



Italian Women Who Emigrated to Egypt (1870-1940): That Is, What Happens When the Woman Is the One Who Leaves Home?

Straniero Maria Agnese

Universidad Autonoma de Cantoblanco Madrid, Spain

Abstract

In the collective mentality of Western culture, it is often portrayed that the person who leaves home or emigrates is typically male, usually young, and unmarried. Common perceptions, even at the academic level, overlook the fact that women also leave home alone. Women have also embarked on migratory paths. This ethnography focuses on Italian women who emigrated alone to Egypt between the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century, settling in Alexandria and Cairo. They were often unmarried women from small villages in Northern, Central, and Southern Italy. That was a time when Egypt was experiencing widespread prosperity and a flourishing of artistic and cultural expression. The emigration of women impacted three main areas: the family of origin, the community of origin, and the workplace. The aim is to illuminate previously silenced life stories that challenge an entire social establishment and a symbolic order that had predetermined women's destinies. I built this research around the hypothesis that those women travelers cannot return. Moving, they opened a door, crossed a threshold; something happened. It is not just the Mediterranean that is crossed. They moved away from economic, socio-cultural, and gender marginalization that had previously defined their existence, to a social and economic "centre-existence". This was a journey from which they could never return.

Keywords center; gender; margin; migration; women