

# Divorced italian style and seduced and abandoned history essay

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A patriarchal society is defined as a society in which the males are the head authority figure. In these societies men are the ones who have control over politics, moral authority, the household, women and children. In a patriarchal society women are subservient to men and in some cases, are seen as property. Patriarchal societies in the Mediterranean date back thousands of years like many other societies. The difference between Italy and several other society is that Italy's shift away from a patriarchal society did not occur until fairly recently. For example, women in America were gaining equal rights while in Italy, women's rights were being suppressed with laws such as The Rocco Code. In 1931 the criminal law codes called The Rocco Code were drafted and put into legislation by Alfredo Rocco, Minister for Justice of Italy. According to Mark Donovan, " The Rocco code was undeniably repressive of associational and individual rights, not least those of women."(Moliterno 171) The code supported fascist views including strict gender roles and demographic views. The Fascist ideology was that a woman purpose was to maintain good moral conduct, have children and tend to the household. Feminism was a threat to Fascist views because it meant that along with independence, women would desert their household and reproductive duties. The Fascist regime suppressed feminist ways of " society women" and glorified women in the home. Fascist put out women's journals that opposed feminism and stated that women could only become, " real women" if they were good wives and mothers. These journals were created by a section Italian government created by Mussolini called Operazione Nazionale per la Maternità ed Infanza or National Operation for Maternity and Infancy. This regime pushed social policies for the protection of childhood and showed

maternity as a desirable attribute of womanhood. These plans were put out by the Italian government to discipline women during this period much different than other nations at that time. Women in America during this time, World War II, were encouraged to serve their country by filling in for their men in occupations that were not considered womanly. Women took the place of men in jobs involving heavy machinery and other jobs held exclusively by men. Mussolini had a different plan for Italian women during World War II. Mussolini wanted women in the home, producing children in order to build his army and his new Italian nation. Mussolini did not want women in the work place because he believed that their sole job was to "bear the nation's children". Mussolini was determined to build a larger population in order to strengthen his regime. He even went as far to tax people for "unjustified celibacy". During the Fascist period Italians were lead blindly by their leaders. According to Peter Bondanella, many Italians were stuck in an adolescent stage because the government took care of everything. This stage of adolescence added to the suppression of new thoughts and ideas. Therefore, during the Fascist period there was very little hope for any progression in women's rights. (Albanese) Before December 1970 divorce was illegal in Italy. Italy was and still is a predominantly Catholic country and therefore abided by the church's rule of marriage for life. Therefore, there was no way to separate from an unwanted spouse without tarnishing the honor of the family name. This meant that there was no way for a woman or man to get separate from their spouse except at death. Italians used death as a loophole around the illegality of divorce. Italian law pretty much allowed a spouse, almost exclusively a male spouse,

to murder his wife in a case of adultery and receive a minor sentence. This law was part of The Rocco Code of 1931. This statement was written in Article 587 of this code. This article stated that, " distinguished killing or injury for the cause of honor was a separate crime and provided for reduced sentence in case of adultery."(Benninger-Budel 42) This article has been criticized for lawfully allowing men to murder their spouses in order to restore " honor" to their family name. This law is a prime example of how the Italian government supported society's " code of honor" and the importance of a patriarchal society. This law was in place for fifty years. This code was not repealed until 1981; more than ten years after Italy allowed divorce. For fifty years Italians were getting a minor sentence for murdering someone who they vowed to care for forever. The allowance of this law to be in place for fifty years is another example of why Italy needed better women's rights and needed to re-evaluate the presence of a patriarchal society. Divorced Italian Style, a film introduced in 1961, thirty years after the Rocco Code had been in place, is a protest against The Rocco Code. The director, Pietro Germi, uses comedy to explain how ridiculous it is that divorce is illegal but it is acceptable for a man to kill his spouse. Germi states, " I chose comedy to challenge a theme that dealt with mentality but not customs. The grotesque is all here to have confused sex with honor and to have utilized the confusion with an article of law, article 587, to be precise. The crime of honor was a disgrace to be ashamed of."(Lanzoni 106) Germi explains that he used comedy to make a point to explain that Article 587 was being abused and used in the wrong manor. In Divorced Italian Style, Barron Fefe`, a married man became sick of his wife. Whenever he got the chance he would look at

