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Author(s): David I. Kertzer
Source: *The Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, Vol. 22, No. 1 (Summer, 1991), pp. 1-25
Published by: The MIT Press
Stable URL: https://www.jstor.org/stable/204563
Accessed: 11-11-2026 18:03 UTC

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Journal of Interdisciplinary History, XXII:1 (Summer 1991), 1–25.

David I. Kertzer

Gender Ideology and Infant Abandonment in Nineteenth-Century Italy

Few images of Italian women are more vivid than the devoted mamma, zealously protecting her children. That image is still invoked in Italy today when people lament the decline in family values. Yet it cannot withstand historical scrutiny, as an examination of the massive dimensions of infant abandonment in Italy's past makes clear. Just over a century ago, more than 33,000 Italian newborns were being abandoned every year at foundling homes which were so overrun by unwanted children that they scarcely knew what to do with them. For part of this period, over one third of all babies born in the cities of Milan and Florence were left at foundling homes. Nor was Italy exceptional in this regard, for similar mass abandonment of newborns occurred in France, Russia, Austria, Spain, Portugal, and elsewhere in the nineteenth century.[1]

Boswell's *The Kindness of Strangers* has directed attention to the staggering dimensions of infant abandonment in European history.[2] Yet his book deals primarily with the centuries before institutionalized means were established in western Europe to deal with abandonment. Foundling homes were built in a number of Italian cities in the fifteenth century, and this system then spread to many other European countries. Abandonment of infants

David I. Kertzer is William R. Kenan, Jr., Professor of Anthropology at Bowdoin College. His most recent books include *Ritual, Politics, and Power* (New Haven, 1988) and, with Dennis P. Hogan, *Family, Political Economy, and Demographic Change* (Madison, 1989).

The author thanks Adanella Bianchi and Massimo Marcolin for their aid in the Bologna archival research connected with this study and Susan Bell, Silvio Fronzoni, Massimo Marcolin, and Louise Tilly for their comments.

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1 An excellent recent study of infant abandonment in Russia is David Ransel, *Mothers of Misery: Child Abandonment in Russia* (Princeton, 1988). For France see, among many other studies, Rachel Fuchs, *Abandoned Children: Foundlings and Child Welfare in Nineteenth-Century France* (Albany, 1984); for Spain, Joan Sherwood, *Poverty in Eighteenth-Century Spain* (Toronto, 1988); for Portugal, Caroline Brettell and Rui Feijo, "The *roda* of Viano do Castelo in the 19th century," *Cadernos Vianenses*, XII (1989), 217–267; for Italy, Volker Hunecke, *I trovatelli di Milano* (Bologna, 1988).

2 John Boswell, *The Kindness of Strangers* (New York, 1988).

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reached its historical apogee in the nineteenth century, when it also became one of the most heatedly discussed social problems of the day.

This article addresses one aspect of this far-reaching system: the gender ideology that lay behind Italian infant abandonment and its institutionalization. Although this focus is limited, inquiry into gender issues affords us valuable leverage for linking infant abandonment to more general matters of social history and social theory.[3]

Examining infant abandonment from the perspective of gender allows new insight into women's reproductive lives, and into reproduction in general. Rapp has criticized scholars for approaching the history of reproduction in terms of family history. The problem, as she sees it, is that characteristically family history presupposes a conceptual distinction between the family and the larger world, a boundedness of a domestic unit that is misleading. Rapp argues that such an equation of reproduction with the family propagates the notion of the home as a "haven in a heartless world."[4]

Anthropologists must be as sensitive to this point as historians, for the anthropological tradition encourages a view of reproductive behavior that is largely contained within the organizational framework of domestic and kinship groups. Yet, it is becoming increasingly evident from studies by both anthropologists and historians that outside institutional forces—such as church and state—have long sought to influence reproductive behavior not only through coercive measures (such as criminal laws) but through social policy programs (such as poor relief for mothers and children). These historical and anthropological studies also have implications for the lively debate among feminist

3 Of relevance in this context are the current debates among feminist social historians regarding the need to break out of the model of "herstory"—that is, descriptive studies of women's lives—and link gender issues to larger historical questions. I second Tilly's plea to make use of a focus on gender to address such classic issues as the impact of the rise of capitalism on society, and the evolution of state control over private life. Louise Tilly, "Gender, Women's History, and Social History," *Social Science History,* XIII (1989), 446–462. See also Judith M. Bennett, "Comment on Tilly: Who Asks the Questions for Women's History?" *ibid.,* 471–477.

4 Rayna Rapp, "Examining Family History: Household and Family," in Judith Newton, Mary Ryan, and Judith Walkowitz (eds.), *Sex and Class in Women's History* (London, 1983), 233.

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anthropologists regarding the tenability of the distinction between the domestic sphere (identified with women) and the public sphere (identified with men). The public sphere has long invaded the domestic sphere in Western societies, a point that is graphically made through the study of infant abandonment.[5]

The case of infant abandonment shows how unsatisfactory it is to limit the analysis of reproduction to the family unit. It also demonstrates how an examination of the intersection of state policy with reproductive behavior can illuminate a host of historical issues that are not customarily raised when the focus is on family functioning per se.

In typical studies of household composition, no attention is given to children who are not related to the household head. The standard methodology calls for identifying the kin-related individuals in each household and placing them in various categories depending on the number of conjugal family units and other kin extensions.[6] Foundlings are thus ignored.

This study of infant abandonment is based on a variety of archival and secondary sources. One of the notable features of the foundling home system was the meticulousness with which records were kept. Because the *ospizi* were responsible for providing monthly payments to all of the wet nurses and foster families with whom the foundlings were placed, careful records were essential. Moreover, since parents could come to reclaim their abandoned children even many years after the abandonment, rec-

5 Jack Goody, *The Development of the Family and Marriage in Europe* (Cambridge, 1983), provides a notable (some might say extreme) illustration of an anthropologist inquiring into the power of the Church in shaping family and kinship relations. Jacques Donzelot, *The Policing of Families* (New York, 1979), has been influential among historians in pointing to the power of the state in family affairs.

On the anthropological debate over the value of the domestic/public sphere distinction, see, among many other contributions, Michelle Z. Rosaldo, "Woman, Culture, and Society: A Theoretical Overview," in *idem* and Louise Lamphere (eds.), *Woman, Culture, and Society* (Stanford, 1973), 17–42; Rosaldo and Lamphere, "The Use and Abuse of Anthropology: Reflections on Feminism and Cross-Cultural Understanding," *Signs,* V (1980), 389–417; John L. Comaroff, "*Sui generis*: Feminism, Kinship Theory, and Structural 'Domains'," in Jane Collier and Sylvia Yanagisako (eds.), *Gender and Kinship* (Stanford, 1987), 53–85; Yanagisako and Collier, "Toward a Unified Analysis of Gender and Kinship," in *ibid.,* 14–50.

