since she or any other family member had heard anything from her husband.\textsuperscript{37} She petitioned the mayor to issue her a passport despite not having permission, so she could emigrate to the Americas to join him. Arguing she was aware of the law, she had hoped the prefect would grant an exception. The prefect’s response was received three days later, “without the permission of the husband…a passport cannot be issued.”\textsuperscript{38}

No matter the circumstances, officials held firm to the law. Women may have tried to work around the law or manipulate officials with their letters describing their circumstances, but most were unsuccessful. Yet, despite denying them a passport, officials were able to help women in other ways, such as by facilitating requests to search for and contact husbands abroad. The prefect and mayor often included these suggestions in their responses to requests.\textsuperscript{39} So even though women received a denial, they were offered some hope for assistance.

As seen in this section, with permission married women were able to request passports for themselves and for their children. Many times this was done out of desperation, and a desire to look for their spouse abroad. Perhaps they were trying to escape their circumstances by emigrating themselves, in order to escape the town and make a new life for themselves. However, a number of obstacles existed against married women interested in emigrating, especially without the approval of their husbands. In all the cases and passport requests used here and others that I examined in Potenza, the law seems to have been followed with few or no

\textsuperscript{36} Archivio di Stato di Potenza, Atti di Pubblica Sicurezza, Cat. 6. Busta 40.
\textsuperscript{37} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{38} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{39} Ibid.
exceptions. So thus far, we see women turning to the state, taking steps to attempt to emigrate themselves, and the use of the mayor and prefect for the necessary documents. We also get a sense of their thoughts and emotions, as the language in their requests depicts women who were desperate, impoverished, anxious, and struggling. Although they may not have always been completely honest, these cases do not depict passive women.

**Searching for Husbands Abroad**

Women demonstrated a new relationship to the state, not only by requesting passports, but by appealing to government agencies for various reasons. If a wife depended on her husband’s wages to support her and the family, then that need would exist whether the husband was in Italy or abroad. If husbands did not send remittances from abroad, then it was the women and children who depended on those men who suffered the most. In many instances, women were desperate to find their husbands. If women could not get a passport because they did not have authorization, another option was to request a search for their missing husbands. Many of these women begged local officials to search for their spouses abroad, whether it be to implore them to return home or to force them to send money. These women found themselves in desperate circumstances. Their interactions with the state give us another way to gauge women’s thoughts, feelings, and fears, and show again how they forged a new relationship to the state by using it for their benefit.

Written and oral communication occurred between emigrants and their families back home. Yet, women left on their own sometimes had the unfortunate circumstance of not hearing from their spouse or receiving any sign that he was alive. Women in this situation could turn to official means and petition the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to search for news of their relatives
abroad. Writing with the help of the local mayor, the requests were then sent to the prefect of Potenza, who would pass it along to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The Ministry would contact local consulates, which would in turn do a search for the “missing” person. This search could be done through word of mouth, bulletins, newspapers, and registers of people being trying to be located. In most cases, the petitioning woman would receive a response once the request was considered by the consulates abroad. These documents offer a rich glimpse into the way requests to the state were made, as well as how the state handled these requests. Unfortunately, unless the woman sent subsequent petitions, we do not know how they reacted upon receiving a response from the state.

Through these requests, we can see women’s interactions with the state and examine the language they used in appealing to officials. Because of high rates of illiteracy, many women wrote these requests with the help of the mayor, so it is impossible to know if the actual words are directly from the women or if they were embellished by the mayor (a male) who knew what to say to make the requests heard. Some women simply wrote petitions for information, without pleading their case or expressing their suffering. Other women pleaded their case using strong and emotional language. No evidence exists that either method was more successful than the other. The differences in wording might just have to be attributed to different personalities of the women requesting assistance. And while there are a large number of requests, it is also impossible to know the percentage of women who did not appeal to the state for assistance.

The most common type of petition was to search for a husband abroad who had not been heard from for some time. In November of 1878, Rosa Palermo, went to the mayor asking for his help in writing to the prefect to get news of her husband, Paolo Tanelli, who emigrated to
Buenos Aires for work six years prior, “leaving a wife and two children of tender age.”40 The request stated that Rosa had not heard from him in two years, and the family was going through great hardships. She decided to turn to the mayor “imploring him for support to discover the location of her husband.”41 Since there seems to have been no response, eight months later Rosa sent another petition, asking for news of her husband. The mayor added a comment when he forwarded the request to the prefect, writing that this request “deals with a miserable mother of two children perplexed over the abandonment of the husband.”42 Three months later, a month shy of a year after the first request was sent, a response finally arrived from the Foreign Ministry, saying they could not locate her husband. Five months later, in March 1880, Rosa again wrote, hoping she would receive news of her still missing husband. At that point it had been eight years since he emigrated and almost four years without sending money to support his wife and children. She received another response from the Foreign Ministry in January of 1881, stating they still could not find him: “the name of Paolo Tannello was published on a list of persons being searched for by the Consulate in Buenos Aires, without showing himself or anyone else having news of him.”43 The file ends here, and we do not know what happened to Rosa or her two children. She seemed to be in a desperate situation, abandoned by her husband and in need of money to support her children. Rosa, like most women in Basilicata, did not earn wages, and it was difficult for her to find paid work without marital authorization. She could not remarry because there was no proof of her husband’s death, so she would have had to find a way to provide for herself and her children. The numerous requests made in attempt to locate her husband show she was persistent. She did not give up after the first request went unanswered,

40 Archivio di Stato di Potenza, Atti di Pubblica Sicurezza, Cat. 6. Busta 41.
42 Ibid.
43 Ibid.
and wrote various times for news of her husband. Her file is interesting because the mayor also added commentary to the prefect about her situation. We see here support from the mayor—he looks upon her with pity and adds his comments in an attempt to facilitate the requests.

In another instance, Rosa Nesi of Spinoso sent a letter entitled “prayer” (*preghiera*) in May 1880 to ask officials to search for her husband, Luigi Alberti, who was imprisoned in Cartagena (Colombia) for petty crimes. His wife knew that his sentence was up and that he had served his time, but “he still has not repatriated, or sent any letter, and thus she had reason to believe he was deceased.” With no response to the initial letter, five months later she wrote again, asking for the whereabouts of her husband. Almost three months later, in November of 1880, she received a response. The Foreign Ministry reported that her husband, Luigi, and fifteen-year-old son, Vincenzo, were in prison in Cartagena for killing a man, Antonio Bussi, by slicing his neck with a sabre while trying to rob him. Her husband, Luigi, was charged with theft and murder, and sentenced to ten years in prison. However, while he was in prison, he committed another crime, wounding another with intent to kill, for which he received a year and a half added to his prison sentence. Her son, Vincenzo, was released after five years in prison and was believed to be near Barranquilla (Colombia).

This was a peculiar and somewhat unique case. First, it shows some of the suffering women endured, not knowing where their husbands and children were when abroad. The wife was also well aware of her husband’s illegal activities in Cartagena. She knew he was in prison, and was probably waiting for him to be released so he could return to Italy, or send remittances for economic assistance. This woman was not passively waiting for her husband to return, but actively sought out information about his whereabouts. Her initial letter also implies that she

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44 Archivio di Stato di Potenza, Atti di Pubblica Sicurezza, Cat. 6. Busta 41.
45 Ibid.
was interested in whether or not her husband was still alive, which would have implications on her legal status. It is also interesting to note that her initial petition did not reference the son, and she just sought the whereabouts of her husband. It is a shame we do not have a follow up from Rosa. What would her reaction have been when she discovered her husband had committed another crime? And that her son was involved? The title of her letter “preghiera,” or prayer, indicated a desperate petition or plea for assistance. Surely the answer to her inquiry was not well received.

The requests to find missing husband also demonstrate some of the fears and emotions that accompanied emigration. A request by a woman from Lauria asked for news about her husband in Algeria and requested that he send aid. Her husband was found five months later, but he refused to send money to his wife. He told officials: “he stopped writing to his wife because she did not respond or pay off the debts he had entrusted her with the money for.”46 He continued, saying that he wished for his wife to join him in Algeria, since he had no intentions of repatriating, and that he would send the necessary paperwork and documents for her to make the voyage. The contents of this petition give us a rare glimpse into how a woman reacted to the news delivered to her in the response. Only two weeks later, the mayor wrote back, saying, “I communicated the contents of your note to the wife…she is willing to join her husband, but she does not know how to travel on her own, especially on a trip of this length.”47 She then asked her husband to return home to accompany her on her journey abroad, adding that his elderly mother wanted to see him and give him a hug. The husband received the letter and wrote that unfortunately he could not travel home at the moment because of work, but he would do so if possible when time permits. Alone and without recourse, left to fend for themselves if their

46 Archivio di Stato di Potenza, Atti di Pubblica Sicurezza, Cat. 6. Busta 42.
47 Ibid.
husband did not send them money, women had to have been scared and uneasy. We see that this woman appeared willing to join her husband, yet did not want to take the long journey by herself. The idea of traveling abroad on a lengthy voyage had to be daunting to someone who probably never went very far from her own village. Women often had little choice when called by their husbands to join them, and many made the long journey on their own or with small children. This particular woman did not want to travel alone and her husband agreed to come back to accompany her. She also used the fact that her husband’s elderly mother wanted to see him in order to try to convince him to return home.

Another possible consequence of being left on their own was not knowing the location of children who may have emigrated abroad alone or with a husband. Women not only made requests searching for husbands, but they also pleaded to the mayor for help when their children went missing abroad, showing their intentions were not always economic. Women in Basilicata sent petitions searching for their children all over the world, from Argentina, to Paraguay, to the United States, and other countries in Europe. All these women were desperate to hear news of their children. Many requested news of their husbands and sent demands to them because they were not receiving money from them. Men were legally required to uphold their marital obligations, even after emigrating. In most of the requests, the women were not much interested in having their husbands return because they missed them or because they felt an emotional bond with them. Their need seemed to be more material and economic. Children, on the other hand, were treated differently in the requests. In most cases, mothers searched for their children because they generally were concerned about their well-being. Although, children may have also been sending money to the parents, the language in these petitions contrasts greatly with the language in requests for husbands.
Women not only searched for their husbands and children abroad, but other family members as well. One woman from Moliterno wrote on behalf of her parents, asking for news about her brother in Cincinnati, who they had not heard from in several years. It seems from the letter that the family also had some business to do in the town, and needed his permission to proceed. They asked him to contact the consulate immediately and send the power of attorney. No response accompanied this request, so it is unknown whether or not the brother responded. However, this letter shows the circumstances that many families may have been placed in: a family member is missing and cannot be contacted abroad and those at home need his authorization for some type of transaction. We also see a daughter making the request on behalf of her parents, who entrusted her to help locate their son.

Overall, the government took women’s requests seriously and it appears it made every attempt to follow up on them. Many of the petitions got a response. Some were more comprehensive, others were short, answering inquiries and explaining the situation if necessary. For example, the wife of Francesco Capece of Picerno received a brief response when she requested a search for her husband: “Capece resides in Mercedes (Buenos Aires) and promises to write without delay to the named woman.” Others were pages long, and officials took time to add detail to their responses.

The requests to officials made by women humanize them, and show that they had apprehensions and fears about their loved ones emigrating and being left on their own. They worried about their spouses and children and in many cases were desperate when they did not have news from them. Although reasons for searching for spouses and children may have differed, these requests show the complexity of emotions that women experienced. Most

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importantly, the documents give agency to rural, southern women, a rarity in the history of Basilicata. They also add another facet to emigration and help us understand how women experienced emigration emotionally.

Southern Italian women were often assumed to be apolitical. The requests for passports in an attempt to emigrate in order to search for husbands and the appeals to the state to find missing husbands or other relatives show that this was not always the case. Some women who remained behind depended on government agencies to issue passports, search for husbands abroad, provide them with information, and possibly even coerce men into fulfilling their duties. These actions show those women were desperate and determined. It also shows they knew they could turn to the mayor when in need of assistance. Some of them were literate, but more were not, a difficulty which did not impede their attempts at petitioning government officials. While impossible to know what percentage of women turned to the government, it was not an insignificant number. We may speculate as to the motives of these women: poverty, desperation, greed, loneliness. Yet there is probably also a significant number of women who chose not to appeal to the state and to deal with their situation in silence or within the family. These women may not have known their options, or they may not have wanted people to know the hardships or challenges they faced.

**Economic Role**

This part of this chapter explores the increased economic role women played when on their own. As explained in Chapter 4, married women did not have much legal or economic

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power and could not make official decisions about finances without the consent of their husbands. While this may not have been a problem when husbands and wives were in the same place, emigration complicated these restrictions. If a woman wanted to make a financial transaction, or, as we have seen, request a passport, it could not be done without the authorization of her husband. These restrictions limited the activities of married women, especially those whose husbands could not be found or contacted abroad. Although the law requiring marital authorization did not change in the years prior to World War I, everyday practices did, and within the boundaries permitted, women took on a greater legal and economic role. In addition, it was not uncommon for men to give authorization to their wives from abroad if they needed to perform certain actions. Documents and requests, such as atti di procura, a legal means for men to authorize their wives to perform certain transactions, show that some men trusted their wives to conduct business or manage finances. Men also trusted wives with remittances, as the women at home had to receive, handle, and spend money as directed by their husbands. This gave women agency and economic power as never before.

Archival sources demonstrate that while husbands were away, married women took on important economic roles. Men could give legal powers to women while they were abroad so that women were authorized to conduct certain business transactions at home. These were called atti di procura, and in certain circumstances could give an enormous amount of legal ability to women, power that they would not normally have. These acts were common especially for married male emigrants, whose authorization and consent were needed for any legal activity involving his wife, children, or other physical property.51 These acts had to be legalized/notarized either in Italy or abroad, and were required if married women were to take

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51 Archivio di Stato di Potenza, Atti di Pubblica Sicurezza, Cat. 6. Busta 42.
part in legal activity without their husbands being present.\textsuperscript{52} It does not seem out of the ordinary for men who had emigrated to sign an \textit{atto di procura} for a wife still in Italy, or for married couples to sign one together before separating.\textsuperscript{53}

An \textit{atto di procura} was not just utilized by wealthy families or large landowners, but by people of all social positions. One man Antonio Spoviero, a farmer (\textit{contadino}) from Brianza, authorized an act which gave his wife permission to sell their furniture and their property. He also authorized his wife to spend the money from the sales on tickets to emigrate, as well as on all the necessary shopping that needed to be done beforehand.\textsuperscript{54} In this case, a husband abroad permitted and authorized his wife to complete the sale of their property, an act she could not have done without his permission. In the same act, he gave her very specific instructions, along with his authorization, on how to spend the money from the sale. This example of an \textit{atto di procura} shows that once given this authorization, the wife was allowed to legally act without limitation according to the terms of the \textit{atto di procura}. With these documents, we see men trusting their wives to act in their best interest and handle their legal and economic affairs. In these circumstances, women had more freedom to act, but did not have complete discretion and were still limited in their activities.

