



Emigrant Draft Evasion in the First World War: Decision-Making and Emotional Consequences in the Transatlantic Italian family

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journals.sagepub.com/home/ehq**Selena Daly** 

Royal Holloway, University of London, UK

Abstract

In 1911, Italians living abroad constituted one-sixth of Italy's population, numbering roughly five million people. During the First World War, approximately 300,000 men returned from the Americas and other European countries to answer the call to arms and complete their military service. However, this number constitutes only 13 per cent of those men living abroad who were liable for conscription. Thus, this article will examine the larger phenomenon of draft evasion among emigrant Italians across the Atlantic, where most evaders resided. I will begin by analysing evasion in the context of Italian mobilization and the factors influencing emigrants' decision-making. I argue that the decision was a joint one, negotiated between family members on both sides of the ocean. I will thus also explore the impact of this decision on personal relationships, through three case studies of familial separation initially caused by emigration and then compounded by draft evasion: a husband in California and his wife in Liguria; a son in the Dominican Republic and his mother in Calabria; and a woman in Argentina whose husband had evaded the draft, and her sister in Liguria, exploring the emotional toll this decision took on them and their loved ones.

Keywords

conscription, draft evasion, emigration, family, First World War, Italy, letter-writing, military service

Corresponding author:

Selena Daly, Department of History, Royal Holloway, University of London, UK.

Email: selena.daly@rhul.ac.uk

Introduction

At the port of New York in spring 1917, a steamship was about to depart for Italy, carrying in steerage a group of Italian reservists returning to their homeland to perform their conscripted military service. One man, after a disagreement with the Italian consul over the payment of his passage, jumped overboard and swam ashore, thus becoming a draft evader in the eyes of the Italian government. His name was Charles Ponzi, whose fraudulent get-rich-quick scheme would earn him worldwide notoriety in 1920.¹ Ponzi was just one of millions of Italian emigrants around the world who failed to respond to his country's call to arms during the years of the Great War. It is on these men and their families that this article will focus.

In 1911, Italians living abroad constituted one-sixth of Italy's population, numbering roughly five million people, with approximately 1.5 million of those living in the United States alone.² The experiences of emigrant communities have not, however, been incorporated into the dominant narratives of Italy's war. In spite of recent comments about the need to internationalize the Italian First World War narrative,³ and the general push towards transnational approaches in the field, the vast majority of Italian studies remain resolutely national in their focus, with little attention given to those living outside Italy's borders.⁴

Arguably the group of emigrants most affected by the outbreak of the war were draft-age men. In 1915, there were more than 700,000 Italian men over the age of 21 in the United States and thus potentially liable for the draft. By the end of 1918, 103,259 of them had returned to Italy, approximately 13 per cent of the eligible population.⁵ This was approximately one-third of the global total who returned for

¹ 'Arrest in Ponzi Case May be Made Today', *Boston Post*, 12 August 1920; 'Ponzi's Plight Another Chapter in His Career', *Buffalo Evening News* (New York), 14 August 1920. On Ponzi's fraudulent scheme in general, see Michael Zuckoff, *Ponzi's Scheme: The True Story of a Financial Legend* (New York 2005).

² *Censimento della popolazione del Regno al 10 giugno 1911* (Rome 1912).

³ Nicola Labanca, 'Introduzione', in N Labanca, ed., *Dizionario storico della prima guerra mondiale*, (Bari 2014), ix–xxxi; and Alan Kramer, 'Recent Historiography of the First World War, Part 1', *Journal of Modern European History*, Vol. 12, No. 1 (2014), 5–27.

⁴ See for example, Mario Isnenghi and Giorgio Rochat, *La Grande Guerra, 1914–1918* (Bologna 2014); Marco Mondini, *La guerra italiana. Partire, raccontare, tornare 1914–18* (Bologna 2014) and Antonio Gibelli, *La grande guerra degli italiani, 1915–1918* (Milan 1998). Claims to Italian exceptionalism are frequent. See Oliver Janz, 'Zwischen Konsens und Dissens. Zur Historiographie des Ersten Weltkriegs in Italien', in Arnd Bauerkämper and Elise Julien, eds, *Durchhalten! Krieg und Gesellschaft im Vergleich 1914–1918* (Göttingen 2011), 195–213. This is a common issue in national historiographies. See Jan Lucassen, Leo Lucassen and Patrick Manning, 'Migration History: Multidisciplinary Approaches', in J Lucassen, L Lucassen and P Manning, eds, *Migration History in World History: Multidisciplinary Approaches* (Leiden 2010), 3–35, here at 5–6.

⁵ Giuseppe De Michelis, *L'emigrazione italiana dal 1910 al 1923*, vol. 1 (Rome 1926), 725 and 731–2. It is impossible to know how many emigrants had received permanent exemptions from military service. It is also important to remember that not all men were immediately mobilized when Italy entered the war in May 1915. The first to be called up were reservists who had already completed their military service and those who had received exemptions in peacetime. The numbers called up also differed year-by-year: in

military service. The number who travelled from elsewhere in Europe was 130,000, of which 92,000 came from France and another 50,000 travelled from South America.⁶ The largest group in the southern hemisphere came from Argentina, from which 41,866 men departed following the call to arms, although much of this return migration from Argentina can be attributed to the economic crisis that had erupted there in 1913.⁷ The 300,000 men who returned from abroad for their military service constituted 7 per cent of Italy's armed forces, a number comparable to the Dominion soldiers who served in the British Army or the colonial soldiers who fought in the French Army. While those latter two topics have received considerable interest from historians,⁸ the same cannot be said for the Italian emigrant reservists and there exist only a handful of article-length studies on this group.⁹

In the few existing studies, the actions of these reservists who returned have been portrayed as a kind of 'volunteerism'¹⁰ or as the 'greatest test of Italian loyalty',¹¹ without further exploration of what impacted on their decision-making. There has also been no attention paid to those who chose to evade the call to arms and how they subsequently navigated the consequences of this decision. Despite the low return rate of the Italian emigrants, Mark Choate has argued that the phenomenon of returning reservists constituted a 'dramatic expression of

(*fnote continued*)

1915, 439,000 men were liable for the draft compared to 1.2 million men in 1917. On the mechanics of conscription, see Claudio Vercelli, *Soldati: Storia dell'esercito italiano* (Bari 2019), 151–63.

⁶ De Michelis, *L'emigrazione italiana*, 719. Due to the improper collection of statistics, these numbers cannot be considered entirely reliable. Some men paid their own fare to Italy and so were not recorded in the official statistics; others did not declare themselves as reservists so that they could travel more freely and spend a few days at home with their families before being subject to the military authorities.

⁷ For a vivid description of the pre-war economic crisis in Argentina and its impact on Italian emigrants, see Samuel L. Baily and Franco Ramella, eds, *One Family, Two Worlds: An Italian Family's Correspondence Across the Atlantic, 1901–1922* (New Brunswick, NJ 1988), 141–59. In 1914 alone, and so therefore prior to Italy's entry into the war, 61,000 Italians returned from Argentina (151). See also, John Starosta Galante, 'The "Great War" in Il Plata: Italian Immigrants in Buenos Aires and Montevideo During the First World War', *Journal of Migration History*, Vol. 2, No. 1 (2016), 57–92 and De Michelis, *L'emigrazione italiana*, 737 and 726–9.