6 This standard approach to household analysis is described in Eugene A. Hammel and Peter Laslett, "Comparing Household Structure over Time and between Cultures," *Comparative Studies in Society and History,* XVI (1974), 73–109.

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ords on each child—from arrival at the ospizio to latest foster family placement—had to be thorough and clear.

The present study is based on use of just such records from Bologna, including both the *bollettari* of admission and the registers detailing wet nurse and foster family placement. In addition, there is a large contemporary nineteenth-century literature throughout Italy regarding the problems of abandonment and foundling homes. It consists both of official documents, ranging from foundling home regulations to annual director's reports and occasional commissions of inquest, and of unofficial writings, ranging from local histories of the ospizi to moral critiques of abandonment and the foundling home system. These nineteenth-century sources are used here, as well as the scores of local-level historical studies that have appeared throughout a good part of Italy over the past two decades.

The unification of Italy was not completed until the annexation of Rome in 1870; through most of the nineteenth century, Italy was divided into a patchwork of separate political entities. The various parts of the peninsula and the islands differed in regard to language; in fact, there was little notion among the majority of the population of being Italian at all. In addition, a number of major political and economic changes occurred. The century began with Napoleonic rule and was followed by the short-lived restoration preceding the Risorgimento and unification of Italy in 1859–1870. With the demise of the states of the ancien régime came the development of a transportation system which tied much of the peninsula together and the rise of modern industry in certain parts of the country. The advent of a powerful socialist movement marked the century's close.

The focus of this article is on the first six decades of the century, before unification, although it examines some of the earlier roots of infant abandonment and gender ideology, and traces some of the changes that took place in the first decades of the new Italian state. What is striking about the practice of infant abandonment and related concepts of gender in this period are the similarities found in different parts of Italy, especially in the northern two thirds of the country. The system of infant abandonment was the product of a centuries-old process of bureaucratization. The institutional practices were solidified by the Napoleonic influence, for not only did Napoleonic rulers unite the

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mainland of Italy, but they instituted detailed regulations governing the administration of infant abandonment and foundling homes. Moreover, both the institutionalization of infant abandonment and the cultural norms associated with it were heavily influenced by the Roman Catholic Church, which itself was the greatest unifying cultural force in Italy over the centuries.

There were important cultural differences among different parts of Italy, and there were also differences in the ways that infant abandonment, illegitimacy, and honor were viewed. Study of such differences is needed. But the first step required in work in this area is the larger view, and it is this view which is set forth here. Moreover, it is only with the pre-unification baseline that we can make full sense of the changes that were to take place after 1860, changes that ranged from the gradual disappearance of the anonymous wheels in the external walls of foundling homes at which infants were abandoned to the establishment of a welfare system which encouraged women to keep their newborns. We look at infant abandonment in Italy in its heyday, when it reached staggering proportions, and when its influence pervaded much of both rural and urban society.

INFANT ABANDONMENT IN ITALY Throughout Catholic Europe, infants were being abandoned in huge numbers in the nineteenth century, deposited at foundling homes established for their care. In France in the 1830s, about 32,000 infants were abandoned per year; in Spain and Portugal at this time about 15,000 each; in 1887, over 27,000 babies were left at the foundling homes in St. Petersburg and Moscow alone. By the middle of the century, the number of infants left at Italy's foundling homes exceeded 35,000 per year. At the time, Italy had over 1,200 approved places at which newborns could be left.[7]

Although almost all of the parts of Italy contributed to this sea of unwanted infants, urban areas were the primary centers of

7 Fuchs puts the matter succinctly, writing of the nineteenth century: "In the Catholic model, unlike the Protestant, women in effect gave their children to the state." Fuchs, "Legislation, Poverty, and Child-Abandonment in Nineteenth-Century Paris," *Journal of Interdisciplinary History,* XVIII (1987), 56.

Estimates for France, Spain, Portugal, and Italy are based on figures provided in Hunecke, "Intensità e fluttuazioni degli abbandoni dal XV al XIX secolo," in Gérard Delille (ed.), *Enfance abandonnée et société en Europe, XIV–XIX siècle* (Rome, in press). Russian figures are from Ransel, *Mothers of Misery,* 307.

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abandonment, and certain cities were especially active. Indeed, in Milan, Naples, and Florence, the three largest centers, about 374,000 infants were abandoned in the first sixty years of the century. Milan and Florence were exceptional; as many as 35–43 percent of all babies born there were left at the foundling homes in the mid-nineteenth century. Milan and Florence were not alone. Even in Cosenza, in southernmost continental Italy, 39 percent of newborns were abandoned during the second decade of the nineteenth century.[8]

More typical was the city of Bologna. Including its incorporated rural "suburbs," Bologna had a population of about 100,000 during the first half of the nineteenth century, growing slowly thereafter. The number of infants abandoned annually at its foundling home hovered around 350–450 for the first sixty years of the century, before climbing to its historical height of 683 in the late 1870s. A Napoleonic census for 1811 shows that 12 percent of the children born in Bologna were abandoned, compared with just 1 percent of those born in the rural areas of the department.[9]

Milan and Florence showed much higher rates of infant abandonment than Bologna in large part because married couples could easily leave their newborns at the foundling homes in the former cities, but not the latter. Hunecke estimates that over 62 percent of all of the infants admitted to Milan's foundling home in 1842 were legitimate. Where foundling homes sought to restrict admissions to the children of unwed mothers—as in Bologna and most other parts of Italy—the magnitude of foundling admissions

8 Figures on volume of infant abandonment for Naples and Cosenza come from Giovanna Da Molin, "Illegittimi ed esposti in Italia dal Seicento all'Ottocento," in Società Italiana di Demografia Storica, *La demografia storica delle città italiane* (Bologna, 1982), 511, 529. For Milan, see Hunecke, *Trovatelli di Milano;* for Florence, Carlo Corsini, "Materiali per lo studio della famiglia in Toscana nei secoli XVII–XIX: Gli esposti," *Quaderni Storici,* XXXIII (1976), 998–1052. Figures on proportions of infant abandonments as a percentage of a city's births should be treated with some caution. The common practice of rural women coming to the city to give birth when they planned to abandon their newborn children results in inflated urban proportions and deflated rural proportions.

