

ologies of male dominance underline not only traditional religious values and social mores, but also the determination of the market value of female labour in a capitalist economy. They try to show how patriarchal beliefs, which are cornerstones of the Islamic and capitalist systems, combine to reinforce women's subordinate position. They raise fundamental questions about the long term impact of economic development policies and whether the movement of women into the paid labour market has had a positive or negative short term effect on women. The implied response after reading the book is that women's position is declining with the coming of industrialization to the countries studied.

The book, which is introduced by its editor Haleh Afshar, is divided into three parts: "Women in Rural Areas," "The Proletarianization of Women," and "Women, Resource, Wage and Industrial Employment." Part One discusses the experience of rural women whose work, though both productive and reproductive, is only recognized as contributing to society by reproducing and nurturing future generations. In her article "Farm and Hearth: Rural Women in a Farming Community," Lina Fruzzetti analyses the impact of mechanized agriculture on the

lives of female farmers in Sudan. She delineates categories of women's labour on these farms. She demonstrates that women's farm work is unacknowledged but nevertheless crucial. Women perform various farm chores during peak times in the production cycle. They initiate and participate in income-generating activities both in the agricultural and nonagricultural sectors. In addition, women's work in the home, which is generally disregarded, is shown to be of central importance in sustaining the rural economy in Sudan. Other articles discuss the role of the colonial state and of capitalist development strategy and how they have shaped the pattern of female land ownership in Malaysia; the position of women in rural Iran; and the effects that extremely high fertility rates have had on rural women in Bangladesh.

Part Two focuses on the lives of women in the wage labour market: from a case study of the increased influence of the cash-based economy in Avatime, Ghana; to the effect that the essentially ideological concept of a family-wage (paid to men) has had on the wage rates of female proletarians in Tanzania. There is also an informative and well-researched article on the ways that patriarchal norms and the need of capital for a docile labour force

has resulted in an "alliance" between Islamic leaders and the managers of industrial capital in Jakarta, West Java.

Part three contains three articles: "Working for Lipstick? Male and female labour in the clothing industry in Morocco;" "Gender, Pay and Skill: manual workers in Brazilian industry;" and "Resources, wages and power: the impact of women's employment on the urban Bengali household." They all attempt to compare the way that women are perceived (that women in the clothing industry in Morocco are working for 'lipstick,' i.e. luxuries) with the reality: that women are forced to work in order to support themselves and their families.

In sum, the articles hold little that is new for anyone who is well-read in the development field. At best, it contains a good standard collection of articles about specific regions and topics. The approach is balanced if not innovative. While they raise questions about the way that various ideologies affect the lives of women and they point the way towards an explanation of the dynamics of ideology and how different ideologies act on one another, they don't live up to their potential. The authors never quite come to terms with the theoretical questions that their studies raise.

## LIBERAZIONE DELLA DONNA: FEMINISM IN ITALY

Lucia Chiavola Birnbaum. Middletown, Connecticut: Wesleyan University Press, 1986.

### *Franca Iacovetta*

Drawing together women from diverse backgrounds into campaigns for constitutional rights, including legal divorce and abortion, and in protest movements against sexual violence and nuclear arms, the contemporary feminist movement in Italy emerged out of the dramatic social and political changes of the sixties. Yet its roots lay far deeper, for Italian feminists drew on a vast history of peasant prechristian beliefs, franciscan and liberation theology, left catholicism, workers' movements, antifascism and the resistance, Gramscian marxism and Italian communism.

Birnbaum, an Italo-American woman, a new left feminist and a historian of beliefs, has written a compelling and provocative account of the history of Italian feminism. In the recent proliferation of studies on women and left politics in

Europe and North America, it stands as a model monograph expertly summarizing important theorists and party positions, documenting major political turning points, and bringing alive for us not only the leading personalities of the movement but the actions of rank-and-file women who spit at fascist soldiers, set up women's cultural centres, sign petitions and march in demonstrations.

