and Europe was in the first stages of its resurgence. Thus her approach was influenced by the work of other women pioneers, such as Simone de Beauvoir, Betty Friedan and Juliet Mitchell.

Saffioti's basic orientation is that of a Marxist social scientist, but she deviates from orthodox Marxists in several ways. As against their tendency to overlook the historical particularities of the oppression of women, she has drawn a picture of their historical situation in Brazil, a dependent capitalist country, as well as provided an analysis of women's condition in the central capitalist countries. Also, while she is convinced that only under socialism will women and men achieve egalitarian relationships, "contingent on the continuation of the process of economic development", at the same time she is critical of the areas in which women are also exploited in the socialist countries.

A crucial facet of Safnoti's theory is that capitalism uses the stratagem of biological determinism to marginalize the participation of both women and racial/ethnic groups in the labor market; that is, create a reserve labor force which it cannot absorb regularly: "Society uses gender to restrict the number of persons who are able to participate legitimately in the process of competition. Since the capitalist system is unable to absorb the total labor potential represented by all normal adult members in class society, it seeks to eliminate labor power from the market. To preserve itself without excessively exposing its internal contradictions, it uses biological and/or racial and ethnic categories for this purpose; to justify the marginalization of large numbers of women from the class structure, it stresses their traditional childbearing and child-rearing functions" (p. 297).

To carry out its purpose of marginalizing women, capitalism has created the nuclear family, headed by a male wage-earner who is expected to support his wife and children. Thus, as Saffioti points out, the nuclear family is not the universal social unit which it is commonly represented to be, but a family form specific to the needs of capitalism.

One of the most interesting sections of the book deals with the socioeconomic position of women in Brazil from its earliest colonial period to the present. Saffioti's description of the contrasts between the position of the white woman as wife and mother, and the black woman as sexual object, shows how women were divided from one another on the basis of class and race in the Brazilian slavocracy. This kind of analytic information about women during a specific time period in a particular geographic area is sorely needed; it enables us to reclaim our history and to understand the full scope of our oppression.

The Introduction by Eleanor Burke Leacock is an insightful overview of Saffioti's principal theses, from the perspective of a Marxist anthropologist who has pioneered in the ethnohistorical documentation of the egalitarian relationships between women and men in band societies.

Ruby Rohrlich-Leavitt


I once had an anthropology professor who referred to certain books in the anthropological literature as "important". Recalling these designations of praise, and having read Molly Dougherty's ethnography, Becoming a Woman in Rural Black Culture, I am inclined to make my own pronouncement: this, too, is an important book.
Dougherty, who is both a nurse and an anthropologist, worked between November 1971 and December 1972 in a rural black community in north central Florida which she calls Edge Crossing. Her “objective was to discover the beliefs, practices, and social supports that women experience during typical female life crises” (p. 3). I see at least three broad dimensions to the significance of the book that has resulted from this research. The author, in her brief discussion of background reading, situates her study in the context of previous research among black populations in the United States, noting the neglect of southern communities since the 1930’s. She views her own work, too, in light of increasing concern in the social sciences, to describe and analyze the experiences and roles of women.

In addition to her contributions of careful, positive description and interpretation in two areas with a history of ethnographic inadequacy, insensitivity, and neglect—(1) black culture and social organization in the United States and (2) the cultural and social definition/achievement of womanhood—there is a third analytical framework to which a major, though largely implicit, ethnographic contribution is made. It concerns the attempt to elucidate the interrelation of culture, gender, and sexuality; in short, to describe and analyze the “sex/gender system” of a culture (cf. Rubin 1975, where this realm was first articulated). I believe Dougherty’s book brings into focus, and lays a foundation for, the kind of thoughtful and detailed ethnographic work that is needed in conjunction with a psychoanalytically oriented account of gender formation such as Nancy Chodorow’s in The Reproduction of Mothering (1978).

Chodorow offers an account of how gender-related psychological proclivities are socially constructed and how this entire process is perpetuated or reproduced. Central to the account is the fact that women are everywhere the primary caretakers of children; mothering is a female, not a male, role, and it perpetuates itself in this main characteristic through the different effects its sexual one-sidedness has on female and male psyches. The process of becoming a woman in the culture Dougherty describes suggests some important modifications of the essentially white, middle-class model maintained in Chodorow’s theory; at the same time, the theory provides a stimulating framework for reading and thinking about the ethnography.