On the other hand, some men did not trust their wives and did not want to give them the power to deal with the family’s finances. Giacomina Grillo of Lauria requested information in June 1879 about her husband who had emigrated to Brazil. She got a response almost a year later, in May 1880, saying the local consulate could not find her husband because the address where she believed he was located did not exist. However, a little over three months later, she

\textsuperscript{52} Archivio di Stato di Potenza, Atti di Pubblica Sicurezza, Cat. 6. Busta 42.
\textsuperscript{53} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{54} Archivio di Stato di Potenza, Atti di Pubblica Sicurezza, Cat. 6. Busta 41.
received word that her husband was a traveling merchant and was currently away on business. Two months later, another letter arrived with word from her husband. He informed her he had sent money home with others who were returning to Italy in order to pay off a debt, but the wife used the money on something else because they were in desperate economic conditions. In his letter home, he was sure to indicate he complied with his duties and sent money, but his wife did not follow his instructions about how to spend the money. Officials would see he sent money home, but his wife did not manage it well, according to his letter. It appears she used it for food. The husband expressed that he did not trust his wife and wrote that the only way to prevent her from spending all the money he sent back was by calling her to join him in Brazil. This would give him more control over his own affairs and how his wife spent his money. While we do not know the veracity of these claims, we can see how both men and women used manipulative language to accomplish an objective.

It is clear that husbands granted authorization to their wives on a case by case basis. While some may have trusted their wives to conduct business for the family, others, such as the man above, did not. These men could have signed an *atto di procura* allowing someone else, perhaps a male friend or relative, to complete these transactions instead of their wives, especially if they did not want to return home. Others may have trusted their wives more than their own brothers or male relatives. However, once this legal act was signed, married women were given financial capabilities that they would not have otherwise legally had if their husbands had not emigrated.

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Remittances

Whether legally authorized or not, women took on an important economic role after their husbands emigrated. Not only were they responsible for the management of the home and children, they were also responsible for managing remittances, or money a husband sent back home from abroad. This was perhaps one of the biggest economic changes for women and opened up a world of new opportunities for them. They had to learn how to receive and handle remittances and then cash. This involved thinking on their own, and spending money as they deemed appropriate: buying land, building houses, fixing the house, paying off debts, buying consumer goods, etc. Some may have had to learn to manage a larger budget than ever before on their own.

Officially, if an emigrant wanted to send money home, they would send it in the form of a remittance.\textsuperscript{56} The emigration law of 1901 stipulated that the Banco di Napoli would become the official means for emigrants to send remittances home from abroad. The emigrant wanting to send money home would go to a Bank of Naples, or an affiliated bank, in their location abroad. The emigrant deposited a sum of money and then once the exchange rate and commission was calculated, he received a special money order from the bank. The emigrant then sent that money order directly to a family member (ex. his wife) in Italy. Once his wife received the money order, she took it to the local post office or a branch of the Bank of Naples (or one of its affiliates). The money order would either be redeemed for cash, or deposited in a Cassa di Risparmio, or savings account.\textsuperscript{57}

\textsuperscript{56} Remittances do not include money that was mailed home or sent home with friends or family members. This was probably more common, especially if people distrusted banks and preferred to send money directly through family or people they knew.

\textsuperscript{57} “Notizie circa il servizio dei risparmi degli emigranti affidato al Banco di Napoli,” Bollettino dell’Emigrationze, n. 18 (1905), 28.
There were other ways to send remittances: by an international money order, through private banks other than the Banco di Napoli, or by sending banknotes. Because only the amount of remittances sent through these official means can be calculated, it is difficult to know for sure exactly how much money was sent to Italy. The official numbers for Basilicata were significant. In 1896, 7,319,530 lire were deposited. This number almost doubled by 1905 to 13,802,018 lire. Statistics gathered between 1902 and 1913 show the average remittance amount for Italy as a whole was 290,224,278 lire a year. While records for remittances give scholars an idea of the amount of money being transferred and sent home, many others carried cash themselves or sent it home with a trusted friend or relative. Thus the actual amount of remittances is likely much higher than official statistics indicate. All the money being added into the economy was no doubt positive. Historian Richard Bosworth even goes so far as to say that remittances prevented the South from going bankrupt. Either way, we are able to say that remittances helped some of the poorest regions of Italy, especially Basilicata, and provided the money and aid that the government did not in a time when it was desperately needed.

Often when men sent back remittances, they sent the money orders to women, who went to the local bank or post office to redeem them. According to an economist cited by historian Andreina De Clementi, a majority of the money orders for remittances were deposited in the name of women. This shows that husbands completely relied on their wives with money and finances while abroad. They were entrusted to collect the remittances, and use them not only to

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manage the household, but to pay off debts, arrange dowries, make purchases and complete sales. With remittances, women had more money to spend than ever before.

Depending on what the money was for or if specific instructions were given, women then had the option to manage and spend it as they saw fit. In addition to sending money to maintain and support their families, men sent remittances for a number of other purposes, and all required that women take responsibility for the money. It was common for men to send remittances to pay off debts at home. Many times, an emigrant would be indebted to another who was had lent them money to pay for their ticket to emigrate. Money could also be sent home to buy land or new property. Many families used the money to have new, better houses built, or to improve or redesign their current house. With the handling of remittances and managing money, women became consumers, buying better clothing, furniture for their homes, and different types of food. If men were able to and were responsible enough to send remittances home regularly, those who remained behind would be better off economically, and would have improved living conditions. For some women, remittances were completely life changing. Not only did the money relieve them from poverty, but even allowed some to move up socially.

Remittances had more than simply individual benefits. Local accounts demonstrate how remittances helped local towns. A reporter, Adolfo Rossi, surveying the region in 1908 noted that “the post offices of poor villages, of 2,000-3,000 inhabitants, had movement of hundreds of thousands of lire a year, result of the savings of laborers.” A senator from the town of Corleto Perticara, interviewed by Rossi, said that without emigration the amount of poverty in the town would increase. A doctor in agrarian sciences interviewed in Viggiano commented that

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65 Ibid., 1564.
emigration benefited the commune and millions of lire had come through in remittances, resulting in many people opening savings accounts. For most in small towns, the benefits of emigration gave them more financial support and opportunities than ever before. As one author wrote, it was “una fantastica pioggia d’oro” So while some officials feared too much emigration and depleting populations in many villages, others saw the benefits of remittances and the boost they gave to the local economy. An article in the Bollettino dell’Emigrazione best sums up the economic impact that emigration had, both directly and indirectly, on the small towns of Basilicata: directly for the money emigrants sent and brought home and the improvements made to their land, houses and way of life, and indirectly because it stimulated landowners to modernize and improve technology which would lead to improved output.

This money came at a cost. Millions of families were separated, men traveled and lived in uncomfortable circumstances, and laborers worked hard, sacrificing home, time with family, and the comforts of what was familiar. An article in the Bollettino dell’Emigrazione in 1907 reminded the readers that “millions in savings came sent to Italy: but they represent a number of great pains.” So while some families may have had the rewards of success abroad, others may not have been so lucky or may have had to deal with insufferable pains in order to earn that money.

Transitioning from being impoverished to having more economic security also may have caused disagreements among families over how to spend that money. Many men and women in Basilicata never had disposable income and thus never learned to manage funds. Wasting and

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66 Ibid., 1567.
spending money irresponsibly was common, which led to arguments and disagreements among families.\textsuperscript{70}

As we have seen, not all men sent remittances home, and sometimes women left on their own were economically abandoned by their husbands. If married men did not send remittances to wives and children, they were left in a difficult situation; in some desperate cases, women petitioned the state for help. In other cases, men simply refused to send money home. A wife from Pignola wrote in search of her husband and her two sons who were living in Paraguay. The letter from the mayor stated that “in two years he has not sent any news of himself or his children, having left his wife in the most squalid misery.”\textsuperscript{71} The consulate wrote back to say that the family members were alive, but her husband refused to send money to her: “he has decidedly refused to send any aid to his wife, accusing her of reprehensible conduct.”\textsuperscript{72} The file ends here and we do not know what happened next. We can only imagine how a wife would have taken this type of news. Her husband was abroad, and she remained behind, forced to fend for herself and not able to do anything legally without her husband’s consent. Thus while some women benefitted greatly from remittances, other suffered immensely if their husbands did not send any home.

In one final economic aspect to consider, many rural women were also forced to take on a greater, more demanding role in agriculture with the departure of their husbands. Married women worked on the lands they owned or rented, and single women worked as day laborers, a characteristic that was unique to Basilicata.\textsuperscript{73} An article in \textit{La Stampa} noted it was not

\textsuperscript{70} Rossi, “Vantaggi e danni dell’emigrazione nel mezzogiorno d’Italia,” 1551.
\textsuperscript{71} Archivio di Stato di Potenza, Atti di Pubblica Sicurezza, Cat. 6. Busta 41.
\textsuperscript{72} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{73} Maura Palazzi, \textit{Donne Sole: Storia dell’altra faccia dell’Italia tra Antico Regime a società contemporanea} (Torino: B. Mondadori, 1997), 382.
uncommon to see women laboring in the fields in Basilicata. The article contended they worked like beasts, lost their femininity, and “aged before their time.”74 As mentioned earlier, many areas of Basilicata lacked modern farm tools and machines, making work in the fields even more grueling. Performing more backbreaking work to make up for the absence of men, women who were only 30 appeared to be 45 or 50.75 Because many of the emigrants were young males who would generally work in the fields and do much of the grueling farm labor, women were called on to replace them in their absence. An article from the Bollettino dell’Emigrazione elaborates on some of the effects of emigration in this respect: “and the women, left alone, to the harsh work in the fields, quickly lose the freshness of youth, and generate weak sons, who, when grown up, are no longer tall, robust, and flourishing.”76 This observer pointed out that the effects of physical labor were taking a toll on women and affecting the strength of the children they produced. This article shows that officials observing the effects of emigration were concerned about how local women were impacted. These circumstances appear to be typical in Basilicata.

Conclusion

In this chapter we have seen women turning to the state when in need of assistance. Their petitions to local leaders during times of hardship or uncertainty show that they were not passive, accepting, or inactive. They were concerned wives and parents, persistent, desperate, and knowledgeable about the law and their rights. Mostly illiterate, they trusted state officials to receive their requests, convey them in a representative manner, and then send them off to the

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75 “Mali e dolori dell’emigrazione,” La Stampa, Jan 5, 1907.
appropriate officials. This trust in the state and state agencies was a direct result of emigration and the absence of men.

This behavior was revolutionary for women because of their legal limitations and subordinate role. Men were the heads of the family and were the liaisons between the state and the family. They had legal authority over their wives and children, and the power to vote for them. Yet, when men were away, women had to step in and deal directly with the state. Although their dealings were not political (in terms of left or right wing), they dealt and communicated closely with state agencies and officials.

We also see women taking on a larger economic role than ever before. Some were given permission by their husbands to act without their authorization. Others collected remittances, and dealt with thousands of lire being sent back from abroad. This newfound wealth changed the lives of many women, forcing them to manage money and enabling them to become consumers. Thus, in this chapter we have seen desperate and impoverished women left behind, but also women who benefitted greatly from the fruits of remittances. Some women’s lives changed for the better, others for the worse. The following chapter will look at more of the social effects of women on their own.
Chapter 6: Emigration, Community, and Family: Shifting Gender Roles and Women as “Heads of Household”

Emigration affected the lives of women in Basilicata in many ways. I have thus far emphasized that each family circumstance was unique and that people experienced emigration differently based on a number of factors, such as class, location, family size, and attitude. The previous chapter examined the political and economic changes women experienced when their husbands emigrated. This chapter will discuss some of the social changes within family and community that resulted from the absence of men. In doing so, I will continue to emphasize the divide between the restricted legal role of women and their actual role in practice, which included much more than they were legally permitted.

This chapter begins by looking at education, and how opportunities for schooling and literacy grew in Basilicata as emigration rates continued to rise. Women benefited from the opportunity to learn to read and write, which gave them greater control and privacy over interactions with relatives abroad. I then discuss changes within the community, and how not only other citizens, but local government officials and even members of the church assisted women who were left on their own. I follow that with a discussion on the changing gender roles within marriage. Perhaps one of the most apparent ways this change manifested itself was in marriage and the roles of each spouse. Yet, how might the idea of marriage be different if emigration is expected soon after the nuptials? Young couples must have known that emigration was an option, and many young newly married women must have known that their husbands were thinking about or wanted to emigrate. Emigration changed how spouses interacted and altered the position of women in the relationship, making them the de facto head of household and the primary parental figure with their husbands gone. I end the chapter by discussing honor,
and how emigration impacted preexisting mentalities. A strong honor code, characteristic of Southern Italy, persisted despite emigration, which created situations that could threaten to damage a family’s honor. Within the chapter, I also examine the language used in the petitions sent by women to government officials and show that women used their position as inferior and subordinate to appeal to officials for sympathy. This chapter shows that much changed while husbands were away, but some attitudes and practices also persisted. Women took on new roles in their families and communities, but were still subject to the same mentalities and honor codes. Emigration resulted in a mix of modern and traditional.

This chapter continues to use many of the same archival and primary sources of the previous chapter, including requests made from women to the state, court cases from the Corte d’Assise (Court of Assizes), and records from the stato civile. I also consult various national and local newspapers, the Bollettino dell’Emigrazione, and the Penal Code of 1885. These sources are the closest we can get to seeing how women experienced emigration at the local level. In using this array of sources for this chapter, I continue to show that women were not silent and passive when men emigrated. They became educated and turned to the community when in need of assistance. They took on a greater role in their marriages as temporary heads of household, even if they did not have the rights to go along with that position. Their roles as mothers changed, as they became the parent largely responsible for raising and educating their children. Overall, they found ways to cope with new and difficult circumstances using the tools available to them.
Education

Emigration sparked rising literacy rates and the increasing desire to send children to school. Linda Reeder has made this argument, showing that emigration from Sicily forced many to see the benefits of literacy and the value of an education, more so than they might have prior when poor peasant and agricultural families never had the need to read or write.¹ I argue a similar phenomenon occurred in Basilicata. Whereas prior rural women had little need for literacy, it became necessary for communication once relatives travelled abroad.

As discussed in Chapter 4, since the mid-19th century, laws attempted to require schooling for all children. The Casati Law of 1859 required compulsory primary education in Italy, and the Coppino Law in 1877 reinforced the need for schooling. Much of the impetus behind these laws was to combat widespread illiteracy throughout the whole country. Despite mandated schooling, literacy rates continued to be low in Basilicata, especially among women. Perhaps it was because for many, literacy did not impact daily life, especially in a largely agricultural society where reading/writing was not part of or needed in daily activity. Impoverished families saw little value in education when mere survival was their main objective.

Illiteracy was a major problem in all of Italy after unification, but was far worse in the South. According to the 1901 census, only about 20% of people in Basilicata were considered literate. In an article written by Pietro Lacava of the Ministry of Finance in 1907, he explained the “vergogna” or disgrace of the state of education in the region. Lacava referred to the 1877 law requiring mandatory education as a complete failure in the region. He cited that thirty years after the implementation of the law, illiteracy was still at about 80% in Basilicata.² Was the law

unsuccessful because of disinterest on the part of the people or because of inadequate schooling facilities? I would argue a combination of both.