Birnbaum begins with the premise that while feminism is global, culture largely determines the particular configuration of a specific woman's movement. For Italy, feminism must be understood as having developed within a country that is the seat both of Roman Catholicism and of the largest communist party (Pci) in the west. Only by exploring the dialectical relationship between the "world of catholicism" and the "world of communism," she notes, can we fully grasp the major shifts and turns in Italy's women's movement and its particular contemporary vision of a libertarian, self-managed socialist society marked by a diversity of interpretation and lifestyle and a respect for individual conscience. Italian feminism, she concludes, is both ancient and forward-looking in that its vision is grounded in lessons

learned from the past while it projects a new society in which abuse and violence, as well as rigid politics, give way to "respect for the beauty and diversity of human life."

It is also marked by an identification with marginalized "others" — the lumpenproletariat (Southern peasants in Northern industrial slums) and Jews, and later, nuns, lesbians and black migrant women. The lasting vitality of contemporary feminism is related to having tapped "subterranean" as well as rational beliefs. As Birnbaum writes, "Figures on the sash of this ancient and advanced feminism fuse into one another: the primordial earth mothers Graeco-Roman goddesses, early judeo-christian women, popular madonnas, familiar saints, persecuted witches and healers, peasant godmothers, peasant women socialists, feminist socialists, women marxists, antifascist women partisans — and contemporary feminists, who are a galaxy of different women from catholic matrons and housewives to prostitutes, lesbians, nuns, and others."

Employing Sicily as a quasi-case study, Birnbaum's early chapters deal with the historical relationship between the two worlds of catholicism and communism.

As she observes, catholicism encompassed far more than the history of the Catholic Church and its doctrine. Rather, it included the pre-Christian beliefs of peasants that persisted into the modern world despite deliberate attempts on the part of the Church hierarchy to abolish them. Peasant culture thus witnessed a plurality of beliefs, with pagan rituals and belief in the supernatural co-existing with Catholic doctrine. It is this sense of cultural pluralism that feminists later recovered. Also important to them, Birnbaum argues, was the acute sense of class oppression and justice that permeated peasant culture, a situation that was linked to the indignity they suffered at the hands of absentee landlords and bureaucrats. This value system, observes Birnbaum, laid the basis for a radical interpretation of Catholicism and one which was expressed, after World War I, in the overt actions of peasants and workers, including women, engaged in the occupation of unused lands and factories during Italy's first surge of socialism. It was in this period 1890-1920 that the two "historic left" parties—the socialist party (Psi) and the Pci were founded. Feminists also stressed that while peasant women were oppressed — by the role of subordinate, obedient ancillary to her husband — they daily sought to resist oppression and forged critical networks with other women within their community.

As Birnbaum observes, that women participated in the surge of socialist, syndicalist and anarchist activity after WWI was of immense importance for feminists looking for a tradition of female militancy. Birnbaum herself goes to great lengths to support this claim, pointing to, for example, a variety of instances to illustrate her point that these protests occurred both in the rural south and in northern industrial cities. As Italy's liberal government was defeated by fascism and Mussolini launched war against Abyssinia, this activism continued, albeit in clandestine fashion, despite severe state repression and persecution of communist and other agitators. However, much of this resistance remained tacit until the last year of the war, when the nazi occupation of Northern Italy — the Allies had early occupied the South — endangered a Pci-led network of people who hid and transported to safety fleeing soldiers, partisans (Pci and Psi members) and Jews. While most of the men and women who risked their lives to hide nazi "enemies" did not officially become partisans, many did so, among them women. Some 200,000 people were drawn into the Ital-

ian partisan movement.

After the war, the Pci's critical role in the resistance was translated into a strong base of electoral support when Italy celebrated its transition to a republic by staging the popular elections of 1945. But it was never enough to defeat the Catholic party — Christian Democrat — a situation which held real implications for Pci post-war strategy. Women's ties to the resistance also translated into important votes for the Pci-Psi popular front and led to the creation of Udi, the Italian women's union, in 1944. By 1948, Udi became a women's alliance of the Pci-Psi popular front following the expulsion of both parties from the Dc-controlled national government.