⁸ Among many others, see Richard Fogarty, *Race and War in France: Colonial Subjects in the French Army, 1914–1918* (Baltimore, MD 2008); Marc Michel, *Les Africains et la Grande Guerre: L'appel à l'Afrique (1914–1918)* (Paris 2014); Bill Gammage, *The Broken Years: Australian Soldiers in the Great War* (Canberra 1974); Damien Fenton, *New Zealand and the First World War, 1914–1919* (Auckland 2013); Patrick M. Dennis, *Reluctant Warriors: Canadian Conscripts and the Great War* (Vancouver 2017); Stephen Garton, 'The Dominions, Ireland and India', in Robert Gerwarth and Erez Manela, eds, *Empires at War, 1911–1923* (Oxford 2014), 152–78.

⁹ See Caroline Douki, 'Les émigrés face à la mobilisation militaire de l'Italie, dans 14–18', *Aujourd'hui*, Vol. 5 (2002), 158–81; Emilio Franzina, 'Volontari dell'altra sponda: emigranti ed emigrati in America alla guerra (1915–1918)', in Fabrizio Rasera and Camillo Zadra, eds, *Volontari italiani nella Grande Guerra* (Rovereto 2008), 215–37 and Giorgia Alù, 'Order and Otherness in a Photographic Shot: Italians Abroad and the Great War', *Modern Italy*, Vol. 22, No. 3 (2017), 291–314.

¹⁰ Vanda Wilcox, *Morale and the Italian Army during the First World War* (Cambridge 2016), 173.

¹¹ Fiorello B. Ventresco, 'Loyalty and Dissent: Italian Reservists in America During World War I', *Italian Americana*, Vol. 4, No. 1 (1978), 93–122, here at 95.

international solidarity [... that] was the climax of Italy's policies promoting a transnational nationalism'.¹² In this article, I wish to challenge these assertions that the decision to evade or not was primarily motivated by feelings of nationalism. Rather, I will argue that the influence of family members on the choice of whether or not to return was of far greater significance than previous interpretations related to patriotism have allowed for.

In their authoritative history of Italy's war years, Mario Isnenghi and Giorgio Rochat have argued that 'we do not have the means to understand the reasons [behind Italian emigrant draft evasion], whether full integration in their new states or in any case a definitive detachment from the mother country, fear of the war or something else'.¹³ This is certainly true if we look to quantitative data or official reports compiled by officials in the Italian General Commissariat for Emigration. Unsurprisingly, in such sources, the voices and experiences of draft evaders are absent. Thus, in order to gain insight into how men and their families approached the decision to evade and how the consequences of this decision were subsequently managed, we must alter the scale of our analysis. In this article, I adopt the lens of familial relationships to highlight the transnational dynamics of emigrant draft evasion. As Bernhard Struck, Kate Ferris and Jacques Revel have argued, 'macro processes are played out or experienced in much smaller units, within villages, institutions, families or local streets'.¹⁴

I will explore these dynamics through three micro-historical case studies of transatlantic familial separation initially caused by emigration, compounded by draft evasion and negotiated through correspondence: a husband in California and his wife in Liguria; a son in the Dominican Republic and his mother in Calabria; and a woman in Argentina whose husband had evaded the draft and her sister in Liguria, exploring the emotional toll this decision took on them and their loved ones.¹⁵ I focus only on transatlantic draft evasion as the situation in Europe was rather different. The outbreak of war triggered a refugee crisis of Italian emigrants fleeing back to Italy from other European countries,¹⁶ many of whom then did not

¹² Mark I. Choate, *Emigrant Nation: The Making of Italy Abroad* (Cambridge, MA 2008), 209.

¹³ Isnenghi and Rochat, *La Grande Guerra*, 236. All translations from Italian are by the author.

¹⁴ Bernhard Struck, Kate Ferris and Jacques Revel, 'Introduction: Space and Scale in Transnational History', *The International History Review*, Vol. 33, No. 4 (2011): 573–84, here at 579. See also Jan R ger, 'OXO: Or, the Challenges of Transnational History', *European History Quarterly*, Vol. 40, No. 4 (2010), 656–8, 660.

¹⁵ The Dominican Republic was occupied by the United States in 1916 and remained so until 1924, but this did not impact on the status of Italian immigrants. Argentina remained neutral throughout the war years. On South America in general, see Stefan Rinke, *Latin America and the First World War*, Christopher W. Reid, trans. (Cambridge 2017), on the Dominican Republic, 58 and 122.

¹⁶ See Matteo Ermacora, 'Assistance and Surveillance: War Refugees in Italy, 1914–1918', *Contemporary European History*, Vol. 16, No. 4 (2007), 445–59, specifically 448–51 on refugees in 1915; Giovanni Favero, 'Un'economia aperta alla prova della grande guerra: i rimpatri degli emigranti nella fase di neutralit ' and Federico Melotto, 'Verona 1914–1915: il rientro degli emigranti tra emergenza umanitaria e difficolt  economiche', both in *Archivio storico dell'emigrazione italiana*, Vol. 13 (2017), 12–21 and 22–31 respectively.

have the option to evade the draft; while in March 1916, France, home to the largest European community of Italian emigrants, signed a reciprocal agreement with Italy to exchange draft evaders and deserters.¹⁷ Thus, draft evasion was a more marginal phenomenon among Italian emigrants left in Europe than it was across the Atlantic. No such accord was ever adopted between Italy and any state in the Americas, affording transatlantic evaders more freedom of action and meaning they were not subject to prosecution by local authorities.¹⁸

By focusing on familial relationships between transatlantic emigrant draft evaders (or their spouses) and their loved ones in Italy during the years of the Great War and on the emotional impact of their decision, it is possible to bring 'actors and agency back into the analysis, something that is usually missing in macro-social analysis of cultures or societies'.¹⁹ This focus on the family unit also fits into broader trends within the study of both migration history and the First World War. Up to the 1970s, research in the field of migration tended to have a strong demographic and macroeconomic bias, focusing predominantly on the quantification of migrants.²⁰ This resulted in a general absence of accounts of individual migration experiences in the literature,²¹ which slowly began to be addressed from the 1980s onwards. More recently, increased attention has been devoted (in both historical and sociological studies) to the 'role of emotion in the transnational migratory experience'.²² However, as Hasia Diner has noted, we in fact know very little about the 'emotional lives of immigrants and their offspring'.²³ This interest in emotion is also related to another recent trend in migration studies, namely the identification of the family as a key analytical cornerstone to examine the dynamics and strategies governing migration decisions.²⁴ Similarly, and in parallel, First World War historians have often looked to the family as an entry point to the analysis of societies at war.²⁵

¹⁷ Pierre-Louis Buzzi, 'La mobilisation des immigrés italiens en Vaucluse pendant la Première Guerre mondiale', *Rives méditerranéennes*, Vol. 53 (2017), 169–84.