Local newspapers give us a sense of some of the deplorable conditions of many schools in the region. An article from *La Vita Lucana* described the situation at one school in Potenza, citing the lack of qualified teachers at the institution, and that the school building itself was in bad condition. This particular school was a high school for women (*R. Scuola Normale Femminile*), and thus aimed at more advanced students. And while the number of students had doubled in recent years, the lodgings for the students lacked air and light, and were cold and unhygienic. The report noted “when the sky is cloudy, one cannot do anything, not read, not write, or do work of any kind, because it is dark like a cellar.” While this article paints a grim picture of the conditions at a particular school, there are some positive points to note. First, attendance at the school, which was specifically for girls, had doubled. This shows a growing interest not just in education, but in educating young girls in Potenza. The article was also a call for funding and assistance from the Ministry of Education. Workers at the school and members of the community recognized the importance of education and wanted to improve the conditions of the school. They petitioned the government to help maintain the school, hoping to be able to accept more students, increasing education even more.

Despite the poor conditions of some schools, there were positive signs that education was improving. In the same year of Lacava’s report (1907), the newspaper *Primavera Lucana* also reported an initiative to open schools for adult education in Potenza. Funded by the Ministry of Education, these schools provided evening and holiday hours for adults, showing there must have been a demand for adult education. The Ministry of Education not only had an interest in

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4 “Contro l’analfabetismo,” *Primavera Lucana* Sept 30, 1907.
combatting illiteracy in children, but in adults as well. While we do not have statistics on the number of pupils in the institutions, I do not doubt that many of the adults interested in education were those impacted or influenced by emigration.

It was not until men started emigrating and sending letters home that women saw a realistic need to learn to read and write and the benefits became more apparent. Women wanted to be able to read in private what their relatives were writing from abroad, and not have to bring letters which contained private or sensitive matters to others to have them read. In addition, if an illiterate woman wanted to send a letter to her husband, she would have to rely on someone else to transcribe the letter for her. In many of the documents analyzed for this dissertation, women went to the mayor to make requests and depended on the mayor to write those requests. It might have been humiliating for some to have to tell private details of their marriage to the mayor. Women may have seen these circumstances as a catalyst for learning to read or write. With emigration, it may have also been more economically feasible to send children to school rather than have them work, especially if the husband was dutifully sending remittances from abroad. As stated in Chapter 4, illiteracy rates for women were decreasing at the turn of the century. In 1872, 96.1% of women contracting marriage in Basilicata were illiterate, a number that decreased to 77.6% by 1905. Thus emigration, more so than state laws or reforms, pushed women to learn to read and write. In thirty years the compulsory education law did little to combat illiteracy in the region. However, the increasing rate of emigration, especially after 1900, amplified the need for literacy, especially amongst women.

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Community Changes and Coping with Emigration

Communities adjusted to large scale emigration, and with that change many women took on an unfamiliar role. The sources paint a picture of close knit small towns in Basilicata. As such, the community helped take care of women who were on their own as a result of emigration. Neighbors looked out for one another, the mayors assisted women when they requested state support, and the church and local parish provided comfort and assistance to families. In short, the community helped women survive with men absent.

As evidence of the importance of family and community when husbands emigrated, one mother wrote to the Foreign Ministry on behalf of herself and her daughter-in-law to find the whereabouts of her son. The letter explained that eight years prior, Nicola Lagrotta “abandoned” his wife, leaving her “in the most desolate misery”. He was a coppersmith living in Africa, but he was not answering letters and they did not know where he was located. Both the mother and the wife of the emigrant were living in poverty, just getting by eating bread. The Consulate responded that he was in Algeria, and although he was a good worker, he had poor conduct and wasted the money he earned. The letter was quite frank and informed the family not to expect any aid from Lagrotta. Here we see a woman and her daughter-in-law working together and depending on each other after the son/husband emigrated. Despite receiving bad news, this petition shows the importance of family and the support system that women had after men emigrated.

The state also took on an important role and, in a sense, replaced husbands. In the previous chapter, I demonstrated instances of mayors advocating for women. Some local mayors took responsibility for women in the town if their husbands were abroad. Their concern is

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7 Archivio di Stato di Potenza, Atti di Pubblica Sicurezza, Cat 6, Busta 42.
8 Ibid.
reflected in the correspondence between government agencies. For example, in one case, the mayor of the town of Rotonda and the prefect disagreed over the release of a passport to a woman, Catarina diPaola. Because she was single and had all the correct documentation, including the *nulla osta*, the prefect issued the passport to diPaola. However, the mayor did not deliver the passport and had evidence to invalidate it. It turned out that she had a lover living in America and he was the one who called her to join him there. Her lover’s mother intercepted and wrote to the mayor, telling him that her son was having illicit relations with diPaola, but diPaola was pregnant with someone else’s child. The prefect wrote that it was correct for the mayor to dispute the issuing of her passport, his reasoning being “there is no doubt that the lover living abroad who has sent the money for the trip, seeing her arrive pregnant, will turn to brutal acts.”9 We also learn that diPaola was under age, another reason for removing her passport.10

This complicated case gives us a sense of the relationships and power dynamics that existed within the community. The mother of the emigrant was aware that her son had a lover, and that this woman had been with other men while he was away. She was also aware that diPaola was pregnant, despite wanting to emigrate. The mayor, after discovering the truth about the situation, refused to issue diPaola the passport, fearing for her safety. His intervention prevented her from emigrating, and possibly prevented her from being harmed or beaten by her boyfriend abroad when she arrived pregnant.

The church also played an important role in supporting men and women both in Italy and in communicating with consulates abroad. It was common for religious institutions to respond to requests made for missing husbands abroad. For example, Rosa Maiorino from Abriola wrote for news for her husband, who had emigrated fifteen years prior. She wanted him to return

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9 Archivio di Stato di Potenza, Atti di Pubblica Sicurezza, Cat 6, Busta 40.
10 Ibid.
home, and to send “means of sustenance, being that she lives with an unmarried sixteen-year-old daughter in the most squalid misery.”  

She received word four months later that her husband was located in Brazil, living in good economic conditions. The parish of the locality had informed the consulate of his location. The priest there added that Nicola Ceruzzi lived “in concubinage” with a woman, but he would speak with him on his wife’s behalf. Here we see the intervention of a local priest in the Americas responding to a state request, who promised to talk to the husband on behalf of his wife in Italy. This gives us a sense of the role of priests abroad—they advocated for women and family and pushed husbands to take care of their families.

It is apparent that members of the community came together to help each other when necessary. Yet, some in the community focused on the negative effects of emigration and the lack of men in certain towns. Fears abounded of increased crime in the community, especially as more children were being raised in the absence of a male father figure in their lives. An article from the Bollettino dell’Emigrazione expressed fears about the possible moral effects of emigration on family and children, stating:

“prolonged absence breaks family ties; the husband loses the love for his wife, who is often scorned, because the man, who, living abroad amongst educated people, has learned to appreciate education and desires a more human way of life, he becomes condescending towards the humble companions, who remained boorish in the distant village, absorbed in the work of the field and the care of the children.”

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1 Archivio di Stato di Potenza, Atti di Pubblica Sicurezza, Cat 6, Busta 43.
12 Ibid.
12 Ibid.
14 While the church was present in the community and no doubt assisting women, the extent of this intervention has been difficult to measure with the sources examined.
A local newspaper article from 1908 spoke of similar fears, stating that “the family is dissolving. A thousand factors contribute to its decline, among them those that come from socialist action, from the emancipation of women, the organization of the classes, workers far from home, and many others.” Emigration was no doubt among these reasons. The article placed the burden on the state, and called for it to step in and take responsibility for education of the young. (An article in La Stampa also argues that the weakening of family ties also led to a rise in illegitimacy.)

Little evidence exists that crime greatly increased with the absence of men. According to statistics from the Direzione Generale di Statistica for the years 1898 to 1903 in Basilicata, most instances of crime decreased. For example, the number of murders went from 93 in 1898 to 74 in 1903. Robberies, extortions, and blackmarks decreased from 67 in 1898 to 24 in 1903. The number of thefts did slightly rise, increasing from 296 to 313 in the same period, perhaps because there were more consumer goods or possessions in people’s homes. Overall, crime did not go up a great deal, considering the population decreased during this period. Falling crime rates were not unique to Basilicata and in the whole Kingdom, between 1880 and 1906, the number of murders and homicides decreased by at least 17%, and in Basilicata by 54%. Of course, the connection between these decreasing crime rates and emigration cannot be directly determined, even though the two occurred during the same period.

17 “La delinquenza nei fanciulli,” La Provincia: Quindicinale Cattolico di Potenza, May 24, 1908.
18 “Mali e dolori dell’emigrazione,” La Stampa, Jan 5, 1907.
19 Francesco Campolongo, La Delinquenza in Basilicata, (Rome: Unione Cooperative Editrice, 1904), 17.
Changes in Family and Gender Roles: Women Taking on More Responsibilities

Some of the most important social effects of emigration were on the family and gender roles. Christiane Klapisch-Zuber has argued that marriage is a useful vehicle to understand the workings of a society.\(^1\) We can better comprehend how the women who remained behind lived by looking at marriage during the period of mass emigration. The requests and petitions examined for this study give us a sense of the overall expectations and duties within marriage, and what occurred if men did not comply. Again, the traditional dowry system in Southern Italy gave married women some power in marriage, but was usually not worth enough that she could survive on her own for an extended period of time without remittances. Absent husbands led to a new role for women, changing ideas of marriage and spousal duties, and altering every day roles in the home and as parents. Emigration challenged key gender roles, and as a result, many temporarily overlooked certain restrictions on married women, as they took on a greater burden to compensate for the loss of the head of household.

In Italy, the husband was the legal head of the family, and the wife and children were subordinate. Men were responsible for supporting their wives and children, whether physically present or not. This patriarchal structure was not merely a result of tradition, but also a key aspect of the Italian Civil Code of 1865. The law included a section on marriage, which reiterated the idea of the father as head of the household. It stated “the husband is the head of the family, the wife follows his civil condition, assumes his surname, and is obliged to accompany him wherever he sees fit to establish residence.”\(^2\) This law not only stated that the husband was the head of the family, but also that he was free to move his household in the place he saw fit.

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\(^1\) Christiane Klapisch-Zuber, “Introduzione,” in *Storia del Matrimonio* eds, Michele de Giorgio and Christiane Klapisch-Zuber (Roma: Laterza, 1996), ix.

\(^2\) Codice Civile 1865, Titolo V, #131.
This could mean that if an emigrating husband decided to move his family abroad because he thought it would be for the best of his family, his wife had few legal means to prevent it.

The law also required that a husband, no matter where he was located, had the responsibility to support his wife and children. A section of the law stated, “the husband has the duty to protect his wife, to keep her near him, and to provide her with the necessities of life in proportion to his means. The wife should contribute to the maintenance of her husband if he does not have sufficient means.”

This law is crucial in regards to emigration. The husband’s duty was to support his wife and children, but it is unclear what should happen if the husband did not have the necessary means to support his family or if he simply refused. The wife must contribute if need be, but it is not clear to what extent. These laws were written before large scale emigration, so they did not address circumstances that would arise with large numbers of men abroad, situations which would have to be settled locally in the courts.

Exceptions to the patriarchal system did exist, which were enumerated in the law, and could also justify a man not supporting his wife while abroad. The law said “the obligations of the husband to support his wife cease when the wife abandons her home without just cause.”

If a husband proved his wife was unfaithful or she had strayed from the household, he also had the right to stop supporting her. However, this law does not mean he was free from supporting his children. Since divorce was not legal at this time, marriage only ended (in a legal sense) with the death of one of the spouses.

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23 Codice Civile 1865, Titolo V, #132.
24 Codice Civile 1865, Titolo V, #133.
25 A separation personale was also permitted by law. This would be brought before a judge in cases of adultery or voluntary abandonment. The court would then decide which parent received custody of the children. (Titolo V, #148, #150, #154)
Finally, in terms of custody of the children, the law clearly stated that “patria podestà” (custody) was in the hands of the father. Unless others could present sufficient evidence that he could not exercise it, then it would be given to the mother.”\textsuperscript{26} So, even while a father was abroad, he still had legal custody of the children and was responsible for their upbringing and well-being. He would also be required to give his consent if they were to eventually marry. Women received custody of their children when the father died or if it was given to them by the court.

These were some of the legal limitations within which married women were required to operate, whether their husband was present in Italy or abroad. While the law does allow for some legal exceptions, a court had to approve them. Evidence I have collected shows that women acted well beyond their legal limitations, yet often did so without turning to the courts to make it “legal.”

The women of Basilicata were familiar with the Civil Code and used it to their advantage when petitioning to the mayor and prefect. As seen in many of the requests that I have thus far examined, women were well informed of their rights and the obligations of their husbands. Through these requests we can learn a great deal about how women suffered but survived with husbands away and also learn about the extra duties they took on. We also get a sense of the nature of marriage and marital duty, as understood by these women.

Women took on a greater role within their families, and with their husbands gone, they made the everyday decisions that their husbands could not make from abroad. Not only responsible for economics and family finances, the mother became responsible for making sure the children were fed, going to school, and that the household was functioning. She would not have legal custody of her children, but she would be largely responsible for them while their

\textsuperscript{26} Codice Civile 1865, Titolo VIII, #220.
father was away. When men left, they were still legally responsible for their families, at least financially, while abroad. Yet, the responsibility of a parent is not only financial, and in many cases the mother took on this role while the father was abroad. As historian of emigration Casimira Grande writes, this was a complete “rethinking of the traditional model of wife and mother.” 27 Wives were no longer subordinate in their own homes, but in charge as head of household, even in the eyes of their children.

Thus, women had to take on a more important role than ever before, especially with their children. Petitions often referred to the children, and made sure to point out that not only the mother/wife of the emigrant was suffering, but the rest of the family as well. It may be harsh to say that women used their children to get what they needed from their husbands, but in many of the requests, women made a point to relate how much their children were suffering as a result of abandonment by their father. Perhaps the women (or the mayors who helped them compose their letters) knew that their requests were more likely to be successful if they mentioned the children.

In a letter to the prefect in 1881, the mayor on behalf of an “infelice donna” from Potenza wrote that her husband left twelve years ago, leaving behind two daughters.28 They have helped their mother all they could, but despite their efforts she said they lived “in a deep and abject poverty” without even a “donation” sent back from their father.29 She explained that she was writing this letter, pleading to the prefect, because she had no one else to turn to. She asked for her husband to carry out his marital obligations and duties, since the desolate family finds itself in deplorable living conditions.30 In a response, the husband refused to help because of rumors of illicit

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28 Archivio di Stato di Potenza, Atti di Pubblica Sicurezza, Cat 6, Busta 42.
29 Ibid.
30 Ibid.
behavior on the part of the wife. Nevertheless, the wife had the right to ask for support for her children, because by law the father was supposed to sustain his family. Yet, by saying that the wife was misbehaving, the husband would have reason not to support his wife. Here we are unsure if the husband’s accusations are true. The mayor nonetheless advocated for the woman, and may or may not have known about this husband’s allegations. The request also shows children took on an increased role with their father away. They helped their mother and, if old enough, even worked for wages to support the family. So, both the mother and the children took on more responsibilities.