Udi is commonly associated with Italy's "first wave" feminism, which was intimately linked to the left, especially the Pci, and emphasized the importance of everyday needs, a response to the scarcity and devastation of war. This feminism did not really challenge women's traditional roles. The resistance movement, Birnbaum argues, had both relied on women's traditional nurturant capabilities and created new roles and fostered a new confidence among women. But Udi signalled a return to more traditional political roles, such as campaigning for hunger programs, schooling for the young, and protective legislation for women factory workers. It was also treated as a women's auxiliary of the male dominated left parties. By 1968, however, a definite split occurred within the movement (and one which would lead the movement into new directions) as a result of a critique launched by a younger generation of new left and cultural feminists interested in a women's movement independent of traditional left parties.

This critique and the subsequent changes in Italian feminism, Birnbaum stresses, were made possible by the heated political environment after 1968, a product of the rise of the new left, of left catholicism, and of the increasingly pluralistic character (that is, growing numbers of parties and governing coalitions) of Italian politics. According to the author, after 1968 several important factors converged to make possible the beginnings of an autonomous women's movement: a left-wing student critique of the hierarchical and centralist structure of the two "historic left" parties and the emergence of progressive catholicism associated with the papacy of John XXIII and Vatican Two, which initiated major social reforms; and the emergence of liberation theologies that called on the Church to

show greater sympathy with the disadvantaged and which reconciled catholicism and marxism into a humanistic framework. One of the consequences of this period was the Pci's growing tolerance of differing interpretations of marxism and its decision in 1979 to permit non-marxist and catholic members to join. (Earlier, the Pci had loosened its ties with the Soviet Union and, rejecting Lenin's theory of violent revolution and vanguard leadership, was formulating a strategy of a parliamentary transition to democratic socialism that, it claimed, was more in keeping with Italian cultural and political realities.)

Another consequence was the articulation of a strong feminist critique of the male left and party structure, culminating in Udi's decision in 1982 to break with the Pci — although this did not occur without some tensions between some of the Udi women and younger apolitical cultural feminists. Yet at the same time, Birnbaum stresses, the feminist rage of the seventies and eighties was simultaneously a feminist and a left-wing rage. As male leftists continued to respond ambiguously to the "woman question," Udi women joined with other women, including progressive catholics and non-marxist progressives, in the campaigns associated with the women's liberation movement — wages for housework, women's health clinics, birth control and abortion. This culminated in the resounding defeat in 1981 of a Dc referendum to abolish legalized abortion. It also led to the creation of autonomous women's cultural centres and other local and regional women's groups throughout the country. The book concludes with the observation that, at present, Italy's women's movement faces the difficult task of finding a long-term strategy balancing respect for individualism and diversity with the necessity for solidarity and collective political action.

Birnbaum's obvious sympathies do lead her to deal exclusively with what she calls the "radical interpretations" of the worldview of the groups she considers. In her discussions of peasant culture, for instance, she never suggests that many peasants aspired to the non-communitarian goal of a family-based form of land ownership. Similarly, when dismissing arguments that many women passively accepted fascism by pointing out that women did not respond to Mussolini's call to procreate (the birthrate actually declined in this period and continues to do so), she chooses to ignore the fact that fascism did receive support among peasant families who benefitted from its child-

centred and (limited) land reform programs and who, at least initially, saw in Mussolini the makings of a heroic national statesman. Still, her reference to instances of disobedient behaviour among Sicilian and other peasant women who openly defied fascism by shouting vulgarities at soldiers and demonstrating in bread and tax riots is extremely com-

elling and provides a corrective to conventional liberal histories that treat the peasants as apolitical and passive. Least satisfying of all are the sections on lesbians and on (Northern) Jewish Italian feminists.

Birnbaum uses written sources, including feminist periodicals, as well as dozens of oral interviews, participant observa-

tions and analyses of novels and graffiti. This is not an easy read yet, paradoxically, the book makes the often confusing world of post-war Italian politics and feminism very accessible. Birnbaum expertly guides her reader through the tangled web that is contemporary Italian feminism.