¹⁸ The situation changed somewhat when the United States entered the war in April 1917 and emigrant men were also required to report for the draft. See below.

¹⁹ Struck, Ferris and Revel, 'Introduction: Space and Scale in Transnational History', 577.

²⁰ Antonio Gibelli and Fabio Caffarena, 'Le lettere degli emigranti', in Piero Bevilacqua, Andreina De Clementi and Emilio Franzina, eds, *Storia dell'emigrazione italiana* (Rome 2001), 563–74, here at 566.

²¹ Baily and Ramella, 'Introduction: The Sola Family Correspondence: A Unique View of the Migration Process', in *One Family, Two Worlds*, 1–32, here at 1.

²² Zlatko Skrbis, 'Transnational Families: Theorizing Migration, Emotions and Belonging', *Journal of Intercultural Studies*, Vol. 29, No. 3 (2008), 231–45, here at 232.

²³ Hasia R. Diner, 'Ethnicity and Emotions in America: Dimensions of the Unexplored', in Peter N. Stearns and Jan Lewis, eds, *An Emotional History of the United States* (New York 1998), 197–217. See also Leslie Page Moch, 'Connecting Migration and World History: Demographic Patterns, Family Systems and Gender', *International Review of Social History*, Vol. 52, No. 1 (2007), 97–104.

²⁴ Jan Kok, 'The Family Factor in Migration Decisions', in *Migration History in World History*, 213–48.

²⁵ For early work, with a mainly quantitative and demographic approach, see Richard Wall and Jay Winter, eds, *The Upheaval of War: Family, Work and Welfare in Europe 1914–1918* (Cambridge 1988) and Ute Daniel, *Arbeiterfrauen in der Kriegsgesellschaft: Beruf, Familie und Politik im Ersten Weltkrieg*

Of course, gaining insight into the emotional and subjective experiences of these men and women is not a straightforward issue but, as Mark Seymour has argued, ‘personal letters remain one of the few documentary sources capable of restoring an interior dimension to our understanding of the past’.²⁶ Letters have long been used by historians of the First World War as a means to explore individual experiences, usually of combatants and their loved ones as missives flowed between the front lines and the home front.²⁷ In Italy too, the war marked an explosion of letter writing among its largely illiterate or semi-literate army of peasant conscripts.²⁸ Martyn Lyons has recently identified war and emigration as two key ‘exceptional circumstances of separation in which writing became intrinsic to the lives of ordinary people’.²⁹ In the case of the letter-writing which will be examined below, both of these circumstances converged as the initial separation of emigration was compounded by the fact of the letter-writers’ decision (or that of their partner) not to respond to the Italian call to arms. In the context of emigration and in the absence of physical proximity, it has been argued that letters become ‘transnational objects’,³⁰ constituting the only tangible link to a loved one and the only evidence of a continuing relationship. This was particularly true in the case of transatlantic emigration during wartime as travel by either party was impossible. Letters thus maintained ‘a micro-social network on a transnational scale’.³¹

Attempting to Mobilize the Italian Emigrant

Before zooming into the micro-level perspective, however, it is necessary to pause to outline the mechanics of Italian conscription. Italy, of course, was not the only

(*note continued*)

(Göttingen 1989). For more recent work, see Martha Hanna, *Your Death Would be Mine: Paul and Marie Pireaud in the Great War* (Cambridge, MA 2006) and Catherine Rollet, ‘The Home and Family Life’, in Jay Winter and Jean-Louis Robert, eds, *Capital Cities at War: Paris, London, Berlin 1914-1919*, vol. 2 (Cambridge 2007), 315–53.

²⁶ Mark Seymour, ‘Epistolary Emotions: Exploring Amorous Hinterlands in 1870s Southern Italy’, *Social History*, Vol. 35, No. 2 (2010), 148–64, here at 150.

²⁷ Two notable examples in English are Michael Roper, *The Secret Battle: Emotional Survival in the Great War* (Manchester 2009) and Jessica Meyer, *Men of War: Masculinity and the First World War in Britain* (Basingstoke 2009).

²⁸ See Fabio Caffarena, *Lettere della grande guerra. Scritture del quotidiano, monumenti della memoria, fonti per la storia. Il caso italiano* (Milan 2005). The representativeness of individual letters and correspondences must be considered: naturally, only the literate (in the absence of a scribe) are represented. This is particularly important in the Italian case where large numbers of immigrants were illiterate. Of the immigrants admitted to the United States between 1899 and 1909, 53.9% of Southern Italians were illiterate, compared to 11.5% of Northern Italians. See Zeffirio Ciuffoletti and Maurizio Degl’Innocenti, *L’emigrazione nella storia d’Italia, 1868–1975* (Florence 1978), 442.

²⁹ Martyn Lyons, *The Writing Culture of Ordinary People in Europe, c. 1860–1920* (Cambridge 2013), 245.

³⁰ Loretta Baldassar, ‘Missing Kin and Longing to be Together: Emotions and the Construction of Co-presence in Transnational Relationships’, *Journal of Intercultural Studies*, Vol. 29, No. 3 (2008), 247–66, here at 257.

³¹ Lyons, *The Writing Culture of Ordinary People*, 202.

European country that was relying on an army of conscripts to fight in the First World War. With the exception of Britain until 1916, all belligerent armies were based on conscription.³² There has been considerable scholarship over the years on the various contrasting ways in which military service during the war was resisted, whether through desertion, conscientious objection or petitions for draft exemptions.³³

However, draft evasion due to one's condition as an emigrant has not formed the basis of studies to date. In fact, the mass mobilization of transatlantic emigrants to perform their wartime military service across the ocean, and its corollary emigrant draft evasion, is a uniquely Italian affair. Germany had the largest emigrant community in the United States and the fourth largest in Brazil, but due to the British blockade, the authorities quickly realized the impossibility of transporting reservists back home and abandoned the plan.³⁴ French reservists were able to depart but their numbers were miniscule in comparison to their Italian or German counterparts. For example, the French community in Argentina barely reached 80,000 (compared to over 900,000 Italians) and during the war, only between 1600 and 2300 reservists made the journey to the Western Front.³⁵ So while there was significant draft evasion among French emigrant populations, the scale was nothing comparable to that of the Italian transatlantic communities.