Emigration changed marriage patterns and influenced when people chose to marry. It was not uncommon for a man to marry right before emigrating and not consummate the marriage, as he would be able to ensure the purity of his wife and honor of his family. Another option was to marry before emigrating so that a man would send remittances to his wife, rather than having to send them to his parents/family; thus he would be working towards building his own home and family. As cited earlier, men in Basilicata generally married in their early twenties, an age when many wanted to start a new family, have their own household, emigrate, and make their own money.31

Once married, the duty of the husband was to care for his family, which included support and authorization for activities of both his wife and children. Husbands abroad did not always comply, and wives would only officially have these powers with a power of attorney or a court order. These are direct instances where we see the law remaining constant, despite the changing reality of emigration. In this regard, we see that the state official stepped in to make sure that the husband complied with his duty. Celestina Trupo from S. Costantino Albanese went to the

31 Maura Palazzi, Donne sole: storia dell’altra faccia dell’Italia tra antico regime e società contemporanea (Milano: Bruno Mondadori, 1997), 371.
mayor’s office in 1881 to inform him that her husband had emigrated to Argentina nine years prior, but had not fulfilled his promise of sending back money. She explained in her petition that the family waited year after year, but received nothing from the father. Now, various issues required his presence at home. He had to pay back debts he incurred before emigrating, and he was needed to give his consent for the marriage of two of his children. After relating the story of Trupo, the mayor pleaded with the prefect that he contact the Consulate in Rio de Janeiro and “compel the aforementioned to repatriate or to send aid, or in the worst case sign a power of attorney for his wife, authorizing her to do any act that which he feels is needed to repair the different family situations.”

No response was received, as more information was needed as to the whereabouts of the spouse. The husband had a number of options, as he could return, send money, or sign a power of attorney giving his wife the ability to authorize documents. Legally, the mayor would be aware of the duties of the emigrant as a husband and father, and he would also witness the true condition of the woman who came to make a request to her husband. It is impossible to gauge whether the women were exaggerating in their petitions, but if the mayor forwarded their requests and added his own comments imploring the prefect to act, it may demonstrate that the women were not overstating their situation.

For some male emigrants, it was important to them to comply with their duties as husbands. Another case of a woman from Potenza shows how each family circumstance was different, and not all fathers or husbands abroad were neglectful. This woman wrote that her husband, Rocco Lo Russo emigrated and had not sent word for twelve years. Her request stated that “he has not given any thought to his wife and five children who are living in the most squalid misery.”

His wife wrote that she wanted him to return, or to at least send some aid to

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32 Archivio di Stato di Potenza, Atti di Pubblica Sicurezza, Cat 6, Busta 42.
33 Ibid.
her and her children. The wife also wanted him to give his consent so his daughter could marry. The Italian consulate located him and he promised to send money, but his response also stated that “he does not want to give his consent for the daughter’s marriage before meeting with the man she intends to marry.”

This response is fascinating because the father showed interest in the well-being and the future of his daughter. His words also seem quite odd, since he had been away for so long and probably did not even know his own children very well. Rather than just giving his blind consent for her to marry (and be less of a financial charge for him), he wanted to first meet her prospective husband and get to know him and see if the family was a good match. (Perhaps it was the mother who arranged the match.) His letter shows that many of the emigrants who went abroad had the interests of their families in mind, even if their actions did not always show that. The subsequent correspondence from her husband arrived almost three years later in 1884. In it, he excused himself for not writing sooner.

We have no way of knowing if this was the first time he contacted home after the initial request, or if letters were exchanged prior. However, this case shows the importance of family, and the concern for the well-being of the children on the part of some emigrating fathers. Emigration did not always break family ties and men did not simply see it as an escape from family and duty.

So in some instances, a husband might have abandoned his wife, but he still took care of his children. The request of a woman from Potenza, Giovanna Leone, demonstrates that fathers continued to care for their children even if they no longer wanted to support their wives. In the letter, Giovanna not only claimed that she was abandoned and left in poverty because her husband did not send money, she also wrote because her eldest daughter planned to get married and needed her father’s consent. The husband, Alessandro di Antonio, responded, stating that he

34 Ibid.
35 Archivio di Stato di Potenza, Atti di Pubblica Sicurezza, Cat 6, Busta 43.
did not wish to have any type of relationship with his wife. However, he asked that the family send him the name of the daughter’s fiancé so he could sign an act of consent to the marriage, as well as send a 2000 lire dowry. He also promised he would do the same when his second daughter married. The letter ended with the reiteration that di Antonio would not send his wife money, as he claimed she owned a small store and from that made enough money to maintain herself and their children.\textsuperscript{36} This case shows an immense amount of distrust of a husband towards his wife. He left her knowing she would be able to support herself managing a store. Perhaps he felt that if he sent more money she would carelessly spend it. While this man cared about the well-being of his children and was quick to take action to respond to their needs, including preparing dowries for their upcoming marriages, that concern did not extend to the wife.

Other letters give a sense of the complicated relationships which existed between husbands and wives. Some petitions show women may not have been concerned for their husbands out of love, but for other motives. Other women who wrote to the prefect were simply interested in whether or not their husbands were alive. Maria Gerarda Sangregorio of Potenza wrote asking for news of her husband, who emigrated over eleven years prior and whom she believed was in Montevideo. The wife did not know his exact location, or if he was dead or alive, and asked the prefect to contact the Consulate to give her news of him. Without hearing news of her husband, she sent another request almost ten months later, hoping to get a definitive answer. It was another eight months before she received a response, which stated that the consulate abroad had not been able to locate her husband.\textsuperscript{37} In this case, married women had few options. She could continue writing asking for word of her husband, hoping that he would turn

\textsuperscript{36} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{37} Archivio di Stato di Potenza, Atti di Pubblica Sicurezza, Cat 6, Busta 42.
up or someone would be able to locate him abroad. Alternatively, she could resign herself to the fact that until it was proven (if ever) that her husband was dead, she was trapped, unable to remarry or do anything that needed her husband’s authorization. Either way, the case of this woman demonstrates that often, wives did not particularly want their husbands to return because they loved them or missed them, but because they were interested in their own rights and civil status.

A woman from the town of Stigliano wrote to the Foreign Ministry in 1879 for information on her husband who emigrated thirteen years prior. This request does not demonstrate much of an emotional marital bond, and simply stated that the woman wanted to know “her own civil position, who was abandoned and is without any means.” The mayor asked the prefect do to all he could to find out if her husband was alive. Three months later, she received a response, informing her that her husband was alive and last known to be working a few months ago in Uruguay. With this petition, we do not have a request for money, a plea that the woman and her children are suffering, or a request for the husband to comply with his duty. She simply wanted to know what her civil status was and whether or not she was free to remarry.

A similar request was sent by a woman from Lagonegro in 1880, where she simply asked for news of her husband. She did not plead her case, did not beg for assistance and did not express suffering. These women may have been surviving on their own or with support of family and/or the community. Perhaps they wanted to remarry, or simply wanted to gain legal rights as a widow. It is also possible they just wanted to know for sure the fate of their husbands. For most of these women, their husband was someone they worried about, but were not deeply concerned about.

38 Ibid.
39 Archivio di Stato di Potenza, Atti di Pubblica Sicurezza, Cat 6, Busta 41.
A woman in a similar situation wrote to officials because she was worried her husband had remarried and had no plans to return home. Isabella Defina wrote for news of her husband, after he emigrated leaving her with three children living in poverty. She told the mayor that he wrote letters promising to send money, but never did. The request stated that it had been two years and her husband had not given any signs of life. The children asked her for bread and she feared that soon she would not be able to feed them. She received a response from the Consulate in Montevideo five months later, saying her husband had not remarried like she supposed. He promised that he would soon write to his family to send them some aid. Perhaps she sent this request out of jealousy, wondering if her husband had wed another, or out of a need to know her own civil position.

Many women wrote requests to the Foreign Ministry because they wanted their husbands to send money from abroad. Some women wrote because they wanted their husbands to return: rimatriare. Either way, the petitions give us a glimpse into marriage and the bond, or lack of one, between spouses. In a time when few rural, lower class couples married for love, some women did not seem concerned about the behavior of their husbands while abroad. They could have lovers, commit crimes, or lead immoral lives. Some women were simply interested in the remittances their husbands would send home.

**Language in the requests**

I have already examined some of the language used by the women in their petitions, but I want to do a more in depth examination of it here. The various requests made by women were sent through the mayor to government agencies. Thus, as I have shown, the state was there to

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40 Archivio di Stato di Potenza, Atti di Pubblica Sicurezza, Cat 6, Busta 42.
support women when emigration affected their lives. The language in these petitions gives us a
glimpse into a practical, but also an emotional, aspect of emigration. Although we cannot know
if the petitions were staged or exaggerated, they play on the weakness and vulnerability
attributed to women, who used their inferior position and their status as second class to gain
sympathy and coerce officials to help them. Each petition was distinct, and told a unique story.
They were imaginative and inventive, and used rhetorical strategies to state their problems.
Women did not simply fill out a form letter when requesting assistance, but each letter told of an
individual family and its own circumstance. Within each petition, the use of specific words and
phrases portrays the desperate state of these women. The language used in the requests gives
women a voice, a type of agency we rarely see from rural women.

Unless the letters were written by the women themselves, we cannot tell if the words
were exactly theirs. Nevertheless, since each letter was different and there was no specific form
or pattern, we can to assume that mayors did listen to each individual woman while composing
their letters. The choice of words in some instances can be very powerful and telling, and a few
main similarities run through each.

Many petitions mention women living in poverty or misery. Often, the letter related a
story of the woman’s situation, and described her as being poor and miserable. In one example, a
woman making a request, Maria Felicia d’Uva, said that she was: “going through the most
extreme miseries, would like to go and find him, and to present his own faithful daughter to
remind him of his conjugal duty.”41 This woman expressed she was living in deplorable
conditions and wanted to go find her husband. This request also referred to the daughter and
marital duty, two important reasons the husband should send money back home.

41 Archivio di Stato di Potenza, Atti di Pubblica Sicurezza, Cat 6, Busta 40.
A petition from Maria Antonia Vignola also uses poverty as a way to show her desperation. She wrote this letter on her own, without the help of the mayor, so her words were directly hers. In her petition, she wrote that she humbly expressed her situation to the prefect. After pleading her case, she begged him to issue her a passport in order to “wash away her misery.”\textsuperscript{42} Here she used her inferior position and inability to work to gain sympathy and support from the prefect. Authorities did not want women to beg on the streets or turn to prostitution, so they helped seemingly desperate women. Perhaps officials believed that if husbands knew their wives and children were poor and living in misery, even if exaggerated, they would be more likely to send remittances.

The language used in many of the petitions was meant not only to pull at emotions, but to require husbands to comply with the legal duties and obligations towards their wives. The wording that Serafina Cosentino from Lauria used in her request for information about her husband in Montevideo employed this dual purpose. She informed the mayor about her husband, stating that “about eleven years ago he emigrated to America and in the first years he sent some small relief to the family, but in the past five years he has persistently forgotten the obligations he has in this town.”\textsuperscript{43} She asked that the Consulate in Montevideo search for her husband and to inform him that his wife and five children “yearn repatriation” and that he “return to his family as a good father and husband as he was before emigrating to America.”\textsuperscript{44} There was no response with the papers I examined, but this letter gives insight into some of the feelings women may have had about their husbands emigrating to America. While a good economic decision for the family, provided that the husband kept his promise and sent money home to his

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{42} Ibid.
  \item \textsuperscript{43} Archivio di Stato di Potenza, Atti di Pubblica Sicurezza, Cat 6, Busta 42.
  \item \textsuperscript{44} Ibid.
\end{itemize}
wife and family, it could also be seen by many as a bad decision. America may have been perceived by some as a place husbands went to escape from their duties and obligations, and to forget about their wives and families. This letter implies that it was emigration to America that made this husband stray from his role as a provider. The wife felt that if he returned home, he would escape the negative influence of America and once again comply with his duty.

In rare cases, women wrote the letters to the prefect on their own. These letters were especially powerful and show suffering and abandonment were not limited to the poorest and least educated. Rosina Coviello of Potenza wrote in 1883 pleading her case to the prefect. Her letter is interesting, as she used elegant script and bolder words she thought were important. She wrote that her husband, Bonaventura Giacomuro “abandoned his country and his large family consisting of five children and emigrated to the Americas, promising to lift his family from the hardest misery.” He first went to New York, and he did send provisions home, which she claimed was barely enough to give bread to their five children. But, she wrote, for the last six months, not only had he not sent anything, but the family had no news of him. She was turning to the esteemed prefect “taking to heart the unhappy position of her five unfortunate children who ask for bread, let this news reach their father and force him to succor his own blood and to repatriate.” The response back from the Foreign Ministry stated that her husband was not located at the address she provided, but they would publish his name in the newspaper L’Eco d’Italia, hoping someone would know of his whereabouts. This letter, written by an abandoned woman, demonstrates that whether rich or poor, married women had the same restrictions, and many depended on their husbands to provide for their families, especially the children. This letter also makes a reference to “blood,” when the mother asked her husband to return to take

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45 Archivio di Stato di Potenza, Atti di Pubblica Sicurezza, Cat 6, Busta 43.
46 Archivio di Stato di Potenza, Atti di Pubblica Sicurezza, Cat 6, Busta 43.
care of his blood. This was another appeal to the duties and responsibilities of men and the ties that bound them to their children, for whom they were obligated to provide.

Women were not the only people who petitioned the mayor and the prefect for news and information, and even young men writing requests used language intended to move state officials. Guglielmo Marotta from Armento wrote a petition on behalf of his mother in 1882, stating that “I live in the most squalid misery at my mother’s expense, who because of her advanced age is hardly able to secure a piece of bread.” His petition used some of the same language as those written by the women, particularly that they were living in poverty and not able to afford a meager piece of bread. His letter shows that both men and women knew what to say and what language would be effective in order to have their requests heard.

Women making requests were not the only ones who used effective language; men also used certain phrases to appease authorities and their wives in their responses from abroad. For example, a woman in 1880 wrote to the prefect, asking for word from her husband and to ask him to return home. Her husband, Domenico Trani, was in Spain, and responded that he would not return home. Instead, he sent money. As long as men responded saying they would send money in the future, it appeased wives and authorities, and at least for some time men would comply with their duties. If men refused to send money home, they were sure to give good reasons, such as infidelity on the part of their wives, or mismanagement of previously sent funds.

Mayors also used persuasive language as they forwarded requests to the prefects. On the petition form, there was an area in the margin for the mayor to include his own comments or notes for the prefect. The mayors often sided with the women and used the requests to help them get their legal right. Even if the mayors knew in some circumstances they legally could do

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47 Archivio di Stato di Potenza, Atti di Pubblica Sicurezza, Cat 6, Busta 40.
48 Archivio di Stato di Potenza, Atti di Pubblica Sicurezza, Cat 6, Busta 41.
nothing for the women, they added their comments anyway, urging the prefect to find a way to help the women in need.

Mayors often commented on the appearance or state of the women who presented themselves before them, whether sending a request about a husband, son, or other relative. In 1880, the mayor of Trecchina wrote on behalf of Carmela Agnelli whose husband Nicola D’Onofrio was in Brazil, saying that the woman was in “in a sad condition and he has not even written.”

In another request, the mayor of Potenza referred to the woman Antonia Castrovillare making the request as “a poor petitioner” (la povera esponente) whose husband emigrated eleven years ago, and for two years has not sent a morsel to the family. She decided to appeal to the prefect “in despair.” The wife was able to provide his exact address in Montevideo, but she received a response saying that they could not find her husband, even though his name was published among those being searched for in Italian newspapers. The mayor did not pass judgment about the women or their circumstances, at least not with his words.