and think about his sister-in-law, Angela. He knew that the only way he could be with Angela without shaming the family was if his wife Rosalia died. He thought of several comical and ridiculous ways Rosalia could die by accident but he ultimately decided on abusing article 587. This was the only way that Fefe` could kill his wife and still get to be with Angela. Barron Fefe` planned to trap Rosalia, so that he can catch her in adultery. By catching her in adultery, he could murder her, receive a short sentence and marry Angela. Fefe` is a typical Italian patriarch. Germi makes fun of Fefe` though his comedic thoughts about how to kill his wife. Germi uses several whimsical scenes such as Fefe` drilling a hole in the room with the frescos and placing a microphone in the room in order to spy on his wife. Germi also uses comical scenes of Fefe` imagining how his wife would die, including drowning in quicksand, shooting her up into space and her being stabbed. Barron Fefe` used drastic actions of trapping and killing his wife in order to abusing article 587 to get what he wanted. Germi uses this ridiculous course of events to protest the law and show the need for reform. (Lanzoni) The Article 587 gives spouses a " license to kill".(Benninger-Budel 42) Germi points out that the code of honor is more important in Italian families than killing a spouse. Germi also uses comedy to point out that the law system that doesn't allow divorce is crumbling. This film is a clear argument that Italians can find a way around the illegality of divorce, hence the title, Divorce Italian Style. This film is an advocate for the legalization of divorce in Italy. This film is an example of the need for woman's rights because without divorce, husbands may choose to murder their wives to either be with a new woman, or to restore their honor in the case of adultery. If divorce were legal

during the time of the film, spouses such as Fefe` would not have to turn to drastic actions to get what they want. By using comedy, Germi is able to criticize the government and avoid censorship. If Germi were to flat out state in his film that the crime of honor is a disgrace, as he did in his statement, it would have been too harsh to successfully prove his point. The comedy also draws in the viewer and makes it easier to impose ideas upon the audience. Overall, comedy is the best tactic to promote the need for change in the patriarchal society and the need for women's rights. Another article written under the Rocco Penal Code of 1931 was Article 544. This article was another code that supported the patriarchal moral codes of Italian society. This article allowed something called "matrimonio riparatore". This law defines sexual violence and kidnapping as a crime against morality not a crime against the person who that act was committed upon. This article allowed a man who kidnapped or raped a woman, either of age or a minor, to be expunged of their crimes by marrying the victim. This law is another vital reason for the need for more women's rights during the period of 1931-1981. The patriarchal society and the code of honor was the fuel behind this law. In the eyes of the patriarchal society if a woman was kidnapped or raped it was her fault because she supposedly gave in to her seducer. Therefore, if a woman was kidnapped or raped, according to the code of honor, that woman had disgraced the family and soiled the family name. The men of society considered this to be a good law that protected women from losing their honor. Italian men with a patriarchal mentality considered Article 544 to be a law that helped women. This code of honor was so important that families would rather have the woman marry her offender than live with the disgrace.

This law is a disgrace towards women because it gives them no means of justice. Not only does this law not put their offenders in jail but it pretty much forces them into a marriage with a man they did not want in the first place. The director, Pietro Germi, uses comedy in his film *Seduced and Abandoned* to show how absurd this law is. (Brizio-Skov) Rémi Fournier Lanzoni asks the question, " was Germi's critical discourse more oriented toward the legal system and all its gender absurdity or, on the other hand, was it more a portrayal of an archaic mentality and its dire consequences on everyday people?" (Lanzoni 115) Germi attacked both the legal system and the old patriarchal mentality of the society in his film, *Seduced and Abandoned*, released in 1964. Lanzoni states, " It seems that Germi's interest concerned both sides of the problem, as he clearly deplored not only the existence of such an article of law, but more importantly the fact that many women were willing to concede marriage even with a former offender." (Lanzoni 115) In the film, Agnese Ascolone, a 15 year old Sicilian girl was seduced by her sister's fiancé, Peppino Califano. Aside from the seduction, Agnese also ended up becoming pregnant. Agnese was forced by her parents to marry Peppino even though she did not want to marry him. Agnese's family was more concerned with what the town would think of the family than concern for what Agnese wanted. Germi uses comical situation such as the planned kidnapping in the town square to portray the absurdity of the *matrimonio riparatore* law. This comical situation also attacks the lengths to which Italian families would go in order to protect their honor. Germi even uses jubilant and comical music that one might hear at a circus during this scene to exacerbate the ridiculousness of the situation. Germi