9 The voluminous archives of the Bologna foundling home were opened for scholarly access only in 1989. My research there has been done in conjunction with Adanella Bianchi and Silvio Fronzoni.

For the volume of infant abandonment in nineteenth-century Bologna, see Fronzoni, "Una ruota sorvegliata,"in *I bastardini: Patrimonio e memoria di un ospedale bolognese* (Bologna, 1990), 61–72.

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was directly linked to the magnitude of illegitimate births. Such a relationship has also been demonstrated for Paris in this period. It is no coincidence that the rates of infant abandonment and of illegitimate births were similar in Bologna, where the 11.7 percent of newborns abandoned in 1811 was comparable to the 11.5 percent illegitimacy rate in the period 1811–1820.[10]

The rise in infant abandonment in Italy from the eighteenth to the nineteenth century is partially attributable to an increase in illegitimacy. For example, the city of Bologna experienced a doubling of its illegitimacy rate (including abandoned infants) from the 1770s to the first decade of the nineteenth century, with almost the entire jump due to the social, economic, and political disruptions brought on during the Napoleonic period. Following the first decade of the nineteenth century, the rate of illegitimacy held steady until unification (1859). A similar pattern has been documented for the southern city of Taranto. In the region of Puglia, in which Taranto is located, the proportion of illegitimate births (again including the abandoned newborns) held steady at about 4.5 percent from 1819–1854.[11]

Documenting Italy's illegitimacy rates for the post-unification period is complicated by the fact that in 1866 a new law went into effect which dictated that only civil marriages were to be recognized by the state. The result was that couples who followed the traditional practice of contracting marriage only in the Church produced children who were considered to be illegitimate by the state. In the first decades of the new Italian state, this practice resulted in inflated illegitimacy rates. The official illegitimacy rate climbed from 4.9 percent of all births in Italy in 1863 to 6.4 percent in 1870 and 7.5 percent in 1883, before declining to 6.0 percent in 1900, when civil marriage became nearly universal. If one distinguishes between the "true" illegitimate births (in the sense of being socially viewed by contemporaries as illegitimate) and those created bureaucratically by the new civil marriage law, there was no dramatic change in the illegitimacy rate during the nineteenth century.[12]

10 On illegitimacy in Bologna, see Giorgio Gattei, "Per una storia del comportamento amoroso dei bolognesi: Le nascite dall'Unità al fascismo," *Società e Storia,* 9 (1980), 613–639. On the relationship between the illegitimacy rate and the rate of infant abandonment in Paris, see Fuchs, "Legislation," 73.

11 Data on Bologna and Taranto are found in Da Molin, "Illegittimi ed esposti," 505.

12 It is possible to make such a judgment by distinguishing within the category of

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In the period 1865–1879, Italy's illegitimacy rate was similar to Spain's and England's, and below that of France, Germany, and, especially, Austria. An average of 6.5 percent of births were legally considered illegitimate, for a total of 1,046,057 illegitimate births in this fifteen-year period. Of this total, 536,217 were abandoned. But many of the other 509,840 were born to parents who were in fact married religiously (although not civilly). Thus, even as late as the end of the nineteenth century unwed mothers in Italy typically abandoned their children at foundling homes.[13]

Some idea of what it meant to leave a baby at the foundling home may be gotten from a look at the chilling death rate. The mortality rates among abandoned infants were so high that many contemporary observers argued that there was little practical difference between abandonment and infanticide. Years in which 80–98 percent of abandoned babies died in their first year at foundling homes can be found in virtually all of the countries where infant abandonment was institutionalized. Before 1850, about one fourth of the infants at the Parisian foundling home died within the first four days of admission, with another fourth dying later in their first year of life.[14]

In the huge foundling home of Naples, the infant mortality rate (IMR—deaths in the first year of life for every 1,000 births) hovered around 800 during the first forty years of the nineteenth century, before declining to 570 in 1841–1850. In Milan the infant death rate was somewhat lower, and declined to about 400 by 1842. At the Bologna foundling home in 1809–1810 the rate was over 700 (compared to an IMR of 321 in the city of Bologna as a whole in 1811–1812), declining to less than 600 by 1849–1850.[15]

illegitimate births between children who were recognized by a father and those who were not. Such data are provided in Mariagrazia Gorni, "Il problema degli 'esposti' in Italia dal 1861 al 1900," in *idem* and Laura Pellegrini (eds.), *L'infanzia abbandonata in Italia nel secolo XIX* (Florence, 1974), 46–48. Data on Italy's illegitimacy rates from 1863 to 1900 are provided in Enrico Raseri, *Atlante di demografia e geografia medica d'Italia* (Rome, 1906).

13 These figures are taken from *idem*, "I fanciulli illegittimi e gli esposti in Italia," *Annali di Statistica,* XIX (1881), 19.

14 On Paris see Fuchs, *Abandoned children,* 142. On France more generally, see Janet Potash, "The Foundling Problem in France, 1800–1869," unpub. Ph.D. diss. (Yale Univ., 1979), 128.

15 Data on infant abandonment in Paris and Milan are found in Hunecke, *Trovatelli di Milano,* 148–158. For Naples see Da Molin, "Illegittimi ed esposti," 107. The Bologna foundling data are based on examination of the *bollettari* (admissions records) in the archives of the foundling home. The Bologna IMR for 1811–1812 is found in Athos Bellettini, *La popolazione del dipartimento di Reno* (Bologna, 1965), 208–210.

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To interpret these appalling figures, we must ask what the risk of infant mortality was for the nonfoundling population in these years. The general infant mortality rate in Italy in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries was commonly in the 250-300 range, sinking below 200 by the late 1800s. But if we look at illegitimate births, we find much higher rates prevailing. This phenomenon was not unique to Italy. In Berlin in 1878, for example, the IMR for legitimate births was 124, compared to an IMR for illegitimate births of 458. In Rome, the IMR for illegitimate births was almost twice as high as for legitimate births in 1877–1880 (330 compared to 174).[16]

The foundlings' high mortality rate, then, represented a worsening of an already high rate for infants born to unwed mothers in societies that provided few means of support for such children. Although it is true to say that abandoning an infant to a foundling home (at least in the first decades of the nineteenth century) was tantamount to a death sentence in most cases, the alternatives—at least for unwed mothers—were also bleak. Mothers who left their children at foundling homes must have recognized that their children were likely to die in infancy.