From the comments, the mayors appear to feel bad for suffering mothers. It was common for them to refer to the women making the requests as “la infelice supplicante.” One mayor commented in the margin when an “unfortunate mother” was searching for her son in Marseilles, with no luck. Another woman, Arcangela Diamante from Pignola, was a widow who had not heard from her son since he emigrated one year prior. The mayor asked the prefect in her request to “please give peace to this derelict mother.”

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49 Ibid.
50 Ibid.
51 Archivio di Stato di Potenza, Atti di Pubblica Sicurezza, Cat 6, Busta 42.
52 Archivio di Stato di Potenza, Atti di Pubblica Sicurezza, Cat 6, Busta 41.
53 Archivio di Stato di Potenza, Atti di Pubblica Sicurezza, Cat 6, Busta 42.
Even the language used by the mayor to describe the circumstances of the women is telling. In a letter from 1880, the mayor sent a letter to the prefect on behalf of Maddalena Pricolo with the subject of “prayer” (*preghiera*). The letter stated that her husband “left with the best intentions in the world…and for a long time he had never been burdened to send his wife and two young children anything, and they are destitute and lack means, languishing in the hardest misery.”

She asked that the prefect have compassion for her. In this letter, the mayor was emphasizing the desperate nature of the woman in question and the horrible conditions in which her husband left her. Similar to other petitions examined, this one was also entitled “prayer,” which plays on the religiosity of the women, their husbands, and the officials helping them.

Whether or not the language choices used in the petitions and requests helped in anyway is unclear, but the mayors’ words show they felt sympathy for the women suffering as a result of emigration. While men were absent, the state took on a greater role in advocating for and protecting women. It was probably not easy and may have even been an embarrassment for women to turn to the state and request assistance. Nevertheless, the combination of the language used within the letters and supplemented by the comments of the mayor gives us a rare glimpse into the emotional toll emigration took on many women and the reaction that some mayors had to their situations.

**Changes in motherhood and childbearing**

Emigration had a major impact on fertility, childbearing and motherhood, major aspects in the lives of married women. Caroline Brettell was one of the first to point out the relationship

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54 Archivio di Stato di Potenza, Atti di Pubblica Sicurezza, Cat 6, Busta 41.
55 Ibid.
between emigration and demographic phenomena in Portugal. For example, she demonstrated that couples married later and had fewer children as a result of migration.\textsuperscript{56} After her study, various scholars have looked at changes in marriage and childbearing brought about by emigration, asking questions like did the marriage age change, what happened to the marriage market as a result of emigration, and did men return to marry?\textsuperscript{57}

Massimo Livi-Bacci, in his study of Italian demographics, has also argued that emigration impacted the net increase in population, as well as structures of family and fertility of couples.\textsuperscript{58} While anthropologists have shown that fertility decline did not reach southern Italy until after World War II, Livi-Bacci argues that emigration contributed to the decline because emigration reduced population pressure which would influence fertility.\textsuperscript{59} While traditional values were not likely to change, emigration may have carried away young people who were most open to change. Thus migration perpetuated traditional patterns, and people who emigrated had fewer children.\textsuperscript{60} Jane and Peter Schneider’s study of Villamaura, Sicily, showed that emigration led to falling birthrate, yet men who emigrated returned to marry and have children.\textsuperscript{61} Emigration from Basilicata undoubtedly caused a changing ratio of men to women, which also affected fertility.

\textsuperscript{59} See: Schneider and Schneider, \textit{Festival of the Poor}.
\textsuperscript{60} Livi-Bacci, 271.
\textsuperscript{61} Schneider and Schneider, \textit{Festival of the Poor}, 131-133.
Besides decreasing population, fertility, and changes in marriage age, emigration impacted mothers in other ways. Infidelity and unwanted pregnancy were extreme examples of how their lives may have changed. In some circumstances, women committed infanticide, killing their babies to preserve their honor. While by no means affecting a large number of people, I use cases of infanticide here to show how despite radical change, some elements persisted in society, specifically a strong honor culture. These cases also give us more insight into what women were doing when left on their own. Witness testimony, including testimony from women, gives us a glimpse into the everyday lives and attitudes of people in the towns of Basilicata.

Honor culture was a major aspect of Italian life, especially in the South. Despite changes in society by the turn of the century, the mentality persisted. The Penal Code of 1889 was lenient regarding crimes committed in the name of honor. Punishment was less severe for cases of adultery, abortion, and infanticide if committed to defend one’s honor. For example, the law defined infanticide as less severe than homicide and lessened the penalties significantly, especially if the act were committed to protect one’s honor, if it was within five days of the birth, and if the child had not been registered in the Stato Civile. These provisions affected some women who remained behind, especially if they got pregnant while their husbands were away.

Honor was largely tied to women’s sexuality, but also reflected on the men of the family. Men were usually the ones who avenged any transgressions to honor, or else they would be ostracized or criticized within the community.62 If men were absent, women took it upon themselves to restore their own honor and defend their reputations. These cultural values led

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women and families to commit incredible acts. Infant abandonment and infanticide were two ways women attempted to restore their honor after their actions had damaged it.

With so many men leaving and so many women remaining behind, public fears increased about women committing crimes or having illicit relations. Local officials expressed a great amount of anxiety over the large number of women being left on their own and their potential sexual conduct. The image persisted of the “immoral woman alone, unable to resist the attentions of men or to exercise the necessary authority over her children, abandoned to a destiny of criminality.”\textsuperscript{63} When husbands left, it was normal for men to put women and children in the care of others, whether it was family or neighbors.\textsuperscript{64} Many of the women who remained behind were young and recently married, more of a reason to have family watch over them to ensure they were not unfaithful.\textsuperscript{65}

Emigration led to new circumstances for women, as we have seen. With husbands away for prolonged periods of time, women may have sought love or affection from other men. While that in itself could cause them problems if caught, pregnancy made their transgression visible to the whole community. At this time little, if any, birth control was available, and abortion was illegal. In a small community setting, women would have to deal with the stress of hiding a pregnancy, neighbors’ suspicions and speculations, and the shame of having committed adultery. The baby would become a sign of her dishonor for all of the community to see. Many of these women were pushed to commit desperate acts, to save not only their reputation, but their honor.

\textsuperscript{65} Bianchi, “Percorsi dell’emigrazione minorile,” 259-260.
Although difficult to measure, evidence shows that infidelity rates among women did not rise significantly as a result of emigration. Yet with many men leaving, some wives would inevitably turn to other men, especially if their husband was gone for a number of years. These actions were risky for a number of reasons. First, if a husband abroad was sending remittances that a wife depended on, this inflow of money would most likely end if the husband discovered his wife was being unfaithful. In many instances, people at home watched his wife (his mother, sisters, friends, etc) and would quickly inform him if they sensed trouble or misbehavior. Infidelity was also dangerous in a culture and society where one’s honor was one of the most important values. It was crucial to be seen as an honorable member of society, and having an affair and a child out of wedlock could tarnish one’s honor, cause irreversible damage to the whole family, and push women to commit horrific acts to remedy the damage they had done.

Infant abandonment was an option for both single mothers and married women. As discussed in Chapter 4, there were large numbers of abandoned infants in Italy, and the practice was sanctioned through the use of the ruota or wheel, where women could anonymously leave their babies in the care of the church. Most abandoned children were illegitimate, given up by single women who got pregnant out of wedlock, but some married couples also abandoned children if they could not afford to care for them. The ruota was used all throughout Italy, but had higher usage in the South. Reforms to end its use by the late 19th century were successful, as attitudes shifted about the anonymity of abandonment, and the need to assist mothers. As Maria Sophia Quine argues, a shift from church to state control of infant abandonment occurred,

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68 There was no legal responsibility for the unrecognized father of an illegitimate child.
and “under liberalism, the unwed mother was transformed from an anonymous sinner into an object for rehabilitation, experimentation, and control.”"\textsuperscript{70} Mortality was always high amongst abandoned babies, but as Quine argues, when the \textit{ruote} were finally closed, there was an increase in instances of infant deaths and stillbirths, which she argues is evidence that people were killing illegitimate babies when anonymous abandonment was no longer an option.\textsuperscript{71} Much more is known about the wheel and abandonment in the North and in Sicily, but abandonment did occur in Basilicata on a smaller scale. According to David Kertzer, Basilicata had the lowest rate of abandonment, 2-3\% of babies.\textsuperscript{72}

Abandoning an illegitimate child was a way to protect and restore a woman’s honor. Infanticide was another, more grave choice. The number of women who may have gotten pregnant and found a method of aborting the fetus cannot be easily determined. A survey of cases in the Corte d’Assise of Potenza between 1881 and 1901 show only thirteen cases of women tried for infanticide. For those who were not able to abort and gave birth, infanticide was the final option to save a woman’s honor, especially in the years after the anonymous \textit{ruota} was abolished. Court records inform us of the facts surrounding infanticide committed by women who were caught. They also give us a glimpse into how society functioned in the small towns of Basilicata, and demonstrate the social pressures that existed for women at the time.

According to the Penal Code of 1889, infanticide was a crime, but the penalty could be mitigated if a woman argued she committed the act to save her honor. After surveying various court cases, most women used this as a defense, and most of the guilty only ended up serving less than five years in prison. David Kertzer argues that the community justified crimes

\textsuperscript{70} Ibid., 219.
\textsuperscript{71} Ibid., 193.
\textsuperscript{72} Kertzer, \textit{Sacrificed for Honor}, 76.
committed to save one’s honor, considering honor was highly valued in Southern Italian culture. Hiding a pregnancy and then disposing of a baby protected a woman’s honor.\textsuperscript{73} Maria Sophia Quine argues that this provision in the criminal code was a result of a general acceptance of infanticide in society. She argues that “the high degree of tolerance which Italian society exhibited towards infanticide arose partly from the conviction that this was primarily a crime against children who should not have been born in the first place”\textsuperscript{74}

Women, out of desperation, gave various arguments to authorities to at first protect their innocence, and if caught, to then lessen their culpability. In cases of infanticide, women frequently told authorities that a child was stillborn. Yet evidence from the examination of cadavers or autopsies often proved otherwise, demonstrating suffocation or bruises on the body inflicted after birth. Mothers of the accused, close friends, or other family members often lied to authorities, denying pregnancies, and claiming they knew nothing. One woman went so far as to tell the local doctor, who had examined her at four months, that he was wrong, and she was definitely not pregnant. Not surprisingly, the doctor testified he did not want to see the patient again after that visit.\textsuperscript{75}

When caught, women commonly made excuses or claimed they had been attacked or raped and thus got pregnant. One woman, upon discovering that undeniable proof existed of her giving birth and leaving the child in a closet to die, claimed that she had a hysterical attack. She committed the crime because she had lost all reason, appealing to common characteristics of female weakness and dominance by their emotions.\textsuperscript{76} Another woman explained her pregnancy-like weight gain by claiming she had hydropsy or a buildup of blood in her abdomen. That claim

\textsuperscript{73} Ibid., 26.
\textsuperscript{74} Quine, \textit{Italy’s Social Revolution}, 184.
\textsuperscript{75} Archivio di Stato di Matera. Corte d’Assise. Busta 192, n. 1189.
\textsuperscript{76} Archivio di Stato di Matera. Corte d’Assise. Busta 216, a. 1353.
was disproved by the doctors, and out of desperation, she accused her younger brother of incest. When her brother was cleared, she told authorities the father of the baby was a stranger who raped her. These cases show that women made outrageous claims and committed extraordinary acts in an attempt to save their reputation and their honor. Similar to the petitions examined earlier in this dissertation, out of desperation, women appealed to the court using their subordinate and vulnerable positions as the weaker sex. If they were caught in a lie, they accused others or tried desperately to justify their actions, even if their argument seemed illogical.

These cases also show us the inner workings of how communities operated. Privacy as we know it did not exist. Most people knew their neighbors and others in the commune and were aware of their everyday affairs. Testimony of one witness in an infanticide trial, merely a neighbor to the accused woman, said she noticed that the accused was pregnant and was trying to hide her growing stomach. The neighbor also knew the husband of the accused was in America. Neighbors and townspeople would also report walking by and hearing discussions or arguments between spouses. Some knew the intimate details of their neighbors’ lives. This seems especially true for women who had husbands abroad, almost as if the townspeople felt obligated to “keep an eye on them” and ensure they remained out of trouble. Other neighbors noticed when women gained weight due to pregnancy. In these small towns, it was difficult to hide from friends and neighbors, and townspeople were quick to notice and form opinions about what was occurring in other’s lives. Some were not even safe from the watchful eye of relatives or extended family. In many cases, it was the mothers of the emigrants, who wrote to their sons abroad, informing them of what was occurring in the village.

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Most residents had an opinion about what was going on and expressed it to the authorities in their testimonies. One witness told the court that he found it hard to believe that a husband did not know his wife was pregnant.\(^79\) Another witness expressed her disbelief that an accused woman actually committed infanticide, saying “it did not appear true because no mother could harm her own child.”\(^80\) In another case, a neighbor doubted a woman was guilty of hiding her pregnancy and subsequent infanticide because “she came from a good family.”\(^81\) Various witnesses used this type of reasoning in court cases, and they asserted that the accused could not possibly be guilty of their crimes because they were good women who came from good families. When these same neighbors found out the truth, they often speculated about what had occurred. One neighbor of an accused stated she knew the woman was living alone with two children, and never saw or heard of anyone visiting or staying the night. This same female witness said she was hurt when she learned the truth, and did not want to know anything more about the accused.\(^82\)

Even inside the home, family members had little privacy from one another. Various members of the family commonly slept in the same room, and children were often present while adults conversed. The ten-year-old daughter of a woman accused of infanticide testified that she heard her mother speaking about an abortion. She also witnessed her mother asking a doctor for pills to terminate a pregnancy, which the doctor refused to provide.\(^83\) In other instances, women report giving birth silently in their bed during the night, while other family members were asleep in the same room. One official recounted the story of a woman giving birth silently in bed so as

\(^{80}\) Ibid.
\(^{82}\) Ibid.
to hide from her family, saying “the woman gave birth and had the rare courage not to scream and to keep the little one from crying.” Many in small towns most likely lived in homes with a few rooms. If there was a separate bedroom, it was likely shared by all family members.

Court documents also give us a glimpse into the relationship between a husband and wife, especially if they were separated. One woman, accused of infanticide, claimed that she hid the pregnancy from her husband fearing for her life. A neighbor reported that the accused woman told her she did not have the courage to tell her husband for fear of his reaction. That same husband said he received a letter while in New York from his mother in the town, informing him that his wife was pregnant. He told the authorities that he did not believe the rumors about his wife and surprised her by coming home. He testified that if she told him the truth, he would not have been violent with his wife, but would have separated from her. This case clearly shows the husband was a figure of authority, and violence and/or abuse was acceptable in marriage. We also see the mother acting on behalf of her son and protecting him from the lies and deceit of his wife.