## THE CONCEPT OF WOMAN

Prudence Allen, R.S.M. Montreal: Eden Press, 1985.

*Louise H. Mahood*

Classical philosophy has endorsed the oppression of woman through the ages in the Western world. Prudence Allen's book, *The Concept of Woman*, investigates philosophy's notion of woman in relation to man from the days of Aristotle in the 4th century BCE. She traces his influence on Western thought to the generation following the founding of the University of Paris in 1200 CE. Allen demonstrates that while philosophy has focused on gender distinctions, generation (human reproduction), wisdom and virtue, gender becomes a central aspect of all philosophy from the 6th century BCE. As a result of Aristotle's focus on gender, Western philosophy has played an active role in the oppression of women.

Aristotle's ideas did not surface in a vacuum, but rather developed from his critical opposition to Plato's writings. Plato understood that the individual has two aspects: the soul (or mind) and the body. And even though the soul is immaterial and therefore has a non-sexual identity, Plato was clear that a woman's soul is matter whereas the man's is form. Human reproduction associates fathering with form and mothering as the receiving of his form within her matter. Plato concludes his analysis by saying that within the soul-realm man's form was superior to woman's matter. Plato believed the body to be the individual's actual physical being. Interaction of the body is different from that of the soul; to Plato, bodies of either gender were equally devalued.

For Aristotle, woman is a deformed male. She is the opposite of man. The male is typified as hot, active and creative, while the female is characterized as cold, passive and receptive. Human reproduction is perceived as a peculiar battle of the sexes during which the male's seed strives to overcome female matter to produce a male child who resembles the

father. Both man and woman have the same wisdom, but woman's 'lower' irrational powers undermine her ability to be wise. Ruled by these powers, woman is unfit to do philosophy. A woman's virtue is not to be found in cleverness but in her obedience to man. For several centuries Platonic and Aristotelian notions of woman ran a race in which eventually Aristotle's ideas succeeded as 'normative' in European thought. Aristotelian notions became so entrenched at the University of Paris, that all students, whether in arts, theology, medicine or law faculties, were required to read his writings during their study.

Historically, the Church first challenged, then ultimately incorporated Aristotle into its dogma. Early monasteries, where both women and men lived in community under the rule of an abbot or abbess, fought the influence of Aristotle. During this time women studied philosophy, although little written material survived as the church expanded and began to separate the monastics. In time, convents lost many privileges including most opportunities for women to study philosophy. For men, the secluded environment

of the monastery enriched their learning opportunities, which included reading Maimonides, the first Jewish philosopher to combine Judaic thought with Aristotle. His works influenced both Saints Augustine and Thomas, who integrated theology and philosophy. Their dilemma was to justify how woman could be both a deformed male and in the image of God. As such, both said woman was in the image of God, but a less perfect image. Resurrection was woman's only hope in reaching heaven, a place where oppression of woman would not exist.

Allen cites the work of women philosophers of the Neo-Pythagorean school (400-200 BCE). They include Theano and Myia, Pythagoras' wife and daughter, and Plato's mother, Perictione. While Allen states that these scholars were important 'transitional figures' for all women studying philosophy, they did not challenge the devalued status of woman. These women emulated men in their dress and in their writings, and stressed that a virtuous woman practiced temperance and self control. Allen relates how St. Catherine of Alexandria, who became patroness of Christian philosophers, died violently at the hands of pagans during the persecutions of Maximinus in 307 CE. Another female philosopher was Hypatia, a Neo-Platonist who taught men philosophy until she also suffered violence, but at the hands of Christian monks in 415 CE in Alexandria. Allen observes that being a woman and a philosopher was a dangerous business indeed.

Allen's meticulous investigation has uncovered little-known sources, and extracts much from the well-known. She makes thorough use of her sources by continually quoting from the writings. While that permits the sources to speak for themselves, and introduces readers to the works of women of antiquity, it tends to disrupt the flow of the book. Allen graphically and succinctly presents philosophers' perceptions of gender-distinction and human reproduction. Readers will find her use of charts helpful.

It is ironic that Allen does not challenge the assumptions that male philosophers