The hundreds of thousands of abandoned infants who died before reaching their first birthday did so without any evidence of gender discrimination. However, a recent study of foundlings in Imola, not far from Bologna, finds that the mortality rate for girls aged 5–14 was higher than for boys. Angeli attributes this pattern to the greater economic value of young male labor, for the boys worked as *garzoni* (agricultural servants), whereas young female labor was in much less demand in the agricultural areas. Further study is needed to determine if her findings reflect a more general pattern.[17]

Were girls abandoned more frequently than boys? Given the patrilocal bias in postmarital residence in much of Italy, along with the pervasive dowry system that made daughters costly, we might well expect just such a disparity in the treatment of sons and daughters.

16 On infant mortality in nineteenth-century Italy, see Dennis P. Hogan and Kertzer, "The Social Bases of Declining Infant Mortality: Lessons from a Nineteenth-Century Italian Town," *European Journal of Population,* II (1986), 361–86.

17 Aurora Angeli, "Caratteristiche, mortalità ed inserimento sociale degli esposti nell'ospedale di Imola nei secoli XVIIIe-XIXe," in Delille (ed.), *Enfance abandonnée.*

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In this context, it is revealing that institutionalized infant abandonment in Italy from the fifteenth to the nineteenth centuries coincides with a movement away from sex selection toward near gender parity. The fragmentary evidence for the 1400s (found in both Milan and Florence, for example) suggests that girls were up to twice as likely as boys to be abandoned. Yet, by the turn of the nineteenth century, many areas showed no disparity at all, and in others, the disparity was small, although in favor of the abandonment of girls.[18]

Typical was the case of Bologna. Of the 877 babies abandoned at the foundling home in the two-year period 1809–1810, 435 were males, for a sex ratio (males to 100 females) of 98.0. Since there are more males at birth than females (the sex ratio in the department of Reno in 1811–1812 was 107.6), this evidence indicates that there was still a modest anti-female bias in the selection process. By 1849–1850, 414 of the 809 abandoned babies in Bologna were males, for a sex ratio of 104.8, showing essentially no evidence of sex selection in abandonment.[19]

The same pattern is found with respect to requests for the restitution of abandoned children, an important phenomenon in cities such as Milan and Florence, where many of the abandoned children were legitimate. A study of the children abandoned in Florence in 1841 shows that just as many girls as boys were later reclaimed, offering provocative evidence that the value of males and females became more equal in Italy over these centuries.

THE ROLE OF STATE AND CHURCH Were only illegitimate children abandoned in Italy, one might be tempted to offer an explanation for abandonment based on cultural codes of honor: by giving birth secretly and then abandoning her newborn, a woman could presumably hide her shame and protect other members of her

18 On the sex ratio of abandoned children in late medieval times, see David Herlihy and Christiane Klapisch-Zuber, *Tuscans and their Families* (New Haven, 1985), 145; Philip Gavitt, *Children and Charity in Renaissance Florence* (Ann Arbor, 1990), 209. Typical is the case of Milan, where from 1660 to 1848 101,496 males and 104,964 females were abandoned, for a sex ratio of 96.7, compared to a general sex ratio among Milanese births of about 104. Likewise, in Venice in 1779–1788, 97.7 males were abandoned for every 100 females. See Da Molin, "Illegittimi ed esposti," 16.

19 Bologna data are based on an examination of the *bollettari* of the Bologna foundling home. The data on the department of Reno—the Napoleonic provincial level of administration in Italy—are from Bellettini, *Popolazione,* 159.

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family (not to mention the father of her child). Yet, even here, a larger historical view shows that such notions of honor were themselves the product not of some atavistic cultural code, but of norms heavily influenced by larger institutions. Both the Church and the state played major roles in shaping and enforcing codes of honor.[20]

Most notable were the effects of Church reforms codified in the Council of Trent (1545–1563). By placing exclusive emphasis on formal marriage as the necessary condition for having children, the Catholic Church essentially deprived illegitimate children of a social identity and branded unwed mothers as sinners. Subsequently, parish priests throughout the Italian peninsula actively encouraged unwed women to abandon their newborns as a means of atoning for their sins, avoiding "public scandal," and preventing a child from being raised outside the church-approved family (or institutional) framework.[21]

This view of unwed mothers as morally fallen is reflected in the statutes of many of Italy's foundling homes. Indeed, the statute governing the ospizio of Trento itself defines the institution's purpose as "serving as a general sanctuary for the deflowered, protecting them from shame and needs, and relieving them of the fruit of their wombs." The huge growth in abandonment in the nineteenth century led the increasingly desperate foundling home officials to oppose Church policy; they recommended that attempts be made to return some of these children to their unwed mothers. The local clergy, joined by local political authorities, firmly opposed this move and blocked all such efforts.[22]

The close identification of the foundlings with the Church, and with the Church's concept of grace and redemption, can be seen in the way in which people referred to them. In much of the

20 I do not mean to suggest that cultural concepts of gender are unimportant in explaining the ways in which illegitimacy was treated. Fronzoni, for example, notes that in rural areas through much of Italy, post-partum women were considered polluted and could not return to church before performing a special rite of purification (pers. commun., 1990). The situation faced by unwed pregnant women must be understood in part in terms of just such local customs and the social pressures that they created.

21 For a Torinese example of this phenomenon, see Franca Doriguzzi, "I messaggi dell'abbandono: Bambini esposti a Torino nel '700," *Quaderni Storici,* LIII (1983), 463. For a case from Brescia, see Stefano Onger, "L'abbandono degli infanti: Illegittimi e legittimi nel brefotrofio di Brescia (1800–1870)," *Storia in Lombardia,* III (1984), 41.

22 See Jolanda Anderle, "Maternità illegittima ed esposizione infantile nel Trentino dell'800," *Studi trentini di scienze storiche,* LX (1981), 149, 177.

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south, for example, people called foundlings simply "*figli della Madonna*" (children of the Madonna), emphasizing their lack of a father. In many foundling homes, including Bologna's, they were not given last names, but simply referred to as "*degli Innocenti*" (of the innocent).