These cases of infanticide, though probably only relating to a small percentage of women left behind, show us a number of important facts about emigration and society at the time. First, we see that in many small towns of Basilicata, privacy barely existed and it was difficult to hide from family or neighbors. People of the town, especially women, always seemed to know what was going on and formed opinions about the behavior of others. More importantly, these cases show us the mindset of women when faced with the potential loss of their honor. They were desperate to hide their sin, and resorted to horrific acts in order to protect themselves and their

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84 Ibid.
85 Ibid.
family’s image. Their actions show the importance of honor, even above the life of a newborn baby.

Conclusions

This chapter has continued to examine the impact emigration had on the women who remained behind, focusing particularly on family and community. By the early 1900s, education was spreading in Basilicata, for children and adults, and women were becoming more literate. The community, local officials, and church helped women cope with living on their own. Women continued to petition the state when in need, using emotionally charged language that appealed to the perceived weaknesses of their sex and coercing the state to advocate for their rights against their husbands’ neglect. As we have seen, the mayor often expressed sympathy for their condition. In order to try to improve their situation, women played on their helplessness, their inability to work, and the duty of a husband to provide for his wife and family. Women also took on increased responsibility in their marriages and as mothers, with husbands and heads of family abroad. While these changes gave women a lot more freedom, they also led to problems in some cases. Infidelity, infant abandonment, and infanticide were realities for some women who remained behind, and their actions in these circumstances show us the attitudes that persisted for these women in small communities of Basilicata, despite the changing times.
Chapter 7: When They Returned

By the outbreak of World War I in 1914, large scale emigration from Italy had been occurring for over forty years. During this time great movements of populations occurred both within and outside of Italy, large sums of money were added into the economy, and ideas and influence arrived from abroad. This chapter will ponder what may have occurred after the men of Basilicata emigrated. No matter the circumstance, each caused a dramatic change in the lives of women. As shown throughout this dissertation, despite still being limited by their legal position, women took on an increased role while their husbands were away. This chapter will examine the effects of emigration on the women of Basilicata after emigration, and argue that it was not just emigration that affected women, but the return of men as well.

I begin the chapter by discussing some of the demographic effects of emigration on the region after almost a half of a century of emigration. The drastic loss of population caused panic for many local officials and residents, which I will also examine in this chapter. It will then discuss men (and women) returning home and how the role of women was once again impacted. Life did not just return to “normal,” but that new experiences of both the returning emigrant and the women who had been on her own changed the dynamics of family, society, and gender roles. I will then discuss the effects on women when men did not return. Many wives would emigrate themselves and join their husbands, upon their request. Some would have little choice, but many may have been excited by the idea of moving to a new place. Other women were simply abandoned and never heard from their spouses again, which often left them in a difficult legal and financial position. I will discuss the limited recourses for these women, which included petitioning the state, or the more drastic act of emigrating illegally.
This chapter will rely on a number of archival and primary sources. Articles by Adolfo Rossi and Amy Berardy from the *Bollettino dell’Emigrazione*, as well as local newspapers from Potenza, continue to offer incredible first hand insight into the lives of emigrants. Archival sources from the Archivio di Stato in Potenza provide documents on illegal emigration and abandonment of women. Records from the office of the prefecture show communications amongst government officials about *emigrazione clandestina*, or illegal emigration, and records from the Foreign Ministry (*Ministero degli Affari Esteri*) contain copies of the requests and petitions sent by women (through the mayor’s office) to consulates abroad to search for their missing husbands. As with previous chapters of this dissertation, many of my sources rely on government documents and material written by outsiders. It is difficult to find sources originating from the emigrants or the women themselves. Thus, the information I gather about the experiences of women must be pieced together. Many of the scenarios presented in this chapter are hypotheses based on evidence I have found in archival sources. In addition, the experiences of each family differed, so I will in no way offer blanket assumptions or argue that any specific circumstance applied to all.

**Demographic Effects of Emigration**

“interi paesi si svuotano” ¹
“entire villages are emptying”

By the early 20th century, millions of people left their towns and villages to emigrate. A magazine on colonization, *Rivista Coloniale*, reported that the number of Italians abroad by 1924 was close to 10 million, a number that had doubled since 1901, and was far greater than the

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estimated 270,000 Italians that emigrated by 1871. These numbers show just how much migration increased in a little over 40 years. However, many of those emigrants returned. They had gone abroad to make more money and save, and came home once they earned enough. Others returned home to retire in Italy. About half of all Italian migrants eventually returned. For example, between 1880 and 1950 over 50% of emigrants returned from the U.S. alone. Yet these numbers vary widely, depending on the year and the location abroad. For example, in 1903, 35% of emigrants returned from the U.S., while 66% returned from Argentina in the same year. Because of the proximity to Italy, emigrants to European countries like France, Germany, or Switzerland, were more likely to be temporary and had a higher return rate. Dino Cinel cites statistics showing Potenza and Mater had low return rates. Overall, tracking the number of returnees is difficult, especially those returning from the Americas.

Yet, the circumstances in Basilicata were somewhat different. Men left in droves, leaving many towns to be occupied largely by women, children and the elderly. Although men may have come back and may have even still considered their village as their home residence, all accounts show that the reality in the village was a lot different. The toll emigration had taken on many towns in Basilicata was far worse than the rest of Italy, as many did not return, which greatly affected the demographics of the small towns. In general, migrants returned to regions with better economies and more opportunity. Thus, the provinces of Potenza and Matera had the

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5 “Relazione de Commissario Generale dell’Emigrazione,” Bollettino dell’Emigrazione, n. 7 (1904): 17.
6 Cinel, 109.
7 One of the major sources of information would be passenger manifests of migrants returning to Italy, a source which I have not been able to locate because they may not have been preserved.
lowest return rates in the Mezzogiorno, mainly because they were among the poorest regions in the South.\footnote{Cinel, \textit{The National Integration of Italian Return Migration}, 109.}

The census of 1901 shows that Basilicata was the only region in all of Italy that had a loss of population. In 1881, 539,258 people resided in Basilicata. By 1901 the population dropped to 490,705, and in 1907 it dropped even more to 470,385, a decrease of 52,847 in twenty years.\footnote{Adolfo Rossi, “Vantaggi e danni dell’emigrazione nel mezzogiorno d’Italia (Note di un viaggio fatto in Basilicata e in Calabria dal R. Commissario dell’Emigrazione),” \textit{Bollettino dell’Emigrazione} n.13 (1908): 1640; Maria Favella, “Flussi Migratori della Basilicata: Situazioni e dimensioni nel period 1861-1940,” \textit{Basilicata Regione Notizie} 98 (2001), 88.} A closer look at these numbers shows that Potenza and Lagonegro, and the mountainous areas surrounding the two cities were mostly responsible for the drop in population. The towns near Matera had a continued growth in population, particularly because emigration was slower from that area.\footnote{Falvella, “Flussi migratori della Basilicata,” 89.}

![Map of Basilicata](http://maps-of-italy.blogspot.com/2011/07/basilicata-map-political-regions.html)

**Fig. 5- Map of Basilicata**
Statistics taken from the town of Picerno demonstrate how emigration may have affected the population. In the 1880s, the average number of births in the town was 214.1 per year. By the 1890s, that number was down to 172.1 per year, and in the 1900s down even further to 146.3 per year. As for marriages, there was an average of 45.2 per year in the 1880s, and that number decreased to 34.6 per year by the 1900s. In terms of overall population, there were 4,401 registered inhabitants of the town in the 1881 census. This number decreased to 3,828 by 1901, and 3,579 in 1911. These lower rates are generally attributed to emigration. Although this is one town, it is representative of many towns in the vicinity of Potenza that experienced large scale emigration in the late 19th and early 20th century. This was significant because it meant that young single women were less likely to find a husband, get married, and have children. I would argue that these decreases were directly caused by emigration, both of men and of families.

Many other towns in the area around Potenza had similar population shifts due to emigration. A report in the Bollettino dell’Emigrazione in 1908 noted that in the town of Albano di Lucano, the population was rapidly declining due to emigration. Not only men were leaving, but entire families. The town registered 2,400 residents in 1908, 600 of whom were reported to be in America. The same 1908 report found that emigration was continuing to increase, especially in the previous ten years. It resulted in a population decrease in many communes. For example, in 1901, 71 comunes in Italy had a decrease in population of 800 or more people, and 24 of those were from Basilicata. In the town of Pignola, the mayor reported that the

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12 This may be attributed to emigration, but lowering birth rates are not necessarily correlated with emigration, there are other variables. Statistics compiled using the Stato Civile di Picerno, Atti di Matrimonio, 1880-1910.  
13 Statistics taken from the Picerno Wikipedia.it page which cites ISTAT as the source.  
14 Rossi, “Vantaggi e danni dell’emigrazione nel mezzogiorno d’Italia,” 1550.  
15 Ibid., 1640.
population almost halved as a result of emigration. There were 4,000 residents in 1881, and the number dropped to 2,557 in 1901 and went down to 2,100 by 1908.\textsuperscript{16} In Laurenzana, the population was 7,300 in 1881 and dropped to 4,300 in 1901. By 1908, the population fell to 3,000, a decrease of about 60% in nearly thirty years.\textsuperscript{17} In Viggiano, the population also decreased from 7,000 in 1881 to 5,000 in 1908.\textsuperscript{18} The mayor of another town, Latronico, reported that the town had 2,300 inhabitants in the country and 1,500 in America, and by 1908 entire families were beginning to emigrate.\textsuperscript{19} Similar statistics exist for most towns in Western Basilicata. Low return rates combined with ever increasing emigration led to severe population loss in the region. The dramatic decrease in the population is evidence that unlike the situation in other Italian regions, emigration was permanent.

**Fears of too much emigration**

“I greet you in the name of the 3,000 people of Moliterno who have emigrated and of the 5,000 others who are preparing to leave.”\textsuperscript{20} - Vincenzo Valinoti Lattorraca, mayor of Moliterno, to Prime Minister Giuseppe Zanardelli

It is impossible to calculate how many people left Italy, or how many of those people returned. Some emigrants left from foreign ports, like Le Havre, Marseilles, or even Hamburg, which they traveled to by land before embarking. Even Francesco Saverio Nitti commented on how unreliable statistics were, since many Italians left from French ports and often Italy relied on American statistics for their own migration numbers.\textsuperscript{21} Either way, we know that emigration

\textsuperscript{16} Ibid., 1555.
\textsuperscript{17} Ibid., 1561.
\textsuperscript{18} Ibid., 1565.
\textsuperscript{19} Ibid., 1574.
\textsuperscript{20} “La saluto a nome di 3000 moliternesi che sono emigrati e degli altri 5000 che si apprestano a partire.”
overall was not a small phenomenon, and was something that affected people all over the peninsula.

Estimates give us a sense of the amount of emigration from each region. Between 1880 and 1915, about three million people emigrated from the Veneto, 1.45 million people emigrated from Campania, and 870,000 from Calabria. In those same years, about 375,000 people emigrated from Basilicata, and in the period from 1869 to 1915, about 400,000 emigrants left the region. While the numbers on their own may not be as high as those from other regions, between the period of 1876 and 1905, Basilicata had the second largest emigration rate per population after the Veneto.

The large number of people leaving caused alarm in many places, especially in Basilicata given the high ratio of men emigrating. The newspaper La Stampa reported in 1887 that in some towns of Basilicata, 1/3 of the male population had emigrated. People feared that because the youngest and ablest men were leaving, no one would be left to work in the fields. They also feared population loss, and towns filled with only women, children, and the elderly. An article about emigration from the Bollettino dell’Emigrazione in 1902 stated, “women and children remain in Italy; only the able-bodied men emigrate…the proof is the low number of Italian births.” One small landholder noted that “emigration does not leave anyone in the countryside besides the old and the invalid, because the best leave and sometimes they take their entire families.”

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27 Rossi, “Vantaggi e danni dell’emigrazione nel mezzogiorno d’Italia,” 1552.
The changing ratio of men to women in the region was a cause for alarm. In 1881, there were 251,621 men and 272,883 women in Basilicata (approximately 48% men to 52% women). By 1901, there were 231,763 men and 258,942 women (approximately 47% to 53%).

Although women outnumbered men earlier on, within a twenty-year period, there was an overall population decrease, and the number between women over men in the region increased by 7,000.

On the local level, mayors expressed concern about emigration from their towns. In a letter to the prefect in February 1882, the mayor of Savoia di Lucania wrote that emigration from the town had increased so much that there was a severe danger to the population because of loss of farm labor. The prefect responded, saying his complaints were not unique to his town, and “an inordinate desire is manifesting itself in many communes of this province for emigration abroad.”

He said they could do little because the government must “respect the right of individual freedom” An article on Basilicata from the national newspaper *La Stampa* in 1910 reported that the region, along with Calabria were completely depopulated (*sono spopolate miseramente*). The mayor of Laurenzana reported many closed up and left houses in the town and abandoned land because of lack of workers. The tone of many of these mayors and officials was dismal.

Outsiders, both visiting the region and with connections to the region, also could not ignore the large population loss. Carlo Levi observed the effects of emigration during his stay in the region in the 1930s, writing that “the villages of Lucania, with half their people on one side

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29 Archivio di Stato di Potenza, Atti di Pubblica Sicurezza, Cat. 6, Busta 40.
30 Ibid.
31 Ibid.
of the ocean and half on the other, were split in two.”

Even Nitti commented on the loss of population in various towns of the region, saying “I represent one of the towns most devastated by emigration, the area of Muro Lucano; in it emigration has become morbid. The population is reduced in some municipalities by half or at least half: Sanfele, Balvano, Ruoti, Ruvo, perhaps all the towns in my area are decimated by emigration.”

Information gathered from the U.S. Immigration Commission from the Royal Italian Agricultural Commission’s investigation into Basilicata and Calabria also demonstrated the fears of local officials about the effects of emigration on their towns. The towns of Albano di Lucana and Viggiano lacked workers, despite higher wages, and during harvest season recruited peasants from the province of Lecce (Puglia). Officials in Albano di Lucania, Pignola, Laurenzana, Viggiano, Moliterno and many other towns, all reported that wages had doubled since emigration grew, and workers had become more demanding, often asking for food. All towns reported heavy losses of population due to emigration.

Local officials wondered what they could do to slow emigration. A priest from Laurenzana said the best way to deter migrants would be by not issuing passports so readily, making it harder for people to emigrate and maybe forcing them to reconsider. An article from a local newspaper proposed solutions to high rates of emigration, which they quote as doubling from 250,000 people in 1902 to 520,000 in 1906. The article stated that some suggested not

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37 Rossi, “Vantaggi e danni dell’emigrazione nel mezzogiorno d’Italia,” 1563.
giving passports to the illiterate, while others suggested that improving the economic situation in the region would eliminate the need to emigrate.\(^{38}\)

Letters from local mayors to the prefects show how local officials even felt pressure from the community to monitor emigration. In a letter to the prefect of Potenza in 1883, the mayor of the commune of Picerno complained that agents told stories of how spectacular the Americas were, and thus many came to request passports to emigrate. However, he asked the prefect to give him “the necessary orders to repress the abuses of agents in order to prevent the best cultivators from leaving.”\(^{39}\) He also asked the prefect how he could slow down or stop emigration, fearing that the attraction of success in America will cause many to emigrate and leave the fields uncultivated.\(^{40}\)

The same fears were shared not just by officials, but by many of the inhabitants of Basilicata. Emigration affected a great many villages, some more than others. In almost all, fears focused on the shortage of young, able men, and the insufficient number of people to work in the fields. An article from the Bollettino dell’Emigrazione described the situation, noting: “Basilicata, like other regions is affected by the damages of emigration: good workers leave and those who remain are the old, women, and children, unproductive individuals in short. There is a lack of workers and the land lies fallow.”\(^{41}\) Members of the community shared in these fears. Women, children and the elderly abounded. According to an article in Primavera Lucana, anyone who was capable of working left, and it quite bluntly stated that those who remained were the “undernourished, epileptics, idiots, invalids, incapable.”\(^{42}\) The article also expressed

\(^{38}\) “L’emigrazione transoceanica ed i propositi del governo,” Primavera Lucana, Feb 12, 1907.
\(^{39}\) Archivio di Stato di Potenza, Pubblica Sicurezza, Cat. 6, Busta 44.
\(^{40}\) Archivio di Stato di Potenza, Pubblica Sicurezza, Cat. 6, Busta 44.
\(^{42}\) “L’emigrazione transoceanica ed i propositi del governo,” Primavera Lucana, Feb 12, 1907.
fear over the future of the military; if all of the most capable men were leaving, it asked “who-in an eventual conflict—will defend Italy?” 43 While many may have supported or understood the reasons for emigration, others had to have feared for the future of their town.