The organization of Italian military service was inherited from the pre-Unification Piedmontese system and all men were liable to serve for two years once they turned 20.³⁶ In a country only formally united 50 years previously and still riven by deep divisions, Italians' understanding and recognition of the state

³² On the Italian case, see Vanda Wilcox, 'Encountering Italy: Military Service and National Identity during the First World War', *Bulletin of Italian Politics*, Vol. 3, No. 2 (2011), 283–302. On the experiences of other conscripted armies in the First World War, see Jennifer D. Keene, *Doughboys, the Great War, and the Remaking of America* (Baltimore, MD 2001), especially 1–35; Joshua A. Sanborn, *Drafting the Russian Nation: Military Conscription, Total War, and Mass Politics, 1905–1925* (Chicago, IL 2003); Ute Frevert, 'Bürgersoldaten: Die allgemeine Wehrpflicht im 19. und 20. Jahrhundert', in Ines-Jacqueline Werkner, ed., *Die Wehrpflicht und ihre Hintergründe. Sozialwissenschaftliche Beiträge zur aktuellen Debatte* (Wiesbaden 2004), 45–64 and Mehmet Beşikci, *The Ottoman Mobilization of Manpower in the First World War Between Voluntarism and Resistance* (Leiden 2012).

³³ For a comparative study of German and British desertion, see Christoph Jahr, *Gewöhnliche Soldaten. Desertion und Deserteure im deutschen und britischen Heer 1914–1918* (Göttingen 1998). Among a vast bibliography, see also Amy J. Shaw, *Crisis of Conscience: Conscientious Objection in Canada during the First World War* (Vancouver 2009); Lois Bibbings, *Telling Tales about Men: Conceptions of Conscientious Objectors to Military Service during the First World War* (Manchester 2011) and Jeanette Keith, *Rich Man's War, Poor Man's Fight: Race, Class, and Power in the Rural South during the First World War* (Chapel Hill, NC 2004), 111–34.

³⁴ Frederick C. Luebke, *Germans in Brazil: A Comparative History of Cultural Conflict during World War I* (Baton Rouge, LA 1987), 86

³⁵ Hernán Otero, *La guerra en la sangre: Los francos-argentinos ante la Primera Guerra Mundial* (Buenos Aires 2009), 137.

³⁶ On the history of the Italian draft system, see Marco Rovinello, 'The Draft and Draftees in Italy, 1861–1914', in Erik-Jan Zürcher, ed., *Fighting for a Living: A Comparative Study of Military Labour 1500–2000* (Amsterdam 2013), 479–518 and Domenico Quirico, *Naja: Storia del servizio di leva in Italia* (Milan 2008).

were not a given. However, these issues notwithstanding and in spite of Italians' famed *campanilismo*, draft evasion among the resident population in Italy was actually relatively low. The rate was approximately 10 per cent pre-1914 and during the war ranged between a high of 12 per cent in 1916 and a low of 8.7 per cent in 1918.³⁷ It was generally accepted by the authorities at the time that the vast majority of this draft evasion was due to emigrants declining to return.³⁸ While draft evasion for emigrants essentially consisted of declining to present oneself at a consulate, evading the draft was much more difficult for those resident in Italy. There is evidence that some were encouraged to evade by family members through fleeing to Switzerland or self-mutilating; the consequences for such actions were severe, including the death sentence or lengthy terms of imprisonment.³⁹

In the case of transatlantic draft evaders, even before Italy entered the war, army officials acknowledged that these men were not 'recuperable' and despite call-up orders could not be coerced to comply with the draft as long as they remained abroad.⁴⁰ In fact, leading up to Italy's entry into the war in May 1915, there was confusion as to whether or not the draft would even apply to citizens resident abroad. For example, the Acting Italian Consul in San Francisco, Pio Margotti, was sure that there were enough reservists in Italy that those in the United States would not need to be called.⁴¹ Simultaneous reports from Washington speculated that men in the US would not be called up unless the war lasted for another year as it was felt that Italy's intervention might compel peace in six months without the need to mobilize reservists abroad.⁴² However, as soon as Italy entered the war, it became clear that citizens resident abroad would not be exempt from their military duties. Citizens living elsewhere in Europe were given one month to present themselves to the authorities, while those across the Atlantic were allowed a grace period of three months, until the end of August 1915, to answer the call to arms.⁴³ For those who chose to remain, however, it was easy to avoid detection: as one coal miner, Giovanni Giraudo, commented, 'In America there was chaos, they did not know where to find us'.⁴⁴

³⁷ Wilcox, *Morale and the Italian Army*, 149–51 and 173.

³⁸ After 1915, the vast majority of those charged with draft evasion were emigrants (some 370,000 of 470,000). See Enzo Forcella and Alberto Monticone, *Plotone d'esecuzione: I processi della prima guerra mondiale* (Bari 1968), 432–4; Piero Del Negro, *Esercito, stato, società* (Bologna 1979), 431–65 and Isnenghi and Rochat, *La Grande Guerra*, 238–39.

³⁹ Wilcox, *Morale and the Italian Army*, 151, 173 and 178–9 and Forcella and Monticone, *Plotone d'esecuzione*.

⁴⁰ Ministero della Guerra, *Dati sulla giustizia e disciplina militare* (Rome 1927), vi.

⁴¹ 'Not call reservists', *San Bernardino County Sun* (California), 21 May 1915.

⁴² 'Italians here may not be called back for a year', *Boston Daily Globe*, 21 May 1915.

⁴³ De Michelis, *L'emigrazione italiana*, 717. Initially, emigrants in Japan, China, Australia, Chile, Russia and Scandinavia were exempt from service for reasons of price and logistics, although this decision was later overturned in some cases.

⁴⁴ Giovanni Giraudo, 'Eravamo come i colombi', in Nuto Revelli, ed., *Il mondo dei vinti. Testimonianze di cultura contadina. La pianura, la collina, la montagna, le langhe* (Turin 2016 [1977]), 179–87, here at 184.

Italian officials at the time and in the post-war period were acutely aware of the small number of reservists who had answered the call to arms,⁴⁵ and lamented this fact. The Italian consulate in Seattle admitted to the Ambassador in Washington in 1917 that:

the mobilization abroad, sadly we cannot hide this fact, has been a 'failure' [in English in the original]. In my jurisdiction as well as in the entire United States the number of deserters is simply enormous and their behaviour when faced with the recent American conscription law, demonstrates even more that they, whether out of ignorance or neglect, do not have even the most basic concept of duty and they do not have any precise idea at all of the seriousness of the error they commit towards the *patria*.⁴⁶

The 'painful phenomenon' of emigrant draft evasion was indeed particularly acute in the United States. Many reasons were put forward by the Commissariato Generale dell'Emigrazione, the state body responsible for managing Italian emigrants,⁴⁷ for the high numbers of evaders. They argued that many were unaware of their obligations to carry out military service in time of war; that large numbers resided in isolated locations and so could not easily travel to eastern ports; that the guidelines regarding who was subject to the draft were unclear; that initial delays in boarding the reservists at American ports deterred others from departing, and there were fears of submarine attacks or sabotage of the liners.⁴⁸ In addition, as many reservists departed, demand for manual labour (of the type many Italian emigrants supplied) increased along with salaries. As a satirist in the *Los Angeles Times* noted in June 1915, 'The local Italian reservists are not rushing back to their native country. They don't see much fun fighting and being shot for \$2 a month when they can get \$2 a day trench-digging in this country'.⁴⁹ Also of importance was the widespread belief that an amnesty for draft evaders would be offered at the war's end, thus encouraging many men to remain abroad and out of harm's way.⁵⁰

⁴⁵ De Michelis, *L'emigrazione italiana*, 717; Franzina, 'Volontari dell'altra sponda', 227.