Social pressure on unmarried mothers, together with the absence of any system which would have allowed them to be supported (by family, state, or church) while they cared for their young children, meant that in many areas of Italy it was unusual for such women to keep their children. In Milan, for example, as in Bologna, virtually all of the 15 percent of babies that were illegitimate were left at the foundling home. However, unwed women increasingly were able to keep their newborns as the century wore on, although a majority of illegitimate children were abandoned.[23]

In many parts of nineteenth-century Italy, unwed mothers had no source of social support and, essentially, no niche in society. By contrast, the social mechanisms and cultural values in France permitted unwed mothers to find a societal niche. In those parts of France least directly affected by the economic and cultural changes associated with the spread of capitalism and urbanization, illegitimacy rates were lower than in the more "modern" parts of France, such as those surrounding the industrialized cities. Yet, in the relatively traditional areas unwed mothers were much more likely to abandon their children. In Paris, in contrast to Milan, only about one half of the illegitimate children were abandoned, but the illegitimacy rate was much higher (up to 40 percent).[24]

The overwhelming abandonment of illegitimate infants in Italy is partly due to the intervention of political authorities in insuring that unwed mothers turned their babies over to the foundling homes. The rationale given for this system of policing women was to prevent infanticide, which was seen as a great risk among women who would go to any length to avoid the potential

23 On Milan, see Hunecke, *Trovatelli di Milano,* 188. By the 1870s, about half of the illegitimate infants born in Rome were not abandoned. However, given the fact that in this period many of these children were born to women who had been married religiously, it is likely that even then a large majority of the truly illegitimate newborns were being abandoned. For the Roman figures, see Raseri, "Fanciulli illegittimi," 114.

24 This intriguing observation was made by Potash, "Foundling Problem," 68. Illegitimacy rates for Paris are provided in Fuchs, *Abandoned Children,* 70.

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shame of having an illegitimate child.[25] Midwives played a central role in the efforts of civil authorities to police women's reproductive behavior.

The midwives were placed in a delicate position. On the one hand, they were charged with maintaining absolute secrecy with respect to the identity of the women whom they helped. They were charged specifically with upholding the honor of unwed mothers and in many cities were forbidden from identifying the mother when they consigned a newborn to a foundling home. In the penal code of the Kingdom of Italy in 1807, for example, a jail term of six months was to be meted out to midwives who compromised a woman's honor by revealing her identity. On the other hand, midwives were called upon to be on the lookout for unwed women who were pregnant, and to insure that their pregnancies were brought to term and their babies consigned to a foundling home.[26]

Such surveillance was evident in a case described in the "secret archives" of the Bologna foundling home, involving the Casa di Correzione, or jail. In 1832, a letter from the chief of police to the jail warden instructed him to take in Giulia Rossi, an unwed twenty-two-year-old "orphan," who was "clandestinely pregnant." As an orphan working as a servant in the city, and coming from another province, Giulia Rossi was the prototypical female victim. She left service in her sixth month, before her pregnancy was discovered. She was taken into police custody, following her unsuccessful attempt to get the married man who had impregnated her to pay for her childbirth expenses.

The chief of police ordered the warden to hold Rossi until she had given birth. He justified this action by his fear that "feeling so acutely her state of dishonor," the young woman might do away with the child. The chief further specified that, following the birth, both mother and child should enter the foundling home, where the mother would be separated from her child, but made

25 Three cases of infanticide in the Bologna area in the nineteenth century are discussed by Maria Pia Casarini, "Il buon matrimonio: Tre casi di infanticidio nell'800," *Memoria, Rivista di Storia delle Donne,* VII (1986), 27–36. They all involve young unwed women whose marriages to their fiancés were delayed for various reasons.

26 The history of Italian midwifery in this period is examined in Claudia Pancino, "La comare levatrice: Crisi di un mestiere nel XVIII secolo," *Società e Storia,* 13 (1981), 612–613.

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to remain to serve as a wet nurse for other babies. Rossi revealed that she had once previously been pregnant, but in that case the father, also married, had paid for the expenses and she thus avoided both jail and forced service as wet nurse at the foundling home. Whether either or both of the men were her employers is not stated in the record.

After Italian unification, a new legal theory—one holding that children had rights of their own—began to change public policies with respect to illegitimate births. This question was not simply an ideological matter, however, for the huge costs of the foundling system continued to push local political officials to seek ways of reducing the financial burden imposed by infant abandonment. Thus, after centuries in which authorities sought to prevent unwed mothers from caring for their offspring, Roman city officials in 1897 decided to grant subsidies to unwed mothers who agreed to nurse and keep their children. This did not mean an end to state supervision of such women. To qualify for a subsidy, a woman had to show that the baby was her only child (that she was not a habitual sinner) and that she was not living with a man.[27]

The role of the state was crucial in regulating the abandonment of legitimate newborns in the nineteenth century. In many parts of Italy (for example, Bologna) and elsewhere in Europe (notably France), the great majority of abandoned children were illegitimate. However, in Moscow and St. Petersburg, as well as in Milan, Florence, and Cosenza, one half or more of the foundlings were born to married women. In Spain the government legally forbade anyone from questioning or interfering with people on their way to a foundling home with an infant, or inquiring into its legitimacy.[28]

How can we account for the large-scale abandonment of newborns by married couples in these areas? Here, too, a simple cultural explanation holds only limited promise. No doubt there were cultural differences, for example, between Bologna and Flor-

27 This point is discussed in Giulia Di Bello, *Senza nome né famiglia: I bambini abbandonati nell'Ottocento* (Florence, 1989), 7. On qualifying for subsidies, see Gianna Pomata, "Madri illegittime tra Ottocento e Novecento," *Quaderni storici,* XLIV (1980), 497–542.

28 For state regulations regarding the acceptability of taking in legitimate children, see, for France, Fuchs, *Abandoned Children,* 71; for Russia, Ransel, *Mothers of Misery,* 110; for Spain, Sherwood, *Poverty,* 103.

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ence in the nineteenth century, but the cities were less than 100 kilometers apart and similar in size. They both served as commercial centers for identical systems of sharecropping agriculture, they both lacked any significant heavy industry, and in both landowning elites were dominant. In Bologna and Florence, too, the Church played a central ideological and social role.[29] Why were up to 43 percent of all children born in Florence abandoned at a time when only 15 percent were abandoned in Bologna? It is hard to avoid the conclusion that the answer is not cultural, but institutional. The Florentine foundling home was willing to take in infants without ascertaining whether their mothers were married; the Bologna foundling home was not.

HONOR For anthropologists working in the Mediterranean, one of the most provocative aspects of the history of Italian child abandonment is the incessant invocation of the concept of honor by contemporaries in accounting for the foundling system. Historically, the code of honor was crucial in the development of an areal focus on Mediterranean societies in anthropology. It not only justified the geographical grouping of those societies for study, but also helped to justify the entry of anthropologists onto turf that was not traditionally considered appropriate for their discipline.[30]

Typical of this discourse of honor in connection with Italian infant abandonment are the words of a Trento official of the nineteenth century, who described the city's institutions for abandonment as having been "erected to protect the honor of women who have been disgraced." The office of the Bishop of Trento, meanwhile, described the system's rationale as "the holy idea of lessening the tragic effects of immorality and vice, preventing

29 Differences did, of course, exist between Bologna and Florence. The most notable of these was political, rather than cultural; whereas Bologna was—until unification—part of the papal states, Florence was the center of the Grand Duchy of Tuscany.