In Edge Crossing, women’s and men’s roles are highly segregated from one another in terms of content and spatial arrangement. The domestic/public dichotomy which has become an anthropological paradigm in the realm of gender roles is one that inheres in Chodorow’s theory and is reflected in Edge Crossing where, although both sexes engage in work (and recreation) beyond the home, “the customary division of labor permits women to exercise authority and independence in the homes and allows males to express their social position and importance in community institutions beyond the home” (p. 17). Within this division, women of different households share resources and responsibilities, including child-care, on a day-to-day basis. During adolescence, viewed as a long transitional phase between childhood and adulthood, young women, guided and supported in peer groups and following the approved pattern of behavior within the community at large, begin to engage in an elaborate courtship process. They function quite freely and independently in their pursuit of courtship partners and management of various courtship interactions. The recognized onset of pregnancy marks the beginning of a threefold rite of passage to full womanhood. It is followed by childbirth and acceptance of the mothering role. Although most young women welcome the status and responsibilities of motherhood, through which they are identified as adults and moved closer to becoming heads of their own households and descent groups, they are not constrained to so do. If the biological mother chooses to extend her adolescence...
and unhampereed freedom in courtship, her baby will be cared for by female kin. Dougherty’s discussion of childhood socialization leaves the impression that children are warmly provided with care, attention, and training on the part of many persons although each has a (biological or sociological) mother and women, not men, are the nurturing figures. The mother/child relationship is not an isolated event; it exists in a network of sharing and cooperation among women. Regardless of whether she embraces motherhood, it is not uncommon for a young woman who has borne her first child to remain unmarried, for it is generally thought that marriage should not be hurried or the partner ill chosen. Thus, “loosely structured relationships in which the male acknowledges paternity and does ‘what he can’ for the mother and her family seem to prevail” (p. 92).

I submit that the acceptance and enjoyment of female sexuality in the Edge Crossing community, and the significance of pregnancy, childbirth, and motherhood in establishing the status of womanhood apart from marriage—these combined with a kinship system that involves close cooperation among women and the insured incorporation of children into descent groups and flexible household arrangements—are circumstances that affect gender identity. Consideration of Dougherty’s ethnography in light of a psychoanalytically based theory of gender points up a need for a comparative approach to questions involving many variables in the gender process; for example, details of family and household structure and the socialization of children, beliefs and practices regarding sexuality and reproduction, availability and kind of support systems during life crises and the adoption of new roles. Lucile Newman (1976) discusses the way in which cultural values regarding sexuality and reproduction were manifested in her study of a group of women in the San Francisco Bay area of California who had sought to terminate their very early (suspected) pregnancies by the procedure known as menstrual induction. She suggests that the cultural attitude towards reproduction is most clearly seen in the personal and social response to inappropriate or unwanted pregnancy. I would say that this is but one side of the coin, for at Edge Crossing, where pregnancy is the first step toward achieving the cultural status of womanhood, and the event gains support and positive recognition in and of itself, one must look to the circumstances that make it desirable and appropriate while it might not be for women of other cultural and class-related backgrounds.

The book deserves praise not only for its content but also for its lucid organization into three parts (representing the three major themes of community, kinship, and rites of passage) and their attendant chapters and chapter sections throughout which the material is skillfully woven without losing a thread. The analytical tools of Van Gennep and Turner are used to delineate the female rite of passage to adulthood. Though the structure of the book is “tight”, it leaves room for the expression of the author’s warmth and respect towards the people about whom she has written. There is one curious omission, I think, and that is more information on the experience of menarche, menstruation, and menopause as well as a clearer idea of the particular lore concerning womanhood that is shared by Edge Crossing women. It is not a “curious” lack, given the book’s main topic, that the reader is not told the details of the male transition to manhood. Men’s economic role is the basis of their adult status. Some further comments on reaching this status, and whether it is in any way comparable to the

1. See Rayna RAPP (1978) for a discussion of the analytical distinction between “family” and “household” and the ways these organize gender in different social classes in the United States.
female passage to adulthood (in intensity and clarity of the stages) would have enhanced the discussion in my view. What is needed to complete the gender picture is a comparable ethnography on becoming a man in rural black culture. I am glad, though, that Dougherty has written her book with precisely the perspective she has taken. Women's knowledge, beliefs, practices, and experiences have commonly been neglected, glossed over, and misrepresented in anthropology, as a growing body of recent work attests, and the same can be said for black culture in the United States. In *Becoming a Woman in Rural Black Culture* there is a strong new contribution to a corrected vision of both, as well as a material which is crucial for an understanding of the interconnectedness of culture, gender, sexuality, and reproduction.

Deborah Jay Stearns

2. It will be important to study change, too. Dougherty notes that while motherhood was the most frequent path to adulthood for females at the time the study was made, the question is raised as to "whether other avenues of achievement, by education or employment, will become important in expressing adulthood. At this time occupational and educational opportunities are fairly restricted, both by the wider society and by socialization in the home and community" (p. 107).

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Dans plus d'une société, les stéréotypes dévalorisant la femme, comme ceux qui justifient l'oppression d'une caste, d'une race, nourrissent paradoxalement le discours des victims. Voilà qui invite à interroger l'idéologie, estime Daisy Dwyer, dont l'élégant petit livre entend avertir — davantage un public anglo-saxon que latin sans doute — de la richesse de l'élaboration symbolique légitimant, dans la culture arabo-musulmane,