

**Lucia Chiavola Birnbaum. *Liberazione della Donna. Feminism in Italy.* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1986) xxiv, 253 pp., \$25.95.**

A book on feminism in Italy might draw a bewildered look from the average American. The image of Italian women, cultivated by the popular media, is of either a sultry sex pot or a black garbed mamma stirring a spaghetti pot. In both examples these women are seen as subservient to the Italian male. It is unfortunate that these images are so pervasive, and that accurate information on Italian women in our society is limited, since their experiences can be instructive.

Lucia Chiavola Birnbaum's book goes a long way toward dispelling myths about Italian women and presents a finely etched history of the birth and development of their movement toward equality. For those interested in ethnic studies, it presents a provocative history of a women's movement in a non Anglo-Saxon culture, providing a needed balance to many texts that implicitly equate the feminist movement with British and American women. It provides a nice accompaniment to material focused on ethnic women in America, such as Abraham Lavender's recent book *Ethnic Women and Feminist Values*.

In *Liberazione della Donna (Liberation of Women)*, the reader learns of the historical and cultural milieu that gave rise to the Italian women's movement. The mystery of who these women are, who certainly fail to fit American stereotypes, and how Italian men react to them is unraveled. Contemporary Italian feminists come from an almost bewildering array of political and economic backgrounds. Birnbaum first explains that these diverse women draw on a cultural legacy of strong female figures, beginning with ancient goddesses, and moving forward in time to include resistance fighters in World War II. She then explains how they overcome their differences to forge a movement that deals not only with "women's issues," like divorce, abortion, rape, and equal representation, but with broader humanist issues like nuclear violence and environmental protection. At the heart of the paradox which constitutes this movement is the shared belief that "Not a single woman's wretchedness is alien to me."

This book offers the reader a useful comparison to the American women's movement. A detailed chronology at the end lists the social and legislative accomplishments of Italian feminists, and the strategies used to achieve them. The text is enhanced by numerous posters, photos, and cartoons from the period of most intense social change. A glossary aids those not familiar with Italian, and a thoughtful bibliographical essay provides a guide to literature on major subjects.

— Phylis Cancilla Martinelli  
Alamo, CA