was able to criticize this law and the patriarchal society by using comedy rather than drama. Germi would not have been able to display how ridiculous the law was in a serious film. By making fun of the actions the family took, Germi was able to criticize the patriarchal society and the laws defending patriarchal ideologies more effectively. By criticizing the patriarchal society and the law using comedy, he was able to present the need for women's rights. (Brizio-Skov) It was important that Germi used comedy to protest this law because this law was subject to a lot of abuse. A true life example of this abuse was in the case of the rape of Franca Viola. Franca was kidnapped and raped by a man named Filippo Melodia, who had been a rejected suitor of hers. Filippo Melodia attempted to use *matrimonio riparatore* to get Viola, despite the fact that he had been rejected. By using *matrimonio riparatore* he could force her to marry him to save her honor. In this case his plan backfired because Viola and her family did not fall to the honor code like Agnese's family in *Seduced and Abandoned*. Filippo did not get the reduced sentence and he was sent to jail for 11 years. Overall, more cases ended up like Agnese's and it was therefore necessary for Germi to protest *matrimonio riparatore* in his film. (Brizio-Skov) The loyalty to the code of honor was a deeper and more threatening issue to women than the Italian laws that backed it. According to Maria Gabriella Bettiga-Boukerbout, "The legal history of so-called 'crimes of honour' in Italy is a good example of how law and society exercise a reciprocal influence and provides an insight into the history of women's rights in the country." (Hossain 230) The reason why these laws were in place for so many years was because of the code of honor. An honorable woman was seen as a woman who did not work, was



married and took care of the home and children. Women were excluded from positions in government, therefore all of these anti-feminist laws were held solid because they were created and supported by men. Women's rights were almost non-existence in Italy until fairly recently, after the elimination of the Rocco Code. Lina Wertmüller was a female director that used her films to show female roles in Italian society. According the Marcia Landy, "Wertmüller's works focused on female experience within the context of larger institutional structures such as the state, working class organizations, the church and cinema." Many of Wertmüller's works show the harsh treatment of women and show women as the victims of national patriarchy. She uses a combination of relationships and politics to show how women have been exploited. The code of honor is not only anti-feminist but also presents many double standards. These double standards are displayed in Lina Wertmüller's film, *The Seduction of Mimi* that was released in 1972. In this film Mimi moves to the north and commits adultery with a woman named Fiore. Not only does Mimi commit adultery but he also fathers a child with Fiore. Mimi considers his actions acceptable because he is a man. When Mimi finds out that his wife has committed adultery and conceived a child with another man, he wanted to kill her. This is the first instance in this film where comedy is used to display this double standard. When the other men tell Mimi that his wife is pregnant with another man's child Mimi's face became overly expressive with angry, wild, bugged out eyes. As was seen in Mimi's expression, he makes no connection with what he has done and what his wife has done. He only considered his wife's infidelity an attack on his honor, not his own infidelity. This is another example of how the patriarchal

society and the code of honor does not consider men and women equal. The code of honor is only attacked in the case of a wrongful act done by women but not by men. The code of honor forces women to be complacent in a marriage with an unfaithful husband. An unfaithful husband is considered acceptable in a patriarchal society. Wertmüller exemplifies this double standard with comedy in her film to make a point that, even in the 1970's, women are still not treated equally. By using ridiculous scenes such as when Mimi seduces his wife's lover's wife, it is easier for Wertmüller to make the audience understand how audacious this double standard is. In Lina Wertmüller's *Swept Away* that was released in 1974, there is an emergence of more rights for women. In the film it is shown that the upper class women are treated more equally and Italy has legalized divorce, but the deep rooted patriarchal views are still engrained in the working class. On the boat the women can be seen playing cards and speaking their minds but on the island away from the elite class it is much different. On the island Gennarino shows his patriarchal views by asserting his dominance on Raffaella. He forces her to clean and cook for him just as he views that woman should do. This film shows that there is still a need for better women's rights even though women's rights have improved and divorce is now legal in Italy. Lina Wertmüller's films, compared to Pietro Germi's films, feature women with more freedoms. In *The Seduction of Mimi*, Fiore is an independent northern woman who will not be swayed by Mimi's patriarchal thoughts. The presence of Fiore's character alongside Mimi's patriarchal character poses the idea that women's rights have improved from the 60's to the 70's. In *Swept Away*, Raffaella is an upper class woman who has her own opinions and appears to