For the country overall, migration did not have that great of an impact on the population. In a way the concern about too many leaving was unfounded, because not many opportunities existed for them at home, which was what pushed them to emigrate in the first place. Many of those emigrants would also return, which alleviated many of the aforementioned fears.

Through Nitti’s words, we can see that the government was aware that emigration was temporary for many. He pointed out that more than half of emigrants returned, whether it be through Naples, Genoa, Palermo, Catania, or any of the other ports (including foreign) accepting ships from abroad. Nitti also stressed that Italy had one of the highest birth rates in Europe at the time. The population rose from 25,016,801 in 1861 to 29,699,785 in 1885, despite the rising number of emigrants leaving each year. Nitti argued that these factors, along with falling mortality rates, showed no need for alarm: emigration was not affecting population growth of the country. 44 Nitti also tried to quell fears by reporting that emigration rates were going up in all European countries, not just Italy. He cited that in the United Kingdom, Germany, Switzerland and Sweden emigration numbers were on the rise in the 1880s. 45

Through these accounts from officials and locals, we can see that desperation was felt by many. An article in Primavera Lucana from 1906 reported the numbers continue to increase at an alarming rate, without remedy, and it stated in a few years Basilicata would be “a true land of

43 Ibid.
death.”46 A 1907 article in the *Bollettino dell’Emigrazione*, pointed out that “emigration has become morbid: entire villages are losing the strongest men and they move to America, accompanied by priests...women, the elderly, and children remain.”47 Houses in the communities were closed up and abandoned, farmlands went uncultivated, and fears persisted that the only ones left would be women, children, the elderly, and those who had failed to make it in America. This image may seem like an exaggeration, but was not far from reality in many towns. Thus, by 1914 it seemed that many of the villages in Basilicata would cease to exist if emigration continued.

**Men Returning**

One of the reasons many of these fears were unfounded is because of the high return rate of emigrants. Some of these men did return, either to remain at home or to collect their families to emigrate. Wives permitted their husbands to emigrate knowing husbands would continue to provide for the family and eventually return with more money after working for some time or accomplishing a specific goal abroad. Men saw themselves as temporary migrants and considered their permanent residence to be in Italy. Their wives, children, families and community was in the village and that was home, no matter how many years they had been abroad. Some men returned temporarily, to bring their wives and children (or other family members) abroad, to settle affairs, or to sell property. Others returned home because they found the streets in America were not paved with gold. Despite the success stories of others, life for an immigrant laborer was tough, and some were not successful. For these men, the best option was

Another group of men returned home to retire and live out the rest of their lives surrounded by familiar people and places.

The return journey would be similar to the departure. Ports of entry in the United States and other countries were also ports of departure. The same ocean liners that brought immigrants to the Americas also brought passengers back to Europe, whether they were returning migrants or potential migrants who were rejected at the port of entry. For many of the Italian “birds of passage” who went back and forth from Italy to America, this would not be their first journey. The steamships arrived in the same Italian ports of departure (ex: Naples, Palermo, Genoa) and passengers disembarked and made their way back home, most likely by catching a train. Once they arrived in the town, returning emigrants were required to make themselves known at the *stato civile*.

The rates of return migration overall were high for Italians when compared to other migrating groups in the same period. According to the United States Immigration Commission, 56% of Southern Italians returned from the United States between 1908 and 1910. In that same period, 62% of Northern Italians returned, a high number compared to other groups immigrating to the U.S. at the time; the Irish had a return rate of 6% and the Jews had a return rate of 8%. Italians were unlike other groups because they generally emigrated for economic reasons, as opposed to others who left because of famine, religious persecution, or political turmoil. Statistics for the years 1906 to 1915 show that around 6 million Italians emigrated, and in the period of 1904 to 1914, 1.8 million returned.49

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Returning migrants generally lived better, had a nicer or bigger house, owned more possessions, and wore newer clothes. They were exposed to ideas, attitudes, and worldviews that drastically differed from their own. Upon their return, whether consciously or not, these new concepts were transferred from husbands to wives, families, and communities. Exposure to different types of foods, social customs, consumer habits, religions, and even houses must have challenged how many emigrants viewed their own world. A number of articles from the *Bollettino dell’Emigrazione* discussed some of the changes to people who returned. Reports stated that return migrants had improved hygiene, were more interested in education, especially for children, and had a higher participation in civic activities. They were used to a cleaner household, without animals living inside, dressed differently, and saw the role of women in a different light. Exposure to these customs and practices (modernity) may have also changed how returning emigrants interacted with the (traditional) community. Did migrants acquire habits and ideas from abroad and apply them to life at home, or did they return to their old ways? More research is needed on how emigration impacted exposure to new ideas which changed family practices and patterns, as well as social practices and ways of life.

Seen by many in their community as new people, returning emigrants formed a new economic class in some towns. For example, return migration in Lagonegro resulted in the creation of a small bourgeoisie called ‘*americani*’-people who returned from the United States or Argentina and lived off their earnings with a small daily income. They lived on that income without working, and often had time to participate in local politics or societies. A report said that in Lagonegro this was the situation for about 100 families.50 Francesco Cerase, a historian who focuses on return migration, noted that people who returned to retire did not play an active role

50 Rossi, “Vantaggi e danni dell’emigrazione nel mezzogiorno d’Italia,” 1577.
in politics and were not “an innovative force within the socio-economic structure of their homeland.” 51 Because many who returned for good were older and retired, they had no interest in participating in politics.

Returning migrants also had a better sense of being Italian, since people abroad viewed people from all over the peninsula as Italian, not as Sicilian, Neapolitan, etc. According to historian Richard Bosworth, the peasantry was not integrated into the new Italian state, and the state was a far-off entity in Rome. While this dissertation argues the people of Basilicata were in fact integrated, Bosworth is correct to state that strong regionalism still existed. Emigration brought Italians from different regions and provinces together in a foreign land, yet outsiders saw them all as “Italians.” This grouping gave migrants a better sense of being Italian, and not just someone from a small town or region. 52

As I have examined in previous chapters, when men emigrated, women undertook responsibilities that far exceeded their legal role. They were given more access to money and finances, had more contact and relied on the government and government agencies, and became largely responsible for the well-being of their families with the head of the household abroad. Yet, when men returned, the extended gender roles clashed with their traditional legal role. Women receded to their subordinate roles, and in many cases may have gone from being the head of the household in practice, back to having inferior status. But could things just return back to “normal,” or the way they were? Men may have been returning to the same house, but the circumstances, roles, and worldviews of each spouse were greatly altered.

Women Emigrating

Women, of course, also emigrated. Married women were either called by their husbands to emigrate or did so with them as a family. The number of female emigrants from Basilicata rose drastically over time. In 1876, there were 193 recorded female emigrants from the region; In 1901, the number rose to 5,565.\footnote{Maria Falvella, “Flussi Migratori della Basilicata,” 90.} We can assume that most of these women were wives who accompanied their husbands abroad. Single women rarely emigrated on their own. Women either emigrated with their husband or with their family. Overall, women made up about 20% of Italian emigrants between 1876 and 1914, and they were more likely than men to remain abroad (i.e. not be birds of passage). In addition, as the period of large scale emigration continued, more and more families left.

Some men, without returning, requested that their wives emigrate and join them abroad, whether willingly or unwillingly (il richiamo). In these cases, husbands sent the appropriate permissions and funds from abroad, and the women would have to obtain passports, buy tickets, and prepare for the journey on their own.

Men made a choice to emigrate. They weighed the risks and benefits, and must have believed that overall, it would be worth it, despite the hardships (unemployment, new culture, lack of opportunities, uncomfortable/long journey). Most women, on the other hand, were not as free to choose whether or not to emigrate. Many did so because their spouses or family members were emigrating. They were obliged by law to follow wherever their husband chose to make his home. They could object, but had few legal means. They may have been a part of the conversation, but the final decision was in the hands of their husbands.
A report from Amy Bernardy on women immigrants in the United States related that Italian women almost always emigrated following the head of the family (husband or father). Once abroad, they faced a new set of hardships, living in a foreign country, adapting to foreign customs, and learning a new language. These women were limited in what they could do, and unlike in Basilicata, often had to work outside the home for wages to help support the family. They mainly found work in domestic service or in sweat shops.

While some women may have been happy to leave their small village and emigrate to a new location, it is difficult to know what the overall feelings were among women about emigration. An article in *Basilicata Regione Notizie* on female emigrants conveys the desperation they may have felt; “we think of a woman as one who emigrates not for work, but to join her husband. The confusion of the present, the nostalgia of the past, and uncertainty of the future…the emigrant housewife is a silent victim of emigration itself.” Emigration, whether forced or not, had to have had a number of mental and physical health effects on women. In fact, medical studies conducted on emigrants found that women constituted the most frequent cases of hospitalization and therapy for mental problems, such as anxiety and depression, as a result of emigration. More research is needed on this fascinating consequence of emigration on women.

Amy Bernardy, reporting for the *Bollettino dell’Emigrazione*, wrote of some of the hardships women faced once abroad. Focusing on the United States, she told of struggling emigrant families. Many were cases of women and families who emigrated depending on the

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54 Amy Bernardy an Italian journalist born in Florence to an Italian mother and American father. Much of her work was on Italian emigrants. In 1901, she was commissioned by the Commissariato Generale dell’Emigrazione to report on female emigrants.


57 Ibid., 111-112.
wages earned from the labor of their husbands, but then the husband got injured and could no longer work, leaving the family in misery and poverty. Without the social support from their family and home village, many of these women were forced to work, or in some cases, return to Italy.

Bernardy provided the story of an Italian family in San Francisco as an example. The husband, who worked as an ice cream man, was hit by a car and killed. At the time, his wife was three months pregnant. He left her a small amount of money, but she soon found herself in debt and unable to pay for expenses. Working as a washwoman to earn money did not suffice. Siblings and family tried to help her, but her life in America was difficult. She finally decided to return to Italy. Bernardy’s story is just one example of how women who emigrated could also be abandoned. Those who emigrated faced challenges and difficulties, and also had to take on new responsibilities.58

**Abandonment**

Not all women were lucky enough to either emigrate or to see their husbands return. These women were put in an especially compromising position. Not just physically abandoned, they were financially abandoned as well. While still legally married, they continued to needed their spouse’s authorization. Unless they went to the courts, their hands were tied. They could not sign contracts, or have custody over their children. They could not remarry without definitive proof that their husbands were deceased. They could not even request a passport to go abroad to search for their husbands, since the authorization of the husband was

58 Bernardy, 154.
required in order for a passport to be issued. Thus, abandonment left women with few legal options.

An observation by Carlo Levi in Christ Stopped at Eboli sums up the experience of some abandoned women: “emigration has changed everything. Men are missing and the town is full of women. Many wives have husbands in America. He writes for the first year, writes again the second, and after nothing is known of him, maybe he has made a new family over there.”

The Civil Code of 1865 had clear laws defining abandonment. After three years of absence (or six if the person left a power of attorney), the family could go to court to receive a statement of absence which confirmed the person had not been heard from. Married women could appeal to the courts to receive a small pension if the family was in dire need. Women could also gain custody of their children if the husband abandoned the family. However, without definitive proof of the absent person’s death, his wife could not remarry and many of her rights were still bound to her missing spouse.

Abandoned women could appeal to state agencies if abandoned. As we have seen in previous chapters, women could go to the mayor to request information about missing relatives abroad. In cases of abandonment, some women attempted the same process. Some received answers which provided definitive word that their husbands were not returning, but others never got a response or were told that the consulate was unable to locate their spouses abroad. These women were left in limbo.

Some women continued sending requests through official agencies, and no doubt also sent letters or messages with relatives of friends traveling abroad, in an attempt to search for spouses they had not heard from in some time. Some men may have left Basilicata with the

59 Codice Civile, 1865, Titolo III.
intention of finding a job in America, saving money and returning to Italy, but plans changed abroad. Many women ended up being abandoned by husbands who had emigrated, whether originally intended or not. While impossible to know the exact number or percentage of women who were abandoned, the petitions give us a glimpse into what it was like for these unfortunate women.

Some men simply abandoned wives, while others denied their existence. When these men were the subject of a search abroad, they stated their reasoning to officials who found them. The wife of Giuseppe Fortunato of Trecchino requested information about her husband in Brazil. The official wrote that he promised to send money to his wife at home, “but it seems that he does not really intend to, because he is telling friends that he does not care about his family at all.” The letter further stated that he lived with a woman but could not marry her because it was locally known that he had a wife in Italy and the church in Brazil would not marry an Italian without a certificate stating he was free to marry. It must have been disheartening that not only her husband abandoned her and would no longer provide financial support, but that he was also living with another woman abroad.

The wife of another man, Vincenzo Fucci, received news of him from the consulate in Argentina. The report stated that at first, he denied having a wife, and then later gave his promise to help her or send money so she could join him in Argentina. The official composing the letter gave his opinion about the matter, stating “the whole of his conduct seems that he has no intention of doing either thing.”

60 Archivio di Stato di Potenza, Atti di Pubblica Sicurezza, Cat. 6, Busta 41.
61 Ibid.
62 Ibid.
The preceding two petitions and responses show that men also knew what to say to appease officials. As discussed in the previous chapter, both men and women used specific language and statements to gain sympathy from state officials. Women used their inferior position, but men also had their own methods to get the officials to side with them. Husbands knew their duty to their wives and their families, and often made the right statements to authorities, even though many in the end did not act on those promises.

Sometimes, women learned that their husbands were not living the most respectable or honorable lives abroad. One woman learned that her husband, Pasquale Mastrangelo, had moved from São Paolo to another town in Brazil (Trasiba) and was the proprietor of a shady hotel for women of questionable morals.\(^{63}\) News like this would have been a terrible blow for many women, whose husbands not only abandoned them, but also lived immoral lives.

Other times, men refused to send assistance to their wives because of their alleged behavior at home. Giuseppa Bofrano, wrote to learn information about her husband and two sons, who had emigrated to Asunción, Paraguay, two years prior. In the response from the Foreign Ministry, she learned that her husband Nicola Ferrari was in fact in Paraguay, but refused to send her any type of assistance, “accusing her of reprehensible conduct.”\(^{64}\) This response, whether true or not, justified his abandonment, and is an example of another woman left on her own with the difficulty of defending accusations made against her.