⁴⁶ Letter from Gian Paolo Brenna (Italian Consulate in Seattle) to Conte Vincenzo Macchi di Cellere (Ambassador in Washington), 7 September 1917, in Prot. 2060, pos. V, Archivio Storico Diplomatico degli Affari Esteri, Rome.

⁴⁷ For a brief history of this body, see Francesco Cordasco, 'Bollettino dell'Emigrazione (1902–1927): A Guide to the Chronicles of Italian Mass Emigration', *Center for Migration Studies*, Vol. 11, No. 3 (1994), 499–508.

⁴⁸ De Michelis, *L'emigrazione italiana*, 716–23. These latter fears were not unfounded. The Sant'Anna liner, carrying 1600 returning Italian reservists caught fire in the Atlantic in September 1915, after bombs were placed in the hold. 'French Liner Sant'Anna Afire in Mid-Ocean', *The New York Times*, 13 September 1915. The SS Ancona, which was on its return journey to New York to collect reservists, was sunk in the Mediterranean, killing hundreds. 'Austrian Submarine Sinks Ancona', *The New York Times*, 10 November 1915.

⁴⁹ 'Pen Points: By the Staff', *Los Angeles Times*, 8 June 1915.

⁵⁰ A partial amnesty for evaders was indeed issued on 2 September 1919, pardoning those who had served in Allied armies, had been engaged in war work abroad or who were resident in enemy states. See Regio Decreto n. 1502, *Gazzetta Ufficiale del Regno d'Italia*, n. 209 (1919), 2547. However, this amnesty left the majority of evaders still liable to prosecution should they return to Italy.

Another complicating factor was the issue of dual nationality. Italian citizenship law stipulated that even men born abroad to at least one Italian parent were deemed citizens and therefore liable for military service, a situation which caused considerable tension with the United States government.⁵¹ As one reservist, considering his options in 1915, stated, 'The only thing that would ever get me to fight in the army would be when the United States was attacked. I'd fight for the red, white and blue, those are my colors now'.⁵² And indeed, when the United States entered the war in 1917, immigrants were deemed eligible for the draft and approximately 200,000 Italians served in the US Army, of whom 104,358 had also been subject to the Italian draft.⁵³ While all of the reasons mentioned above certainly affected the high rates of draft evasion, they do not reveal how emigrants confronted the decision of whether to return or not and how family members grappled with the fallout of that decision.

Case Studies of Families Separated by Evasion and Emigration

I will now turn my attention to three case studies of family pairings ruptured due to emigration in the first instance and subsequently by draft evasion. All three of these unpublished collections were found and accessed at the Archivio Ligure della Scrittura Popolare in Genoa (ALSP, Ligurian Archive of Popular Writing). The collections have been selected as they each highlight a different significant personal relationship (husband-wife; mother-son; sisters) in three distinct transatlantic locations across the Americas, two of which had large Italian emigrant communities (the United States, in this case California, and Argentina, here Buenos Aires) while the third emigrant is part of a much smaller Italian enclave in the Dominican Republic in the Caribbean.

Two of the recipients were based in the Ligurian hinterland in northern Italy while one was based in Calabria, some 1000 kilometres further south. Despite these differences, it must be remembered that all evidently have some degree of literacy (although only the son in the Dominican Republic can be said to write fluently and accurately in Italian), which already makes these emigrants exceptional to some degree. Hence, while these collections cannot be considered representative of the experience of Italian emigrant draft evasion as a whole, the variety of geographical locations and familial relationships explored offer valuable insights into the lived experience of this condition and its development over time.⁵⁴

A recent study has critiqued the frequent use of immigrant letters in studies of migration merely to 'provide color and drama in historical narratives' and has

⁵¹ Bahar Gürsel, 'Citizenship and Military Service in Italian-American Relations, 1901–1918', *The Journal of the Gilded Age and Progressive Era*, Vol. 7, No. 3 (2008), 353–76.

⁵² '200 Italian reservists leave city', *New Castle News* (New Castle, PA), 29 November 1915.

⁵³ See Christopher M. Sterba, *Good Americans: Italian and Jewish Immigrants during the First World War* (Oxford 2003). Foreign-born soldiers constituted 18% of the US Army in the First World War. See Nancy Gentile Ford, *Americans All! Foreign-Born Soldiers in World War I* (Austin, TX 2001), 3.

⁵⁴ The shortest correspondence is from 1914–1918 (mother-son, Dominican Republic) and the longest is from 1914–1929 (sisters, Argentina). The husband-wife correspondence in the United States lasts from 1914–1920.

pointed instead to the need to examine immigrant letters as texts in their own right that maintain and develop significant relationships over time and space.⁵⁵ Emigration is usually considered an attempt to achieve an improvement in material conditions for oneself and one's family. Close examination of correspondence between emigrants and their loved ones at home reveals 'what has been jeopardized or lost in pursuit of the fulfilment of this project'.⁵⁶ The following case studies should be understood in this context.

Giovanni Campi and his Wife Rosa Mangini: San Francisco, United States to Liguria, Italy

The first collection consists of 23 letters from Giovanni Campi in California to his wife Rosa Mangini in Fontanarossa, written between April 1914 and July 1920, and two letters from Rosa to Giovanni from May and December 1920.⁵⁷ They provide a striking depiction of how a marriage could survive lengthy separation, a typical emigrant experience. In the period 1870–1914, Italian emigration was 60–80 per cent male,⁵⁸ and husbands migrating alone was relatively normal for many years in large parts of the country. In the case of Giovanni and Rosa, their separation was extended by the war, which prevented them from knowing when it might be possible for them to be reunited. This collection also provides an insight, albeit largely filtered through Giovanni's letters, into the experience of the so-called 'white widows', women whose husbands were still alive but who were absent due to emigration. As Linda Reeder has argued, the decision for a man to migrate alone, leaving his wife and children behind, was generally a joint one, which would provide short-term economic gain that could be reinvested in Italy.⁵⁹

Giovanni set sail for from Genoa on the S.S. Taormina in April 1914 bound for New York (or 'ne viorche' as he wrote it in his ungrammatical and phonetic Italian), and then on to San Francisco, California, where he had already spent time during a previous American sojourn. In the spring of 1915, he was considering a return home but Italy's entry into the war in May 1915 ruptured these plans. The couple's letters then reveal how instrumental Rosa was in steering the course of Giovanni's decision to evade. Far from urging him home, she hid from him the fact

⁵⁵ David A. Gerber, *Authors of Their Lives: The Personal Correspondence of British Immigrants to North America in the Nineteenth Century* (New York 2006), 31.

⁵⁶ Gerber, *Authors of Their Lives*, 3. It should be noted that Gerber was talking about immigrant correspondence in general here and not specifically about draft evasion.