have more rights. Just like *The Seduction of Mimi*, Raffaella's character is put alongside with Gennarino's patriarchal character to show that upper class has swayed from patriarchal ideologies but the lower class is still deeply engrained in it. The violence and dominance that Gennarino displays towards Raffaella shows that there is still a need for the liberation of women in the lower classes. The fact that Wertmüller chose Mimi to be from the south suggests that women from the south need to be liberated because of southern men like Mimi. Wertmüller uses her films to show that Italy still needs to break away from the patriarchal society despite some improvements that society has made. The change in the presentation of women in these films from the early 60's to the 70's can be correlated with the feminist movements that were taking place in the late 60's and in the 70's. Women began protesting for wages for housework, divorce, abortion, birth control and prevention of violence in the home. Women began to speak up against the patriarchal society and demand the equality they deserved. Women formed organization and led rallies, formed road blocks and more in order to fight for what they wanted. Overall, these films aided women and played a factor in protesting the patriarchal society. (Cunningham) Italian feminism became stronger and more radical in the 1960 and 1970s when they allied with student and worker protests. A trace of this can be seen in Lina Wertmüller's *Seduction of Mimi* when Fiore goes to the worker's rally. One of the major feminist movement organizations in the 1970's was the Wages for Housework Organization. Italian women's liberation is still a struggle to this day. Women's rights has not been as prevalent in Italian society for as long as many other nations. Women's salaries are still unequal

with men in Italy. There are still very few women in higher job positions and they are still discriminated against in some areas of the professional world in Italy. Italian women still only hold about 10% of the positions in parliament today. Many women still bear most of the household and child rearing duties on top of their jobs. Some suggest that women's rights still have far to go because the modern Italian women of today now has double the duties to take care of. During the 1960's and 1970's, women hastily organized and planned local and regional feminist groups. These groups included the Rivolta Femminile in Milan and Libreria delle donne, the Movimento Femminista Romano, Diotima in Verona and Transizione in Naples. These organizations created women's research and study centers, as well as many feminist magazines and journals. Two examples of publications put out by these feminist groups were Effe and Quotidiano Donna. Feminists sought out new paths for women's liberation. Instead of using external sources to fight their battles, women used private and personal matters such as Italian women in the home. One example is the group Litta Femminista who campaigned for wages for housework. Litta Femminista was criticized for their simple view on changing matters of the home. Critics stated that their approach did not address that their demands would require the state to intervene in every aspect of family life. Despite critiques by others this party was able to successfully bring questioning upon women's domestic labor as well as the inequality of wages for women in the workplace. There was a big wave of reform legislation in the 1970s reforming many aspects of family and personal affairs. The group called Movimento di Liberazione della Donna who were affiliated to the Radical Party, demanded legislation allowing free

medical services, abortion, contraception, legal equality, the end of economic exploitation and the end of discrimination on grounds of sex. In 1970, a divorce bill finally went through Parliament and was upheld by referendum in 1974 despite the opposition of the Catholics. Despite the passing of the divorce law, Italy still has one of the lowest divorce rates in Europe. There is also significantly less divorce in the south than in the north. This statistic is mostly likely true because the patriarchal mentality is much more prevalent in the south than in the north. Overall, comedy is an excellent tool to use to protest major issues such as the need for women's rights. These films can easily present an opinion to the audience without being as overbearing as dramas. Both Pietro Germi and Lina Wertmüller use comedy to show the need for a shift away from a patriarchal society and allow more women's rights. Germi protested against Article 587 and 544 in *The Rocco Code* by using his films, *Divorced Italian Style* and *Seduced and Abandoned*. Lina Wertmüller uses her film *The Seduction of Mimi* to show that the code of honor is nothing but a double standard in which women get the short end of the stick. Lina Wertmüller's film *Swept Away* shows some of the progress that has been made in society such as the legalization of divorce and better equality for upper class women but it still shows that women are struggling in the lower classes. These films were able to make a big statement and fight alongside women for better rights and protection. All in all, these directors used comedy to draw the audience in and show a need for there to be a change in the patriarchal system and a need for women's rights.