30 The heavy concentration of honor in Mediterranean anthropology has had its negative consequences, leading both to unwelcome limitations in the purview of anthropological research in Europe and to a distorted view of the cultures being studied (after all, what societies do not have concepts of honor?). It was therefore almost with a sense of embarrassment that I noted prominent references to honor in justifying the design of the foundling home system in Italy and in describing the motives that drove women to abandon their newborn children. For a recent compendium of anthropological studies on honor, see David D. Gilmore (ed.), *Honor and Shame and the Unity of the Mediterranean* (Washington, D.C., 1987).

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extremely serious crimes [that is, infanticide or abortion], caring for the honor of so many unhappy females."[31]

A revealing point in these descriptions, as in so many that cite honor as justification for the abandonment of infants by unwed women, is that they almost exclusively refer to the honor of women. There is nary a mention of men's honor. In 1895, Sorani, a lawyer, alluded to this curious fact, arguing: "the woman is asked and is required to be chaste, while the man is given the means to undermine the law; the woman is faced with frequent occasions to fail; while the man is given an easy way to get out of paying for his failure. We [men] are immoral and mendacious; the woman must bear the shame and the penalty."[32]

Here, again, we must be careful before assigning an independent role to culture, which is the typical anthropological approach to honor.[33] The isolation of young, pregnant, single women was produced in no small part by a combination of Church and state policy, rather than simply by social pressures operating at the lower levels of society. The sharp distinction between the moral status of wed and unwed mothers in Italy came only following the Council of Trent in the sixteenth century. For a time even after the Council, men were required to take responsibility for children whom they had fathered outside of marriage, especially in the Savoyard kingdom in the northwest. Unwed women did not then face the birth of a child alone, nor did they face the task of raising a child by themselves. Insofar as honor was at issue, it concerned the baby's father as well as the mother.

By the eighteenth century this pattern had begun to change, under the influence of the new Church policy and the cooperation of state authorities. Men were less and less frequently called upon to take on responsibilities after fathering a child outside marriage, and women were becoming increasingly isolated. The pall of dishonor cast on unwed mothers led to increased attempts to keep pregnancies secret and to dispose of illegitimate children clandestinely. The Napoleonic reforms at the turn of the nineteenth century gave this movement greater momentum. In 1804, the

31 These quotations are from Anderle, "Maternità illegittima," 149.

32 Ugo Sorani, quoted in Di Bello, *Senza nome,* 9.

33 There are some notable exceptions to this generalization, including Jane Schneider and Peter Schneider, *Culture and Political Economy in Western Sicily* (New York, 1976).

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new civil code of the Kingdom of Italy abolished the right to determine the paternity of a child of an unmarried woman.[34]

Napoleon also mandated that all communities install a wheel—called *la ruota* in Italy, and *le tour* in France—to facilitate the anonymous abandonment of newborns. This reform makes sense in terms of the other changes already mentioned. With pregnant, unwed women becoming increasingly stigmatized and isolated, infanticide became a great temptation. Throughout Italy, ruote were justified as a means of preventing infanticide, and of allowing unwed women to escape the permanent damage to their honor of being known to be the mother of a *bastardino*. But ruote, and the vast expansion of infant abandonment associated with them, can just as easily be seen as an innovation designed to protect the fathers, rather than the mothers.

Women's honor became the idiom through which men were able to relieve themselves of responsibility for their own acts. Preventing unwed mothers from keeping their young protected men as much as women, yet none of the extensive corpus of ideological pronouncements surrounding the foundling homes mentions this fact.

Young men did, however, encounter a great deal of social pressure aimed at getting them to marry women whom they had impregnated. In the latter part of the nineteenth century, for example, a substantial proportion of all brides in Casalecchio (around one third) were pregnant at the time of their marriage.[35] What changed was not the social pressure on men to marry—which continued to be great in cases where the woman was part of a local family and the man was integrated into the local society. Rather, what changed was the situation which faced a woman whose family was not in a position to compel the man to marry her.

It is revealing that the foundling homes themselves, although set up to protect the secrecy of the paternity of infants abandoned on their doorsteps, often made strenuous efforts to ascertain paternity in cases where foundling women under their tutelage be-

34 On these Napoleonic reforms, see Giovanna Cappelletto, "Balie ed esposti nel secolo XVIII. Risultati di una rilevazione seriale sul territorio veronese," *Annali veneti,* I (1983), 423–433; Onger, "Abbandono degli infanti," 41.

35 These data are taken from Kertzer and Hogan, *Family,* 119–135. It is the only historical study of Italian bridal pregnancy rates in print.

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came pregnant. Such was the case, for example, in Siena, when the head of the foundling home was informed that one of his charges, living with a rural family, had become pregnant. He immediately sent a letter to the parish priest, and launched an independent investigation, both designed to identify the "guilty party" and to try to arrange a marriage. In most such instances, these efforts failed.[36]

Women of means were at an advantage in this system of infant abandonment, and one sign of this was the greater attention paid by the authorities to protecting their anonymity and, hence, their honor. A particularly clear case of this preferential treatment occurred in Trento, where the foundling home had an associated maternity hospital to allow unwed pregnant women to avoid detection by entering it in the last months of their pregnancy. By giving birth there and having the child directly removed to the adjoining foundling ward, a woman could bring her pregnancy to term in secrecy.

This system was found throughout much of Italy (and was used as the primary means for training midwives). Yet, a sharp distinction was made between those women who were able to pay for their care and those who were not. Women who paid were guaranteed absolute secrecy, as well as more comfortable quarters. Indeed, they did not have to come into contact with those who did not: they were even given a separate hour for mass in the chapel. Most importantly, they were free to leave the hospital as soon as they gave birth (and turned their child over to the foundling ward). Not only were poorer women denied such luxuries, but even their anonymity was compromised by the necessity of procuring various documents demonstrating that they came from the area around Trento and that they were too poor to pay for their care.[37]

WET-NURSING: WOMEN'S BODIES, WOMEN'S WORK, FORCED LABOR

With the flood of babies left on their doorsteps, the Italian foundling homes faced the daunting task of placing tens of thousands of babies every year with lactating women. Satisfactory artificial

36 The Siena case is discussed in Tizziana Bruttini, *Madri e figli nella Siena granducale: L'assistenza dell'Ospedale alla maternità e all'infanzia abbandonata* (Siena, 1985).

37 The difference between women who paid and those who did not is discussed in Anderle, "Maternità illegittima," 150–153.

