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Labelling Women Deviant: Heterosexual Women, Prostitutes and Lesbians in Early Criminological Discourse

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In 1893, the internationally-renowned psychiatrist, Cesare Lombroso, published the first criminological treatise on women. Entitled *Criminal Woman, the Prostitute and the Normal Woman* (hereafter *Criminal Woman*), it offered a plethora of examples from around the world to support Lombroso's assertion that female 'born criminals' – that is, women who had inherited a biological and psychological propensity to deviancy – were more terrible and monstrous than their male counterparts. Bell Star represented one of his prime examples, an 'outlaw [*brigantessa*] who had terrorised Texas until a few years ago'.¹ By the age of ten, she had learned the use of the lasso, revolver and shot-gun from her father, an officer in the Confederate army during the Civil War:

Strong and brave like a man, her greatest pleasure was to ride horses that the most expert soldiers had failed to tame. One day she won two races, one dressed like a man and one like a woman, changing her clothes so quickly that no one realised that it was the same person.²

She was not only strong but lusty, having 'as many lovers as there were desperados and outlaws in Texas, Kansas, Nebraska and Nevada'.³ For 18 years she and her band fought government troops and committed a string of spectacular robberies. Preferring male attire, she even shared a hotel room one night with a sheriff whose mission it was to catch her. The next morning, after mounting her horse, she revealed her identity to him, whipped him twice across the face, and escaped. She died as she wished, 'in her boots', in a gun-battle with government troops.⁴

In this synopsis of the life of Bell Star, Lombroso emphasised several traits that he believed were common among female born criminals. First, she exhibited abnormal psychology, in this case an extreme love of violence. Her expertise and joy in using weapons and her aggressive taming of horses appeared particularly dangerous in an age when popular opinion – and Lombroso's own scientific theories – held women to be naturally passive, loving and obedient. Second, Bell Star's voracious sexual appetite and string of male lovers likened her to a prostitute, the most common type of female criminal according to Lombroso. Third, Bell's violence and lasciviousness marked her as particularly virile, an image that she consciously sharpened by dressing as a male cowboy. Finally, she seemed to have inherited her tendency to violence, aggression and perhaps promiscuity from her father, causing her deviancy to appear early in her childhood and accompany her until death. Overall, Lombroso seems to be repelled but also fascinated by the sexual ambiguity of Bell Star, who remained voraciously heterosexual while dressing and acting like a man.

The sensational example of Bell Star helped Lombroso's readers grasp his theoretical argument in *Criminal Woman*. According to this theory, 'normal' women were obedient to their husbands and God, lacked physical vigour and mental acuity, and exuded maternal love but never sexual passion. On the other hand, criminal women were strong, vain, cruel, vindictive, sometimes intelligent, lacking in piety and maternal feelings, and always sexually deviant. While this portrait of good and bad women was not particularly original for the nineteenth century, Lombroso's book was significant for its scientific pretensions and the large group of students and followers who perpetuated his ideas in Italy and abroad. Called the positivist school of criminology, this group professed to have replaced the traditional philosophical penology of the eighteenth-century Enlightenment with scientific criminology.⁵ For these criminal anthropologists, truth about the aetiology of crime lay in the body of criminals themselves, which warranted the study of the empirical signs – both physical and psychological – of deviancy. They then used a Darwinian perspective, the most fashionable in the scientific development of the mid-nineteenth century, to interpret the signs or, as they called them, anomalies in criminal men and women. Lombroso was an early convert to Darwinism, having read both *Origin of the Species* and *Descent of Man* before they were translated into Italian. According to the positivist school, criminals were atavistic, displaying biological and psychological characteristics similar to animals and 'savages', a category including not only ancient peoples of Europe, but

contemporary Africans and Asians as well as the aboriginal inhabitants of the Americas and Australia.⁶

This chapter will explore how Lombroso uses heterosexuality and homosexuality to classify women into several categories: 'normal women', 'criminal women', 'prostitutes' and 'lesbians'. Because the original Italian edition of *Criminal Woman*, unlike the English translation, offered a physical and psychological portrait of 'normal' as well as 'deviant' women, it constitutes an extended gender analysis of late nineteenth-century society.⁷ In his discussion of each category of women, Lombroso offers voluminous tables of physical measurements and a myriad of interviews and anecdotes revealing psychological capacities. Such data constituted the basis for the claim of Lombroso, and of the entire positivist school, to have established the first scientific method – based on empirical facts – of identifying, classifying and, in some cases, reforming criminals. Employing a medical model, they distinguished between 'occasional' criminals, whose behaviour was sociologically determined and therefore curable, and 'born' criminals, whose stunted physiques and moral deficiencies were biologically fixed and irreparable. Widely read by professionals and the educated classes of Italy, *Criminal Woman* influenced debates about legislation that shaped the lives of both 'normal' and 'deviant' women at the turn of the twentieth century.

Normal women

Lombroso used a Darwinian scaffolding to construct not only a racial but also a sexual hierarchy. It underlay his differentiation between 'normal' women, who were feminine, sexually passive and heterosexual, and criminal women, who were virile, usually prostitutes and often lesbians. *Criminal Woman* devotes a long section, well over a quarter of the book, to 'normal' women and the argument that their sexual passivity and heterosexuality are the natural outcome of evolution. 'Normal' women – that is, white European, middle-class women – differ radically from their animal ancestors, but the transition has an evolutionary logic and determinism based on mechanisms of survival of the fittest and sexual selection. According to Lombroso's narrative, female members of the lower species (representing the early stages of evolution) are bigger, stronger and more complex than their male counterparts. For example, 'in worms of the *Bonellia* species, the female is a massive creature, while the male is very small, lower in organisation and parasitical on the female'.⁸ Certain female spiders are so strong that when a male wishes

to mate, 'he approaches the female slowly and prudently, to see if she will welcome his caresses or will view him as a tasty morsel'.⁹ Further up the evolutionary scale, however, males begin to become larger and more complex in order to compete with each other in the sexual struggle for existence. Thus, male birds almost always have better developed secondary sexual characteristics (like plumage and song), while among primates, 'sex differences become more accentuated and form perfect analogues with those of the human races'.¹⁰ At this point, males are almost always superior in size and strength and, in the exceptional cases where they lack strength and size, they nevertheless display greater complexity and variability than females.