⁵⁷ The collection was transcribed in this unpublished undergraduate thesis. Unfortunately, the originals were not deposited in the ALSP. Fondo Campi, Maria Rosa Mangini, 'Il fenomeno migratorio in alta Val Trebbia fra Otto e Novecento. Le testimonianze orali' (undergraduate thesis, University of Genoa, 1987/88). Page numbers in the notes below refer to this document. Unless otherwise indicated, all letters are from Giovanni to Rosa.

⁵⁸ Donna R. Gabaccia and Franca Iacovetta, 'Introduction', in D. R. Gabaccia and F. Iacovetta, eds, *Women, Gender, and Transnational Lives: Italian Workers of the World* (Toronto 2002), 3–41, here at 11.

⁵⁹ Linda Reeder, *Widows in White: Migration and the Transformation of the Rural Italian Woman, Sicily, 1880–1920* (Toronto 2003).

that he had been called up, even though he had explicitly asked her in to keep him apprised of the mobilization orders and possible punishments were he not to return.⁶⁰ He eventually decided to register at the Italian consulate, where he was fined as a draft evader.

However, he was still undecided about what he should do and told Rosa 'i don't know what to think because here there are lots of us and nobody is thinking about returning'.⁶¹ Their situation was altered after the United States' intervention and Giovanni seemed resigned to the unavoidability of military service, stating '[whether] in america or in italy those who are fit [for service] have to become soldiers'.⁶² Such a statement clearly demonstrates the extent to which thoughts of patriotism and national duty, whether to Italy or his adopted home, were alien to him and did not factor in his decision-making process.⁶³

Throughout the war years, Giovanni and Rosa kept up their marriage by correspondence.⁶⁴ Their letters became the currency of their marriage and the only way for him to prove his continuing love for Rosa. Increasingly evident in the correspondence is the way that the extended separation meant that 'a language with which to express loving feelings had to be found'⁶⁵ and Giovanni wrote continually of his love for Rosa. A stock phrase that he repeated at the end of almost every letter was 'dear wife i leave you with my pen but with my heart never'.⁶⁶ By the summer of 1917, three years after his arrival in the US, Rosa had become suspicious of Giovanni's actions and accused him of being unfaithful to her. In response, he used his letters as tangible evidence of his continued devotion to her, writing: 'you say i don't love you but if i didn't love you i wouldn't write to you so often' and continued 'i love you forever and i don't love anyone else and i hope it's the same for you'.⁶⁷ He also sought to use money as proof of his loyalty to her, by lodging money in the bank under her name, and reassuring her that he had gone to California 'to earn some money to enjoy it together with you and not with other women'.⁶⁸ In turn, Rosa, in one of only two letters, told Giovanni how she read

⁶⁰ 20 June 1916, 140.

⁶¹ 28 August 1916, 141.

⁶² 12 August 1917, 149.

⁶³ He ultimately only registered for the American draft in autumn 1918 and so never saw active service. 18 October 1918, 155.

⁶⁴ For the most part, Giovanni wrote every 2–4 months, although at times he wrote in two consecutive months and on two occasions there are gaps of 8 and 10 months between one letter and the next.

⁶⁵ Kate Hunter, 'More than an Archive of War: Intimacy and Manliness in the Letters of a Great War Soldier to the Woman He Loved, 1915–1919', *Gender & History*, Vol. 25, No. 2 (2013), 339–54, here at 344. See also Christa Hämmerle, "'You Let a Weeping Woman Call You Home?'" Private Correspondence During the First World War in Germany and Austria', in Rebecca Earle, ed., *Epistolary Selves: Letters and Letter-Writers, 1600–1945* (Aldershot 1999), 152–82

⁶⁶ 18 March 1916, 139.

⁶⁷ 12 August 1917, 150.

⁶⁸ 24 June 1917, 148.

and re-read his letters as 'it's like talking to you dear husband',⁶⁹ revealing the way in which letters could constitute a proxy for physical presence.

As well as declarations of love, Giovanni's letters are filled with references to his homesickness, telling Rosa 'how i am tired of being alone you can't imagine'⁷⁰ and that he wished that the war would end soon so that they could be reunited. He repeatedly referred to his condition using the language of imprisonment: 'it seems like a long time to you that we are apart and to me it seems even longer 100 years as if i was in a cell but oh well that's our destiny'.⁷¹ It is, of course, possible that Giovanni was exaggerating his loneliness to convince Rosa of his fidelity, but Giovanni also appears to suffer from the fact that he had received few letters from other family members. In fact, he attempted to use correspondence as a form of leverage by asking Rosa to tell his sisters that if they wrote to him he would send them some money.⁷²

When the war finally ended, Giovanni began to think about when he would travel to Italy but the punishment he would face as a draft evader deterred him. In July of 1920, he was still in California, and continually pushed back a possible date of arrival, in part because he was now earning very good money. Nonetheless he assured Rosa that he thought of her constantly, hoping that they would 'see each other soon and kiss each other deeply to never be apart again until death'.⁷³ This was Giovanni's last letter to Rosa. The final letter of the collection is by Rosa, dated 12 December 1920, who had heard from the Consulate that Giovanni was finally free to return to Italy and would return in the summer. Having seemingly suppressed her emotions during the six years of their separation, Rosa finally felt able to express her joy and relief to Giovanni, writing: 'i feel my heart is opening up that believe me i had completely suffocated'.⁷⁴

Angelo Grisolia to his Mother: Puerto Plata, Dominican Republic to Calabria, Italy

This collection comprises 39 letters written between February 1914 and December 1918 by a young Italian emigrant, Angelo Grisolia who was living in the Dominican Republic.⁷⁵ Angelo had a wide network of correspondents, with the collection featuring letters to 19 different people. He turned 20 in 1914 and had been living in the Dominican Republic since 1910. His exact occupation is unknown but he worked in an office setting and was educated up to primary school level. All but eight of the

⁶⁹ Letter from Rosa to Giovanni, 12 December 1920, 167.

⁷⁰ 18 March 1917, 145

⁷¹ 30 September 1918, 154.

⁷² 23 February 1917, 144.

⁷³ 10 July 1920, 163.

⁷⁴ Letter from Rosa to Giovanni, 12 December 1920, 167.

⁷⁵ Fondo Grisolia, ALSP. These unpublished letters are a mixture of typed transcriptions and photocopies of the original handwritten letters.

letters are from 1914–1915, a period during which he was debating whether to depart in order to complete his military service in Italy.⁷⁶

Angelo's most frequent correspondent was his mother, to whom he wrote nine letters from February 1914 to December 1915. His other correspondents included his younger brother, Guido, some cousins, his uncle, and a wide circle of friends, some based abroad and some in Italy. Due to the wide range of correspondents, it is possible to observe the different slants he put on his situation, depending on the recipient.