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feeding methods were developed only late in the nineteenth century (although much medical attention in the foundling homes was devoted to experimenting with such methods even in the eighteenth century). In these circumstances, the survival of newborns was linked to their rapid placement with wet nurses. The quality of the wet-nursing, in turn, was the major determinant in the subsequent survival of the child. Half or more of the abandoned children typically died in their first year of life.

Foundling homes were in desperate need of women to nurse newborns within their confines. Such wet nurses allowed the infants to survive until they could be placed (generally within a week or two) with external wet nurses. Getting women to serve as internal wet nurses was never easy, for the living conditions inside an ospizio were miserable; in addition, the women were required to nurse two or three infants at a time, pay was low, and service meant that the women were separated from their own families. Since it was difficult to entice women to serve as internal wet nurses, many Italian foundling homes coerced unwed mothers who were abandoning their newborns into such duty. They were not allowed to nurse their own newborns, in part for fear that they would favor their own children over others for whom they were responsible.

Conditions for internal wet nurses were not unlike those found in jail. For example, in Milan, they were allowed to speak with other family members only once a week, and they could leave the premises only twice a month, in small groups, with an escort. During such excursions they were not allowed to talk with outsiders, nor could they enter anyone's home.[38]

The regulations of the Bologna foundling home stipulated that any woman who did not pay the 20 lire "charity" fee for the care of her child had to spend twelve months as a wet nurse, unless her child were already dead upon presentation—in which case she was required to remain for only six months. Enforcement of this female servitude waxed and waned with the need of the foundling home for internal wet nurses, but many women fell victim to it. During 1809–1810, 100 living babies were left without the stipulated payment at the Bologna foundling home; 50 of

38 See Pellegrini, "L'esposizione dei fanciulli a Milano dal 1860 al 1901," in Gorni and *idem* (eds.), *L'infanzia abbandonata,* 174.

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their mothers were forced to become internal wet nurses. Even by mid-century, women were still being forced into wet-nurse servitude: 22 of the 82 mothers who, in 1849–1850, left living infants at the Bologna foundling home without the obligatory payment were forced into wet-nursing service there. More than one feminist Italian historian has referred to this system as comparable to prostitution, based as it was on class and gender systems that led women to be exploited for their biological capacities.[39]

Foundling homes, however, sought to find outside placements for infants as soon as possible, believing—with good reason—that they were more likely to survive in the healthier environment of the countryside. In Bologna, as in a number of other Italian cities, the mountain zones were especially favored, both because they were regarded as especially healthy and because the poverty and the nature of the family economy in the mountains encouraged married women to take in foundlings for nursing. Women were paid on a monthly basis for this labor; the payments declined after the child was weaned but could continue until the child reached eight to ten years of age.

Ransel, in his study of infant abandonment in Russia, uses a provocative commercial metaphor in examining the Russian wet-nursing system: "The perishable commodity in the system of exchange—the foundling children—circulated in much the same manner as the capital." In a sense, the urban-based system took in young lives that were the product of the countryside (for example, of servant girls in the city who had come in from the hinterland) and sent them back out to the countryside, but this time along with money and goods (such as clothes) acquired in the city. Through the wet-nursing system, even in cases—such as Milan—where the great majority of the children came from urban women, the foundling system had a great impact on rural society. It distributed not only income but also human beings to the caretaking families of the hinterland.[40]

39 The data on the forced entry of mothers into the Bologna foundling home are based on an examination of the *bollettari* in the foundling home archives. For a history of prostitution in nineteenth-century Bologna, see Mary Gibson, *Prostitution and the State in Italy, 1860–1915* (New Brunswick, N.J., 11986).

40 Ransel, *Mothers of Misery,* 221. Of particular benefit was the fact that payments were made in cash and were guaranteed for an extended period of care. As a result, the wet-nurse payment booklets could be used by rural women as collateral for loans. For a discussion of this phenomenon in France, see Nancy Fitch, "'Les petits parisiens en

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The desperate need of many of these rural women for cash led to a much lamented phenomenon: rural women got pregnant and, with the complicity of a midwife, consigned their newborn child to a foundling home, arranging at the same time to take in a foundling to nurse instead. Emblematic are the comments of one mid-nineteenth-century observer in Siena: "Every day, sirs, this scandal is repeated. . . . After having abandoned her newborn child at night, the mother presents herself the next morning, either directly, or through an intermediary, to serve as wetnurse for a foundling, to raise for many years at the institute's expense."[41]

THE LIVES OF FOUNDLINGS, MALE AND FEMALE What happened to the foundlings who survived, and what does the course of these foundlings' lives tell us about gender ideology and gender relations in nineteenth-century Italy? Here our story becomes more complex. To this point, we have portrayed women as the primary victims of the infant abandonment system. Yet once we look at the lives of the foundlings we find that males, too, paid a high price.

Male and female foundlings were treated differently. The foundling home in Bologna is typical, in that it assumed responsibility for boys only until they reached their fifteenth birthday. After this point, they were on their own. In most cases, boys never returned to the foundling home after they were one or two weeks old. If their current caretakers no longer wanted them, the foundling home made arrangements for them to move to another rural home. By the age of eight or so, they were doing productive work in agriculture and, by the time that they were released from foundling-home supervision, they generally were working as agricultural servants.

The situation for female foundlings was dramatically different. They could never achieve full independence, for their honor had to be protected—a role entrusted to the foundling homes.

province': The Silent Revolution in the Allier, 1860–1900," *Journal of Family History,* XI (1986), 131–155; for Italy, Sandra Cavallo, "Strategie politiche e familiari intorno al baliatico. Il monopolio dei bambini abbandonati nel Canavese tra Sei e Settecento," *Quaderni Storici,* LIII (1983), 391–420.

41 Quoted in Bruttini, "Legittimi e illegittimi: Aspetti istituzionali dell'assistenza all'infanzia abbandonata a Siena nell'Ottocento," *Bullettino senese di storia patria,* XCIX (1982), 232–233. For the same phenomenon in Trieste, see Leonardo Trisciuzzi and Diana De Rosa, *I bambini di sua maestà: Esposti e orfani nella Trieste del '700* (Milan, 1986), 14.

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Since the institutions could not unilaterally give up their responsibility, they handed it over to someone else, namely, a husband in marriage (or, less commonly by the nineteenth century, to a convent). At the time of life when the boys were being liberated from foundling home control, the girls—reaching the dangerous years of fertility—came under increasing ospizio supervision. This tutelage often involved bringing the girls, as they reached age ten to twelve, back into the foundling home, where they were put to work and housed until they married. The practice of returning girls at this age to foundling homes was related not only to the desire to protect their honor, but also to the lack of interest of rural families in keeping such girls after their payments had ended.

