

## You Can Get There From Here: 25 Years of Bridging Courses for Women at York University

Ruby Newman and Andrea O'Reilly, eds.  
Toronto: School of Women's Studies, York University, 2006.

### Reviewed by Rita Bode

*You Can Get There From Here* is a volume of voices, rather than a collection of essays, whose range and power attest to the success of what the book records: the history of York's Bridging Program for Women, and the experiences of the women who have been involved with it. Now part of the School of Women's Studies, the Bridging Program aims to enable women, over the age of twenty-one and out of school for at least two years, to acquire the critical thinking and writing skills required for university-level study. A grade of B in the Bridging course qualifies students for admission to undergraduate studies at York.

The voices number forty-seven in all and include the program founders and supporters, instructors, and students. The editors, both of whom are involved in the program, divide the book into three sections that correspond to these groups: History, Pedagogy, and Student Voices. The pieces across the sections reflect, in addition to such practical benefits as job advancement, a vision of higher education as a life-enhancing experience offering intellectual as well as emotional and psychological fulfillment. While not all the Bridging students continue their studies, they are given an excellent chance to do so, and the program's thoughtful curriculum of texts that speak to a range of female experiences encourages the intellectual self-confidence of all participants.

The contributions commonly express such values as determination, commitment, and the importance of mutual respect in human interactions. This pattern of similarity enhances rather than negates the individuality of the volume's multi-voices, for the contributors speak these values from personal, unique perspectives that reflect a broad diversity in racial and socio-economic backgrounds. This commonality, moreover, suggests a truth about higher education that is too often overlooked by educational institutions, especially for mature female students: getting "there from here" requires a communal understanding and practice in which administrators, instructors, and students work together to create the opportunity for individual achievement.

*You Can Get There From Here* articulates its own "idea of a university" on several fronts. Its "feminist pedagogy," valuing the students' thinking and experiences, offers, for all classrooms and both sexes, the worthy practice of student validation. This validation, moreover, as both instructor and student contributors make clear, comes not at the expense of academic standards. The bridging program is as committed to intellectual rigour as it is to warm support

and encouragement and affirms that one need not exclude the other.

The program's aim of facilitating the process of university study for women involves a re-configuring of the traditional places of higher learning. Through the Bridging classes, the ivory tower becomes accessible in the community spaces of suburban malls, public libraries, company offices where what counts is the gathering of eager minds to read, think, discuss, and communicate ideas.

Since together the individual contributions affirm the importance of shared activity in helping to realize educational goals and dreams, it would somehow be against the spirit of this volume to single out any one individual contribution for specific comment. A thoughtful addition to this collection is that each contribution is accompanied by the author's photograph. In this celebratory record of the bridging program's twenty-fifth anniversary, as in the program itself, no one remains faceless.

## **Mothers of the Nation: Women, Families, and Nationalism in Twentieth-Century Europe**

Patrizia Albanese.

Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2006.

### **Reviewed by Layne Parish Craig**

In *Mothers of the Nation: Women, Families, and Nationalism in Twentieth-Century Europe*, sociologist Patrizia Albanese provides an empirical study of the relationship between states' adoption of nationalist ideals and women's roles in such nations. As she writes in her introduction, "This book ... tests whether nationalism intends to modernize or archaize gender and family relations." Albanese's "test" is as rigorous and well-defined as such a project can be, and its potential contribution to work on the material relationship between "the personal and the political" is provocative.

Albanese's project examines the real-life effects of policies regulating women and families in nationalist and non-nationalist states at two points in history: between World War I and World War II and Post-1989. For each time period, she examines two nationalist states (Nazi Germany and Fascist Italy for the Interwar period and Post-Soviet Russia and Independent Croatia for Post-1989) and two non-nationalist states (Revolutionary Russia and Yugoslavia for the Interwar period and Post-reunification Germany and Contemporary Italy for Post-1989). Each of the text's chapters focuses on one of these governmental bodies, outlining its history, demography, and policies pertaining to women and families, then offering statistical information about women's