

## Part 1: Mediterranean Women in Canada

When I was invited by *CWS/cf* to be guest editor for "Mediterranean Women in Canada," a number of questions immediately came to mind. I wondered how to organize an issue specifically on Mediterranean women that differentiated their issues from those of immigrant women in general. The differences are minor: the issues that immigrant women face are identical to those that all women face — equal pay for work of equal value, adequate day care, world peace, choice, etc. But for immigrant women these issues are acutely heightened. They are more likely to be exploited; due to language barriers, they have less access to programs and they tend to be trapped in stereotypical roles. Canada is a country that is not always wholeheartedly welcoming and that often encourages its immigrants to remain in ethnic "ghettos" rather than facilitating their integration into mainstream society. It is difficult enough for women who have all the privileges of a middle class education and financial security. Imagine how much more difficult it is for immigrant women whose first priority is ensuring there is enough food on the table for their families!

It can be theorized that what makes Mediterranean women different is that most belong to an "older" wave of immigration; to a certain extent they have surpassed some of the obstacles that more recent immigrants are still facing. Nevertheless, the racism and discrimination that all new immigrants are inevitably con-

fronted with never wholly disappears — even for those immigrants who are in a less "visible" category. Racism will continue to thrive so long as we have governments — federal and provincial — which insist upon a policy of "ethnicity," labelling people as separately identifiable entities, rather than encouraging their integration. As long as we exist as "hyphenated" Canadians, we will never be totally accepted by, or feel part of, mainstream Canadian society.

It must be acknowledged, however, that Canada is a country that gives its people tremendous opportunity for growth and improvement. Mediterraneans have been here longer and have had more time to work at it. In part, this issue is about the many who have been able to see and seize the foothold Canadian society affords them.

I actively sought out articles written by as many women as possible who were of Mediterranean origin. Many of the articles are by women who work at some level within their own communities. I also sought to include profiles of Mediterranean women doing a wide range of different things. Personal pieces were also solicited that in some way deal with what it means to be "Mediterranean" and living in Canada. In this issue, then, *we are the women of whom we speak*. It was, however, very hard to find women who would write. Most of the articles that were submitted turned out to be by or about Italians. I venture to speculate that this is because Italians are the oldest and largest

group of the immigrants from the Mediterranean and therefore are better organized as a community and are at a point where they are ready to document their history. It was harder to find Greek and Portuguese people who could write for us; their communities are only just beginning to be organized. Of the women I approached, some didn't feel they "could" write; others just didn't have the time to write. It was also difficult to get articles on many of the topics which would have been interesting to see discussed, such as homosexuality. Perhaps for these kinds of topics it is just too soon.

A Greek woman I met, working with a prominent immigrant women's organization, commented that every time she was asked to write a report on immigrant women's issues, she would be told the report had to be re-written because it was felt she was not able to express herself adequately. Furious, she raged that her inability to write in flawlessly fluent English was no reflection on her intellectual capacity! I cannot stress enough how important it is that "we," as immigrants, be allowed to speak *in our own voice*. This issue is a conglomeration of voices — Mediterranean voices — speaking for themselves and about themselves. They are our voices and they are beautiful.

Many thanks to Franca Iacovetta and Carmen Perillo, who were on the editorial board with me and contributed invaluable. And a special thanks to Shelagh Wilkinson for opening the door.

— Luciana Ricciutelli

## Part 2: Women of the Mediterranean (The KEGME Papers)

The brochure for the KEGME Women's Studies Summer Programme, following one of the myriad tracks around the world radiating from Nairobi's Forum '85, arrived in our mailbox in March, 1986; thus was the idea of a special "Mediterranean Women" issue born. We saw the project very much as a follow-up to the efforts of the UN Decade for Women and of Forum '85: a chance to explore a region not covered in our "Post Nairobi" issue last year and, more importantly, to bring the insights and energy of those cross-cultural endeavours close to home in a reflection on a vital segment of new Canada.

The Mediterranean Women's Studies Institute mounted the two-week program-

me, "Building Strategies for Mediterranean Women," on the beautiful Greek island of Spetses. KEGME solicited our presence as North American women's studies scholars for the experience we could impart to women newly embarking on the enterprise. Nevertheless, Shelagh Wilkinson (Founding Editor of *CWS/cf*) and I attended in the spirit of students, privileged to be participant observers in a reality different from our own.

The differences gave us pause, for in many ways the contrasts between Canada and the Northern Mediterranean are less stark than those between the north, south and east shores of the sea. A very important part of the task of creating a common ground for feminist research and action in

the Mediterranean is engagement with its dramatic variations in economic development. As well, the endeavour will be successful to the extent that it can transcend the political hostilities of the region. The absence of women from Turkey and Israel, and the tensions between the Moroccan and Western Sahara (Polisario) women who attended, were an awkward measure of the road still to be travelled. The participants started down that road, however, with both harmony and argument, and with many a shared vision. KEGME Director Eleni Stamiris, in her overview on page 75, captures perfectly the state of grace we experienced for two weeks in Spetses last summer.

— Patricia Stamp