The figure of the 'mamma' looms large in popular understandings of Italian culture⁷⁷ and Angelo's letters are testament to the strength of this bond. Although two of his brothers were also living in Puerto Plata, both with wives and families, Angelo felt isolated and turned to his mother at home in Italy for comfort. Already in February 1914, he expressed his desire to return home as soon as possible. His loneliness was such that he wrote to a bookstore in New York to order copies of Paolo Mantegazza's 1892 work *L'arte di prender moglie* (The art of taking a wife), a bestselling practical guide.⁷⁸ Knowing he would become liable for military service in 1914, Angelo saw a return to Italy not only as a way to 'do my duty' but also as a way to realize his 'eternal dream' to see his mother and siblings again.⁷⁹ Writing in June 1914, he admitted to a cousin that returning for his military service would be 'an excuse' and he believed that, in any case, he would fail the medical exam.⁸⁰

In August, he had finally decided to leave the Dominican Republic to complete his military service but the outbreak of war in Europe, despite Italy's initial neutrality, caused him to reconsider his plans. He informed his mother of his decision at the end of September, explaining that returning to Italy at that time meant exposing himself 'to dangers that I could do without'.⁸¹ However, despite this resolute tone, he confessed to his younger brother Guido that he was tormented by thoughts of his family and a possible return to Italy.⁸² Angelo's letters to his diverse range of correspondents provide an unusual insight into the contrasting ways he presented this decision to different friends and relatives. In a form of filial self-censorship, also identified by Michael Roper in his study of mother-son relationships between the front line and home front,⁸³ Angelo presented a sanitized version of the truth to his mother, assuring her that he had regulated his position

⁷⁶ Even before the First World War broke out, the issue of Grisolia's compulsory military service featured in his letters, a reminder that many of those emigrants who were called up in 1915 were already draft evaders.

⁷⁷ See Penelope Morris and Perry Willson, *La Mamma: Interrogating a National Stereotype* (Basingstoke 2018).

⁷⁸ Letter to J. Personeni (bookseller), 10 March 1914.

⁷⁹ Letter to mother, 16 February 1914.

⁸⁰ Letter to cousin, 25 June 1914.

⁸¹ Letter to mother, 30 September 1914.

⁸² Letter to Guido (brother), 8 October 1914.

⁸³ See Roper, *The Secret Battle*.

with the Italian Army and that he had successfully postponed his military service until 1915.⁸⁴ In fact, he had merely made such a request via the Consular Agent in the Dominican Republic (who happened to be his cousin) but he had not yet received any response.⁸⁵ Such a letter also reveals the inequities at play between the better and less-well educated draft evaders. Angelo Grisolia, as a relatively educated man with a network of connections in the small Italian community on the island, had options open to him that would not have been available to the vast majority of emigrants elsewhere in the Americas.

In a letter to a friend back in Italy, he was at pains to justify his decision to evade, clarifying that he would return for his military service as soon as the war was over and emphasizing that it was not fear preventing him from returning. He assured his friend that this prolonged absence from his family was ‘torture’, as if trying to equate his own suffering abroad with that of his mobilized friends in Italy.⁸⁶ As a partial justification, he reminded his friend of the revolution in the Dominican Republic in the spring of 1914 and how there was ‘the danger of being killed directly or indirectly from one moment to the next’,⁸⁷ attempting to equate active military service in wartime to being an observer of political unrest.

By contrast, in letters to his mother, he revealed his feelings of confusion and indecision, and made no effort to hide his unhappiness from her. On the one hand, he explained how fortunate he felt at having been able to avoid his military service, but on the other, by June 1915, he had decided that he would return to Italy. However, his brothers did not approve and forbade him from departing. The following words reveal the complex web of factors influencing this decision:

It’s true that if I had come, I would not have done it entirely willingly; because it is true that I am as patriotic as anyone; but it is also true that I would have been up against a thousand dangers, as well as exposing myself to losing all the advantages of my careful behaviour over four years here and the career that I have started.⁸⁸

To his mother, he presented his decision to evade as a fiscally responsible one and made sure to underline that he was prioritizing his safety, presumably sentiments to which he thought his mother would be sympathetic. The possibility of being declared a deserter, however, weighed on him and thus he suggested to a friend, Fermino, who was in the same situation, that a group of Italians from the Dominican Republic could return all together before the government deadline of 31 August.⁸⁹ The letter concluded with a patriotic cry of ‘Long live Italy!’⁹⁰ Just

⁸⁴ Letter to mother, 30 September 1914.

⁸⁵ Letter to Prof. Raffaele D’Elia, 10 October 1914.

⁸⁶ Letter to Olindo (friend), 15 April 1915.

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ Letter to mother, 24 June 1915.

⁸⁹ Letter to Fermino (friend), 29 July 1915.

⁹⁰ Ibid.

days later, however, he appeared to have definitively resolved not to return, a decision with which he did not feel entirely comfortable: 'I know I am doing the wrong thing and that my attitude cannot be justified'.⁹¹

After a succession of letters between 1914 and August 1915, the volume of Angelo's letters decreased. He sent several at Christmas 1915, telling his mother that they were 'days of sadness and bitter memories and painful regret'.⁹² The enforced separation from his mother instilled intense feelings of guilt and remorse at ever having emigrated in the first place and had increased his filial devotion, or at least his desire to communicate as much to his mother:

I hope one day to return and find you well, to be able to prove that, if I have in fact been a bad son, the distance that separates me from all of you (from the first year that I left home) has made me bitterly regret it, awakening in me a true maternal love.⁹³

The war's conclusion clearly brought some hope to Angelo, as he wrote to a friend that he was awaiting the Government's decision on his fate and that he would embark immediately for Italy if it were favourable. Just a few days later, however, he contracted Spanish flu and he died on 19 December 1918.

These letters reveal the multitude of reasons why reservists chose not to return, or why they considered returning and, moreover, the ways in which Angelo packaged this decision for different recipients and tried to manage the expectations of others and the emotional fallout of his decision. It was clear he felt competing pressures from all sides – desire to see his mother and family in Italy, his brothers in the Dominican Republic preventing him from leaving, and shame towards his friends in Italy without the option of evading the draft.

Anna and Rosa Callero: Buenos Aires, Argentina to Liguria, Italy

Studies of the figure of the male migrant have long dominated the field, leaving explorations of the female emigrant experience under-researched and largely neglected.⁹⁴ As Donna Gabaccia has argued, alongside sociologist Katharine Donato, contrary to the claims of much recent scholarship, the 'feminization [of migration] is not a recent development and the migration of women and girls has a long history'.⁹⁵ This final collection of letters between two sisters thus provides an

⁹¹ Letter to Vincenzo Pugliese (friend), 9 August 1915.

⁹² Letter to Guido (brother), 8 October 1914.

⁹³ Letter to mother, 24 December 1915.

⁹⁴ Gabaccia and Iacovetta, 'Preface', in Gabaccia and Iacovetta, *Workers of the World*, ix–xvi, here at ix.

⁹⁵ Katharine M. Donato and Donna Gabaccia, *Gender and International Migration: From the Slavery Era to the Global Age* (New York 2015), 1. On the role of women within the historiography of migration, see: Katharine M. Donato, Donna Gabaccia, Jennifer Holdaway, Martin Manalansan IV and Patricia R. Pessar, 'A Glass Half Full? Gender in Migration Studies', *The International Migration Review*, Vol. 40, No. 1 (2006), 3–26.

important alternative perspective on the decision of male emigrants abroad not to return for their military service and reveals the significant emotional burden it placed on their wives.