Many of the female foundlings never married and therefore had to remain in an ospizio until their death. For example, in 1857, 222 girls and women resided in the Bologna foundling home (no boys or men did). Of these, 174 were organized into work groups within the ospizio, with careful records kept of their production. They were not free to leave unless they were getting married, joining a convent, being reclaimed by a parent, or taking up a job as a servant. In the last case, the employment had to be approved by foundling home authorities.[42]

Those girls over age fifteen who were allowed to work as servants continued to have their behavior carefully supervised. For example, a Bologna foundling home document from 1829 specifies that the ospizio would cut by half the dowry to be given to any girl who left her place of service without first receiving permission from the ospizio. If she was over age twenty-five, she would lose her entire dowry. Moreover, when a girl working as a servant requested permission to return to the ospizio, the institution first ascertained why she was terminating employment. If she was judged to be at fault, she was given the most unpleasant and onerous jobs in the foundling home on her return.[43]

Trying to insure marriages for female foundlings was one of the main preoccupations of the ospizi. The mechanism used was to provide a dowry which would be substantial enough to attract

42 These regulations are taken from the *Statuti del Pio Stabilimento degli Esposti,* found in the archives of the *Ospedale Esposti,* attached to the acts of the *Commissione Amministrativa,* b. 15, 12 Jan. 1826.

43 From the regulations for girls over age seven in *ibid.*

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a husband despite the social disadvantages that the foundling brought with her. Foundling homes continued to take an interest in these dowered women after their marriage. One reason was that the dowry document (in Bologna and elsewhere) obligated a husband to return half of the dowry and what remained of the trousseau to the foundling home in case his wife died without leaving children. Conversely, if he died and no children had been born or survived, the widow might well return to her foundling roots, reentering the ospizio and living the rest of her life there.

How to find husbands for these young women posed some problems, especially for girls who had been taken back into the foundling home before age fifteen. For those living where they worked as servants, the matter was more straightforward, although the ospizi used the dowry as a lever to control the behavior of young unmarried women under their charge, refusing to provide a dowry in cases where the women exhibited recalcitrant or dishonorable behavior. The ospizi, however, could be flexible even here. For example, in 1885 a rural parish priest wrote to the foundling home in Florence requesting that it provide a dowry for one of its foundlings, despite the fact that she was five or six months pregnant.[44] In such cases, compassion may not have been the only motivating force; it was less expensive in the long run to pay a dowry than to support yet another abandoned child.

Some foundling homes dealt with the problem of a surfeit of unmarried young women by organizing regular public occasions on which the women could be displayed. The huge Roman foundling home, for example, sponsored three processions per year, in which all of the female foundlings had to march in line. Young men interested in marrying a foundling descended on the city to pick out the woman whom they wanted. We are told that, at least in the eighteenth century, few Roman men were interested in such marriages; it was men from the rural hinterland who ensured that, in Rome, few women remained in the ospizio until old age. Similar processions were sponsored in Naples in the nineteenth century, and, given the squalid conditions of the ospizio, and the fact that many of the female foundlings who left it without marrying became prostitutes, it is easy to imagine that these processions were a source of anxiety for the foundling

44 Di Bello, *Senza nome,* 111.

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women. A popular novel by Mastriani in 1892 described them as resembling a "meat market."[45]

Although male foundlings escaped the institutionalized degradation that female foundlings were made to bear, they were not exempt from suffering. Corsini argues that Florence's male foundlings often led wretched lives. The Florentine foundling home gave up all responsibility for them after age ten. Exploited because they were unprotected by either family or institution, they commonly resorted to theft and consequently were on the run, without property or family support. Since they often lacked the means to establish a secure livelihood, they found it difficult to attract a woman in marriage. In some periods and in some areas, the state dealt with this problem by forcing male foundlings at age eighteen to enter the military, a fate that female foundlings escaped.[46]

Paradoxically, the stress placed on the honor of women rather than men, the belief that women's behavior needed to be supervised, and the assumption that, in some sense, husbands should have higher status than their wives, all contributed to making the lives of male foundlings more difficult than those of female foundlings. Unfortunately, the very fact that the institutions took no interest in male foundlings after they reached puberty means that we are not in good position to reach firm conclusions about their fate.[47]

ON HISTORY, ANTHROPOLOGY, AND THE STUDY OF GENDER In 1983, Scott offered suggestions for future research in feminist history that are equally relevant to the issue of the relationship between historical and anthropological studies of gender. She called for analyses that "include women's actions and experiences, ideas and policies which define their rights, and metaphoric and symbolic representations of feminine and masculine. The problem for empirical historical investigation is to select moments when all of these are somehow at issue and ask how they illuminate not

45 For the Roman situation, see Sergio Pagano, "Gli esposti dell'Ospedale di S. Spirito nel primo Ottocento," *Ricerche per la storia religiosa di Roma,* III (1979), 360. Francesco Mastriani, *La Medea di Porta Medina* (Rome, 1892).

46 See Corsini, "Materiali," 999. On conscription of male foundlings in Siena, see Bruttini, *Madri e figli,* 26.

47 The greater social disadvantage suffered by male foundlings is also argued for the first half of the nineteenth century by Franco Della Peruta, "Infanzia e famiglia nella prima metà dell'Ottocento," *Studi Storici,* XX (1979), 473–491.

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only women's experience but politics as well." She went on to argue the necessity for analyses of "the ways in which politics construct gender and gender constructs politics."[48]

If anthropologists are interested in building social theory and documenting ethnographic diversity, there is no reason for them to exclude historical materials. The family and political system of nineteenth-century Italy is no less relevant to social theory than the family and political system of twentieth-century Italy, or that of the Nuer in the Sudan.

But there are many ways for anthropologists to examine history, some more productive than others. Anthropologists must avoid limiting themselves to approaches that are either exclusively symbolic or exclusively materialist. As this study of infant abandonment in Italy clearly demonstrates, the interactions among cultural norms, guiding social metaphors, religious institutions, political institutions, demographic forces, and economic structures are complex. Anthropological studies of gender should be sensitive to the importance of historical materials, even in studies of contemporary societies, in their efforts to understand the gender system. They should also not get so carried away with the power of symbols and metaphor that they ignore the fact that the construction of gender is a political process. Behavior cannot be explained simply by reference to culture. We have to ask not only how the cultural categories developed in the first place, but also to what extent behavior is the outcome of culture.

48 Joan W. Scott, "Women's History: The Modern Period," *Past & Present,* 101 (1983), 156.

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