During Prime Minister Giuseppe Zanardelli’s visit to Basilicata in 1904, he experienced first-hand stories of women who were abandoned by their husbands who had emigrated to America. Ausonio Franzoni, a man working with Zanardelli, told him about a woman in Latronico in 1902, “a forty-year-old woman with superb features, but with wrinkled skin,

\(^{63}\) Ibid.

\(^{64}\) Archivio di Stato di Potenza, Atti di Pubblica Sicurezza, Cat. 6, Busta 41.
welcomes us as enemies…her husband has been in America for ten years, he left her with two small children, he sent money the first five years; now, though she knows where he is, she no longer gets any aid. She is forced to work in the field.”\textsuperscript{65} This shows that abandonment was not a novelty and officials were aware that it was occurring.

An article in the \textit{Bollettino dell’Emigrazione} described another type of abandonment, those who abandon wives after the family had emigrated to America. It gave the example of a man who divorced his wife, which cost $500, and then sent her back to Italy with the children. He then ran off with a younger woman.\textsuperscript{66} In another case, a woman from Denver was abandoned by her husband who went with another woman to Chicago. With the help of the police, she found him and forced him to return home. They lived together afterwards, but they constantly disagreed. These stories show women in an even more vulnerable and helpless position. If abandoned in Italy, women could turn to their family, friends, and community for assistance. While that extended community and social network might exist abroad, women abandoned after emigration often had to rely on strangers, or possibly local aid societies to assist them. Their best option was to return home to Italy, if possible.

\textbf{Illegal Emigration}

If writing and trying to contact their husbands failed, some women resorted to more extreme measures. As shown above, if abandoned, married women had few options. They could not get a passport, could not work, and may have had to care for a number of children on their own. Women depended on help from others, but they also may not have wanted outsiders to know how bad their situation was. In all cases, it was not an easy position for many of these

\textsuperscript{65} Schirone, 111.
\textsuperscript{66} Berardy, 167-169.
women to be in. Feeling as if they had nothing to lose, some desperate women turned to *emigrazione clandestina*, or illegal emigration. This act, while illegal and frowned upon especially for women, was an act of agency and the ultimate expression that they had some independence in their own lives, even if done out of desperation.

*Emigrazione clandestina* included any type of illegal emigration, everything from sneaking out of the country to using a false passport. Since most of the emigrants were men, it is safe to assume that a majority of the illegal emigrants were men as well. Men emigrated illegally if they could not get a passport, were trying to evade the military draft, wanted to avoid paying debts, or in order to escape prosecution or prison time. Many who attempted illegal emigration were caught before they could make it out of the country. If detained, they were arrested and brought back to their home town.67

While the majority may have been men, many women also attempted *emigrazione clandestina*. Official documents give us a glimpse into the mindset of some of the women who attempted to emigrate in this manner. Much of the documentation was between local authorities in Basilicata and officials in Naples, the closest and biggest port of emigration. Many of the reports also contained information about the clandestine emigrants in an attempt to detain them before departure.

When officials learned that someone attempted to travel abroad illegally, they sent out notices with a physical description of the person. For example, officials in the town of Colobaro sent out a bulletin about a woman, Gerolama Tuzio, who was attempting to travel to America with an internal passport (not an international passport). The bulletin reported that she initially stated she would be going to visit a daughter in Genoa, but really intended to travel to

67 Archivio di Stato di Potenza, Atti di Pubblica Sicurezza, Cat. 6, Busta 40.
America. It asks that she be detained and sent back to the commune if discovered.68 This woman’s actions demonstrate that she was not ignorant of the law and was deceitful as a way to achieve her goal.

Many women may have left without even attempting to obtain a passport. A report from the mayor of Pietrafesa (Satriano di Lucania) to the prefect stated that Arcangela Cavallo disappeared on the first train overnight and was attempting to emigrate illegally to her husband in America. The letter claimed she left many obligations in the town and she did not have a passport to travel abroad. The mayor asked the prefect to send a telegraph to Naples, where they could detain her and return her to the village.69 This instance shows the chain of command among officials policing emigration, and demonstrates authorities were on the lookout for illegal emigrants and worked together to find them. Emigration was free and it was relatively easy to obtain a passport legally. So those emigrating illegally more likely than not had a legal impediment that prevented them from emigrating.

The option of emigrating illegally is further proof of the desperation that some women may have felt being left on their own. They may no longer have been able to cope with their situation, and felt they had nothing to lose by trying to emigrate. These actions are further proof that women were not passive and inactive, and when in a difficult position, they took initiative. Abandonment and desperation drove them to act, which shows that the situations they were placed in as a result of emigration led some women to make decisions that would change their lives.

68 Ibid.
69 Archivio di Stato di Potenza, Atti di Pubblica Sicurezza, Cat. 6, Busta 44.
Conclusion

This chapter has shown the various situations that arose after emigration, when men either returned or did not return. Women were involved in the decision and process of emigration, but were also affected by the realities that occurred after emigration. Their husband may have returned home, taking back his old position in the home and family. He may have called his wife abroad to emigrate with the children. He may have abandoned his family, either financially, physically, or both, leaving women legally helpless and in desperate circumstances. Despite what happened, married women were still legally tied to their husbands and marital authorization was needed until it was proven that their spouse was deceased.

Of all the possible outcomes of emigration, each meant dramatic changes to the lives of the women of Basilicata. However, many women did not just sit back and passively accept their fate. As we have seen, they requested help from the mayor and the Foreign Ministry to find their spouses abroad, and some even went so far as to attempt to illegally emigrate in search of their husbands. This chapter has shown the far reaching impact and effects of emigration on the women of Basilicata, and the various changes that occurred in their lives as a result. Once again we see that although many of these women did not initially emigrate themselves, they were greatly affected by emigration.
Chapter 8: Conclusion

Emigration touched the lives of millions of Italians between 1880 and 1914. It was an option for those experiencing economic hardship, a chance for an escape, or simply an opportunity to leave the village and live in a new part of the world. Yet, as has become abundantly clear in this dissertation, emigration not only affected the people in motion. The family, friends, and community at home, especially wives, were greatly impacted by, and were largely influential in, the decision to migrate. These women were left on their own to cope with absence and to survive with their husbands abroad, a situation which put them in a unique position and led to innumerable changes in their lives.

The dissertation has argued that the way women dealt with emigration alters the stereotypical image of rural, Southern Italian women as backwards, passive, and unchanging. Women did not quietly wait for men to return. They took care of their families and became heads of household and the main parental figures for their children. In many cases, the survival of the family rested on their shoulders, and they took on the responsibility, despite legal limitations. They were not silent when in trouble or in need of assistance. The state was present in their lives, not a far-off and disconnected entity in Rome. Government and local officials assisted inhabitants of the small towns of Basilicata, and women petitioned officials when in need of support or if they felt they were being cheated. I argue that through these interactions with the state, women became modern citizens. Whether left with children or not, women took care to manage the household when their husbands emigrated. The subordinate legal status of women was meaninglessness when practicality and survival were more important. Laws correcting the inferior legal position of married women were not passed before World War I, but
their practical position most definitely did. Above all, emigration forced women to become more “modern” because they had to learn to become independent.

The women who remained behind acted practically and did what was needed as the situation called for it. Many aspects of their lives changed, not only in their connection to the government and their increased economic role, but also through a changing social role within family, their marriages, and the community. Yet, while some women’s lives were determined by the actions they took, many women did not act. Surely there were those who did not petition the state, who did not ask for help, and who did not experience a changed role. What pushed some women to act and petition the state, and others to remain silent?

While the lives of women who remained behind changed in dramatic ways, not all change was positive. Some women may have felt like they had more freedom with their husbands gone, but others may have experienced more hardships if their husbands did not send money to support them. Some may have felt like they escaped an unhappy marriage or duties to someone they did not love, while others may have experienced feelings of despair and loneliness. Some may have been glad about the opportunity to learn to read and write and have an increased role outside the home, while others may have resented their husbands for leaving them on their own to take on more economic duties and physical labor, a role they were not used to and for which they had not been prepared. Emigration and the emotions surrounding it differed for each family.

This dissertation has highlighted just some of the many consequences of emigration, both positive and negative, on the families of Basilicata. Due to the nature of my sources, many of the cases presented were stories of abandonment, poverty, and despair, but I do not have reason to believe this was common. These were the women who were more likely to petition for help,
and thus we have their voices in the sources. Wives who received remittances and who had husbands who returned were more numerous than those who were abandoned. Yet, the stories discussed in this dissertation are still important because they highlight the array of experiences that resulted from emigration.

I also argue that the women who remained behind were living in a transnational society, with mixed elements of traditional and modern. Lucanians were not enclosed and isolated in small villages, but were exposed to ideas, cultures, people, and goods from all over the world and were influenced by factors that transcended borders, whether they were aware of it or not. Women were not confined to the private or domestic sphere, but acted in the public sphere as needed. They may have lived in towns with only a few thousand people, but the world they lived in was far more globalized than ever before. These realities help further my argument that women living in the Italian South did not conform to the various stereotypes of women as ignorant and uneducated, coming from a homogeneous, backwards, and unchanging South. Using emigration as a lens to examine life for women in the South and the overall Southern Question, we come to a more nuanced understanding of how society contained elements of old and new, local and foreign, and a heterogeneous mix of elements, ideas, and people. I also argue that despite living in a more modern world, tradition persisted, but even these elements were impacted by emigration and mixed with modern influences from abroad. Thus, in Basilicata, emigration created a mixture of tradition and modernity.

Basilicata itself is an important setting for this study, as none of this kind has been done prior. One of the poorest and least populated regions of Italy, Basilicata had high rates of emigration, which make it a unique area to examine. The landscape and the weather, combined with little government interest and persistent stereotypes about the South overall made it a
largely disadvantaged region. Although the economic situation in the region has changed much in the past 100 or so years, with successful industry, the discovery of oil, and increased tourism, many young people still emigrate to northern Italy, other parts of Europe, or other parts of the world.

Making the decision to emigrate was (both back then and even today) a remarkable and life changing decision. As we have seen in this dissertation, it had been the choice of many families in Basilicata. Italians had a high return rate (estimated at about 50%), so women expected emigration to be temporary. The expectation of return also demonstrates a unique connection between emigrants and the home, family, friends, and towns left behind. People in the villages of Basilicata were constantly coming and going, emigrating and returning, introducing new ideas and goods into their small towns. This constant exchange and interaction continued for generations over the course of the timeframe examined in this dissertation, and demonstrates the true transnational nature of emigration.

This study also has demonstrated the unique relationship between rural women and the burgeoning Italian state, and the importance of the government’s role in emigration. Not only, as I have shown, was the state sympathetic to women, but it also took on a unique position in regulating and assisting departing emigrants. This role varied in other European countries that were experiencing large scale emigration over the same period (ex: Irish from Great Britain, Jews from the Russian Empire, Eastern Europeans, etc). A fruitful endeavor for further research would be to compare state intervention in large scale emigration, both during the same period and during other periods of mass migration. To what extent did the government of each sending country assist or protect citizens or subjects who were leaving?
During the time period covered in this dissertation, a little over 100 years ago, fear of too much emigration from Italy was evident. Citizens worried all the young and able-bodied emigrated, leaving no one to till the fields, harvest crops, or care for livestock. Officials, local priests, and local citizens feared towns would be abandoned and they worried how they could possibly survive with the mass exodus that was seemingly endless. Currently, we see a different phenomenon: fear of too much immigration to Italy. When Italians left and migrated by the millions to places abroad, especially the United States, they were seen as an inferior and undesirable race. The Americans, for example, did not welcome them with open arms, and immigrants faced much discrimination and hardship. Ironically, present day immigrants to Italy from Eastern Europe, the Middle East, and North and sub-Saharan Africa receive similar treatment.

Another interesting parallel to the present day is the gendered aspect of migration for many groups. Between 1880 and 1914, men tended to be the pioneers, and they largely emigrated in search of jobs in industrial labor. Today, it is more common for women to be the pioneers and emigrate. They arrive in the host country, find a job, many times in the domestic service industry, and send money back home to their husbands and families. The men and children either follow or the woman returns home after saving money. Immigration from present-day Latin America to the United States, Eastern Europe to Western Europe, and Ireland to England feature “birds of passage,” who engage in many of the same economic and family tactics as migrant groups from over a century ago.

While the reasons and direction may be different, migration is a phenomenon that continues in Italy today. Never an easy decision, it affects the lives of migrants, those in receiving countries, and those who remain behind. It is important to continue to tell the stories
of these migrants, especially those who do not have a voice, such as the women highlighted above. As this dissertation has shown, even though it has been difficult to find, the women who remained behind had a voice, and their actions when left on their own contributed to them gaining a new social and economic role, and becoming more active citizens in a new Italian state.

In addition to some questions already raised above, much further study can be done to continue the work of this dissertation. Additional examinations on the women who remained behind in other regions of Italy during the same period would be exceptionally fruitful. Was the experience of women in Basilicata similar to that of women elsewhere? Would different source material paint a more accurate picture of what life was like? A comparative approach would help us view the emigration experience from various Italian regions and give us a more nuanced understanding of emigration from Italy as a whole. What about women who didn’t emigrate? How did their lives differ? Lack of source material might make this a difficult study to conduct, but the comparisons between the two groups of women would indicate another aspect of their changing role in Italy in this period. Another area that needs much more examination is children. What was their experience like, as either migrants themselves or as people who remained behind and saw their parents and siblings emigrate? Did children take on an increased role in the household if their fathers emigrated? Also, did the family situation and the role of the wives left behind alter depending on whether or not they had children?

Further studies can also examine the extent of religiosity and the role of the church in late 19th and early 20th century Southern Italian culture. We know that the Church was an important part of the fabric of society, but many of the state sources I use do not mention or even refer to the church. It would be interesting to further examine the role the Church played in communities decimated by emigration in Basilicata, especially at a time when people were exposed to new
ideas, including religious ideas. How and when did the state come to supersede the pastoral authority of the Church? How did this relationship with the state affect the women who remained behind, as their conception of the role of church and state in their lives might be in flux. I would also encourage study of new religious ideas permeating through the South, such as Protestantism, influenced by returning emigrants from countries like the United States. Likewise, an examination of how return migrants influenced ideas, actions, and thoughts at home is merited. Did religious rituals or festivals change as people came and went from the villages?

While this dissertation is a case study focusing on one region, its importance is to show that gender and emigration were fundamental to the creation of citizens in a modern, secular state. Government involvement in emigration allows us to rethink the separation of public and private spheres and state interaction in women’s lives. Overall, this dissertation has shown the complexities of emigration and the consequences of it on young married women who remained at home. Though not emigrating themselves, they were affected just as much as the migrants, and their lives changed in innumerable ways. Gender roles, relationships between husbands and wives, and motherhood all changed to varying degrees as a result of emigration. Women’s dealings with economics, politics, and the community also were impacted. Many of them suffered and experienced incredible hardships, others survived just fine. This dissertation has attempted to piece together those various experiences, and show that women, even in the most wretched situations, acted, spoke up, and had a voice.
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