Between November 1914 and July 1929, Anna Callero wrote 15 letters from Buenos Aires to her sister Rosa in Montoggio, a town of approximately 3000 inhabitants about 14 kilometres inland from Genoa.⁹⁶ Anna emigrated alone and in autumn 1914 met and married an Italian man already living in Argentina alongside his entire family. The circumstances of Anna's marriage were not ideal. She confided to Rosa that 'it was too rushed because i did not want to marry him and he really wanted me and came to my door acting mad and so i was forced to marry him' but in an evident attempt to reassure her sister, she continued 'i don't regret it because he is very kind and he loves me more than you can imagine'.⁹⁷ When Italy entered the war, her husband was called up for service but chose not to return. Although Anna was desperate to return home, her husband's status as a draft evader, liable for prosecution if he returned, meant that she was also effectively stranded in Argentina, hoping than an amnesty for draft evaders would be issued at the war's end. The letters that Anna wrote to her sister throughout the war and its aftermath reveal the impact that a man's decision had on his loved ones, a rare perspective in accounts of conscription and draft evasion.

Due to the ongoing economic crisis, she and her husband's family had trouble making ends meet. She was thus unable to send any money home to her family in Italy, which became a recurring theme in her letters. She expressed shame that she was not fulfilling the role of the successful emigrant family member abroad and was constantly worried about what her mother and sister must be thinking of her and her failure to provide for them. She wrote in April 1916 that 'mother will say that i have forgotten [her] but it's not true because i hold all of you in my memories but i can't help you because i have nothing there is poverty and people are dying of hunger and there is no work of any kind'.⁹⁸

Anna's nostalgia for home and for her family in Italy is on constant display in these letters. In her first two years in Argentina, both her father and a brother died, and she was plagued by thoughts of her mother's suffering and mourning. She prayed that her mother would live long enough for her to see her once more. Her letters are also filled with references to Rosa's children, asking whether they still remembered her and expressing sadness that she was missing so much of their childhoods. Her focus on her nieces and nephews conveys a sense of yearning that is clearly linked to her own unsuccessful attempts to become a mother, to which she frequently alludes.⁹⁹

⁹⁶ Fondo Callero, ALSP. Anna's grasp of written Italian is generally quite solid, despite numerous misspellings. She uses little punctuation, a feature reproduced here. As time passes, Spanish vocabulary and spelling increasingly begin to infiltrate her Italian. All letters are from Anna to Rosa.

⁹⁷ 21 November 1914.

⁹⁸ 14 April 1916. She expressed similar sentiments in another letter of 21 November 1917.

⁹⁹ 7 March 1918.

A rather unusual feature of Anna's letters is the frequent mention she makes of the nature of familial relationships and in particular to the bond between sisters. This relationship took on greater significance for Anna as she detailed, in rather veiled terms, the difficulties of living with her parents-in-law and tension with her husband after he forbade her from working outside the home, despite their continued financial struggles. In a letter of November 1919, she wrote that it had been a year since she had heard from her sister and that she was 'half mad' without news:

i'm sending you a big hug and a kiss from the happiness i feel to have heard from you i can't stop crying because i thought you didn't want to write to me any more that you had forgotten me it seemed impossible that you had abandoned me we are two sisters and we must love each other always.¹⁰⁰

This sisterly bond was further strengthened due to the attempts by their brother ('a donkey')¹⁰¹ to control the inheritance from their father, with Anna making clear that should she not have children she would wish her portion to go to Rosa's children. In 1922, she sought to reassure Rosa that she did not regret coming to Argentina as she had found a husband and in-laws who loved her. Her true feelings were not entirely hidden, however, as she admitted to Rosa that 'of course i would like to be near you too because between sisters it's different'.¹⁰² Despite this declaration of sisterly love, after this letter of 1922, their correspondence seemingly dried up. There are only two more dated letters in the collection, both from 1929, and it becomes clear that Anna was never able to return Italy. In the first of these letters, Anna told Rosa that she had not written for many years because she was ill and hospitalized for a prolonged period and they had used all their money to pay for her medical bills. There is, however, one bright spot in this rather melancholy end to this chapter of Anna Callero's life. In the last letter of the collection, dated 25 July 1929, she joyfully informed Rosa that she was finally the proud mother to a three-year-old daughter.

Conclusion

This discussion and its focus on three case studies has shed light on the complexity surrounding the transnational mobilization of emigrants in wartime, the extent to which family ties were central to their decision-making processes and the emotional implications of these decisions on family members both in their host country and back in Italy. Those whose immediate families resided with them abroad (like the husband of Anna Callero) could continue their lives to a large extent unaffected by the war in Europe, although Anna's letters reveal the human cost of this decision.

¹⁰⁰ 12 November 1919.


¹⁰¹ 4 February 1920.

¹⁰² 27 March 1922.

On the other hand, Giovanni in California and Angelo in the Dominican Republic struggled to maintain their most important relationships in Italy. The strongest motivating factor that tempted these men to return was the possibility of seeing their loved ones again and, overall, these letters demonstrate the limits of a purely patriotic interpretation of the decision on whether to return to Italy or not.

One of the aims of this article has been to engage in a ‘global microhistory’ approach,¹⁰³ by using individual narratives to highlight broader national and international dynamics of wartime conscription in the context of mobile people and their families. While it is impossible to claim that these cases are wholly representative of the hundreds of thousands of Italian wartime draft evaders, in line with Ann McGrath, I maintain that properly contextualized accounts of intimate relationships, such as the ones outlined above, can be ‘emblematic and instructive of larger stories’.¹⁰⁴ While each draft evader examined here belonged to a different category (a reservist; a new conscript; a pre-war evader) and each resided in a different host society on the two American continents, the similarities between the three separate narratives are striking. In deciding whether to respond to the call for arms and in grappling with the aftermath of that decision, each letter-writer was confronted with expectations regarding their role, whether that of the loving husband, the dutiful son or the good daughter and generous sister. Thus, this article and its focus on emigrant draft evasion and its familial repercussions is just one part of a much wider story of Italian migration dynamics during the First World War, which largely remains to be told.

ORCID iD

Selena Daly  <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-2728-785X>

Author Biography

Selena Daly is a Senior Lecturer in Modern European History at Royal Holloway, University of London and a specialist in modern Italian history. Her monograph, *Italian Futurism and the First World War*, was published by University of Toronto Press in 2016. She is currently working on a history of Italian migration during World War I.

¹⁰³ Sebouh David Aslanian in S. D. Aslanian, Joyce E. Chaplin, Ann McGrath and Kristin Mann, ‘AHR Conversation. How Size Matters: The Question of Scale in History’, *The American Historical Review*, Vol. 118, No. 5, (2013), 1431–72, here at 1468.

¹⁰⁴ McGrath in ‘AHR Conversation. How Size Matters’, 1440.