

reference is somewhat regrettable, given the peculiar place smoking holds in the French imaginary, the many points of connection between French and Italian culture, and the heavy influence that the French understanding of individual liberty and the role of the state has had on Italy's political culture. The Anglo-Saxon and the French political traditions show remarkable differences in terms of understanding the relationship between the individual and the state, the limits of the citizen's freedom, the constitutional right to health, and the place of the individual within the community, all themes that possess obvious reverberations when it comes to smoking as a political matter. Taking into consideration the French domain and its influence on Italian culture could have perhaps helped in better problematising the troubled 'love affair' between Italy and the cigarette, as well as in isolating its elements of exceptionality.

A rich study on the role smoking has played in Italy's society and culture, *Fumo* will naturally appeal to a wide range of readers, both specialist and non-specialist, with an interest in Italian history. They will find in it a fascinating opportunity to see the Italian twentieth century from an unusual angle, between the private and the public sphere.

Fabio Camilletti

University of Warwick

F.Camilletti@warwick.ac.uk

© 2016 Association for the Study of Modern Italy

doi:10.1017/mit.2016.39

Women and the Reinvention of the Political. Feminism in Italy, 1968–1983, by Maud Anne Bracke, New York and London, Routledge, 2014, 256 pp., \$145.00 (hardback), ISBN 978-0-415-73402-8

Maud Anne Bracke has written an important and useful history of Italian feminism in the 'long 1970s'. Bracke treats the women's movement as both a social movement with goals of political and legal change, and a cultural or existential one which transformed the identities and subjectivities of thousands of women. In the former sense, she persuasively argues that it was the most important and effective of the mass mobilisations born of the 1968 protests, with high points between the campaigns for legalised divorce in 1974 and for abortion in 1978. In the latter, she wields a comprehensive source base of secondary literature, primary texts both archival and published, and oral histories collected from participant activists to illustrate and interrogate how Italian feminists imagined woman as a new political subject, redefined the private sphere as a political space, and elaborated key concepts of sexual difference, female liberation, and the patriarchy.

The book is structured by several framing chapters and three case study chapters. In chapters 1 and 3 she provides a chronological narrative of the movement, outlines and contextualises its main concepts and practices, and locates it within local, national, and transnational networks. Two innovations stand out here: first, the necessity to reperiodiserecent Italian history, which recognises 1968 as a beginning rather than an endpoint of social and political mobilisation in Italy and complicates the picture of the 1970s as merely the decade of the 'years of lead' characterised by political violence. Instead, she writes, the many upheavals of the 1970s can collectively be seen as the playing out of two intersecting crises: that of patriarchy and that of representation. In this sense women, youth, radicalised workers, and southerners in the north were all protesting their lack of voice and agency among 'established political agents and procedures' (p. 13). Second, Bracke recognises that 'the

nation state as a unit of analysis has proved to be unstable' (p. 211), and thus, although she identifies specificities of a national character in Italian feminism, she also emphasises the importance of the local (an emphasis substantiated in the three case study chapters on Rome, Turin, and Naples). In addition she notes the transnational encounters with other feminists, through face-to-face meetings as well as through the translation and exchange of influential texts. Ultimately Bracke finds that Italian feminists made sexual difference their central idea in a way different from other movements, and that they tended to link grass-roots practice to theory more consistently than others.

In chapter 2 and the conclusion, Bracke offers a before-and-after framing of the movement in order to assess what kind of change it achieved and what legacy it left. Characterising the 1945–1960s movement for equal rights in formal politics and law as 'wounded emancipation' (p. 33), Bracke argues that after 1968 the women who joined feminist collectives reacted against institutions that had failed to redefine work from women's point of view, to challenge the male breadwinner/female caregiver model of economic value or of family structure, or perhaps most acutely to question moral standards regarding female sexuality. At the end of the book she evaluates the ways in which, though having brought these issues to the fore, feminists after about 1983 were confronted with a renewed patriarchy that had not only not been vanquished, but had co-opted some of the language and values of feminism. In these chapters Bracke tackles the complex issues of recent Italian history, proving that an understanding of such major trends as the economic miracle, the lowering of the birthrate, the persistent under-employment of Italian women, the migration of southerners to northern industrial centres, political violence and the criminalisation and repression of extra-parliamentary organisations, the dissolution of the Communist Party, and not least the growth of 'berlusconismo' (understood as a cultural and not just a political phenomenon), can in no case be explained properly without the history of feminism. It is of course especially poignant to wonder with Bracke, in her conclusion, 'So what went wrong?' (p. 215). She concludes that although '[m]ore than any other sociopolitical current of the long 1970s, feminism was the carrier of wider cultural and political change in a rapidly changing society' (p. 210), a particularity of the Italian context has been the 'relative weakness of what has been termed state feminism' (p. 215). That is, the escalation of violence at the end of the 1970s damaged all progressive movements and encouraged the state to continue or resume repressive methods towards protest; the disappearance of the post-war parties meant feminists lost their most reliable interlocutors among the elite and in government and institutions; and so overall the fact that Italian feminism had been composed largely of grass-roots and 'small groups' structures meant that a backlash in mainstream culture could succeed.

The three case chapters examine, respectively, Rome and reproductive rights activism, Turin and feminist workerism, and Naples and performative and popular existential transformation. Bracke has built an original and substantial base of oral histories in each context with great care for the women involved; she is nonetheless very articulate in her account of blind spots and difficulties in the elaboration of feminist ideas in each context. For instance she notes the strong impact of the reframed Cinderella story as performed by the Neapolitan Nemesiache group, while noting that although its members were mostly lesbian or bisexual the group was unable to openly or coherently account for homosexuality within its aspirations for female liberation (pp. 169–174). In such instances her authorial voice shows its greatest strength as both advocate and critic of her subjects. Indeed, it seems that another reason for Italian feminism's decline in the 1980s and 1990s was its inability to let go of an essentialising idea of authentic femininity and sexual difference in the face of new thinking about differences among women, particularly the idea of intersectionality.

There are some minor weaknesses. Tina Anselmi is identified as a Communist rather than a Christian Democrat (p. 141); a 1983 international conference was attended by 447 women or by 'more than six hundred' (pp. 144, 145); occasionally a sweeping historical argument is cited with an oral history interview (p. 147). And I would quibble with the characterisation of women's activism in the

1940s and 1950s as merely failed emancipationism, which doesn't adequately represent the agency or the complexity of the currents of thought and action in women's associationism.¹ Still, the volume is an impressive accomplishment, fills an important lacuna in the field, and ends on some very productive questions about the path of feminism and women's equality in Italy today. Without question, this book belongs on syllabi of contemporary Italian history and of women's and gender history, and should inform the scholarship of all who work in related fields.

Note

1. See W. Pojmann, *Italian Women and International Cold War Politics, 1944–1968* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2013); M. Tambor, *The Lost Wave: Women and Democracy in Postwar Italy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014).

Molly Tambor

Long Island University Post

molly.tambor@liu.edu

© 2016 Association for the Study of Modern Italy

doi:10.1017/mit.2016.38