While the sexual struggle accelerates male evolution, a related factor retards that of females; this factor is maternity. According to Lombroso, 'there is an opposition between the evolution of the individual and the evolution of the species, so that the development and differentiation of the female is restricted by the great organic expenditure required for reproduction'.¹¹ Channelling their energy into motherhood, female animals fall behind their male partners on the evolutionary chain. Once the strong and dominant sex, female animals gradually become fixed and relatively unchanging in their biological structure.

This tendency towards sexual differentiation continues in human evolution, with men becoming ever stronger, more active and more intelligent and women growing weaker, more passive and more emotional. Again, maternity is the key, so that heterosexuality can be explained as a necessary outcome of the struggle for existence. Furthermore, evolution diminishes sexual sensitivity in women, and thus their desire for any type of sexual relationship not leading to reproduction. In one of his most unscientific sections, Lombroso quotes poets, adages and personal observation to prove that the most highly evolved women – those of his own social set – 'become cold and fastidious when their husbands approach, even though they love them greatly'.¹² Such anecdotes showed women are 'naturally and organically monogamous and frigid', as symbolised by the immobility of the egg compared to the activity of male sperm.¹³ Women's sexual sensitivity declined even further at menopause, when they developed 'a repulsion and loathing for sexual intercourse very similar to that found in female animals after pregnancy or at the end of the rutting period'.¹⁴

Why would women marry at all, if so disgusted by the sexual act? To perpetuate the species of course, which explains why women are not concerned with beauty but only strength in their mates. Women wish to be protected and even dominated, as long as their husbands give them

children. Lombroso denied that women's complicated sexual organs – including the vulva, uterus and ovaries – constituted proof of their capacity for sexual expression. Dismissing them, as well as secondary sexual characteristics such as breasts, as 'maternal organs', he argued that 'organically, woman is a mother more than a man's lover ... Female love is, essentially, nothing more than a secondary aspect of maternity. All those feelings of affection that bind woman to man are born, not of the sexual impulse, but from instincts of subjection and devotion acquired through adaptation.'¹⁵

Motherhood and its secondary manifestations, including piety and modesty, were the characteristics that saved women from sliding back on the evolutionary scale. Nothing more than 'big children', their stunted biology limited possibilities for moral and intellectual growth equal to men. Never able to leave behind their lower psychological qualities of vanity, cruelty and jealousy, 'normal women' had at least developed the countervailing qualities of piety, modesty and maternity. Not unpredictably, Lombroso counselled that women pursue sedentary occupations in the private sphere and leave active life in politics, industry and intellectual pursuits to their husbands.

Prostitutes

In contrast to 'normal' women, criminal women are throwbacks on the evolutionary scale who continue to exhibit many male or virile characteristics. Prime among these was aggressive sexuality, making prostitution the most typical form of female crime according to the positivist school. As Lombroso wrote in *Criminal Woman*, 'Primitive woman was rarely a murderer, but she was always a prostitute.'¹⁶ Deviant sexuality explained why crimes such as abortion, infanticide and procuring were, alongside prostitution, categorised as 'female crimes'. Criminal anthropologists even traced many 'male crimes', such as murder and theft, to sexual causes when committed by women. Menstruation, pregnancy, childbirth and menopause could all disrupt a woman's psychological balance and drive her to irrational actions. Thus Lombroso's book established the criminological tradition, which remained unchallenged until the 1970s, that sexuality was the root of female deviancy.¹⁷

Lombroso's emphasis on female sexuality explains the prominence of prostitution in both the title of his book and the elaboration of his theory. Caught in the contradiction between the supposed inferiority of women to men on the evolutionary scale and low rates of female crime, Lombroso shifted his focus to prostitution. By adding together

the number of female criminals and prostitutes, he claimed that women were indeed more deviant than men, as would be expected from the inferiority of even 'normal' women to their male counterparts. In fact, atavism was more marked in the prostitute than the female criminal. Without hesitation, Lombroso declared that:

the psychological and anatomical similarity of the male criminal and the born prostitute could not be more complete... Male criminals and prostitutes exhibit the same lack of moral sense, hardness of heart, youthful appetite for evil and indifference to public opinion which lead the former to become a convict and the latter a fallen woman.¹⁸

He concluded by stating categorically that 'prostitution is nothing more than the female form of criminality'.¹⁹

Born prostitutes also shared with many male criminals a plethora of physical anomalies that made them throwbacks on the evolutionary scale. A series of tables in *Criminal Woman* showed that the bodies of prostitutes, in comparison with 'normal' women, were marked with signs of inferiority: smaller skulls and brains, larger and heavier jaws, receding foreheads, jutting brows, asymmetrical faces, prehensile feet, higher rates of obesity, denser pubic hair and larger (that is, masculine) vocal chords. Such characteristics were signs of inferiority because they were typical of women in 'primitive' races. According to positivist research, these features were more pronounced in prostitutes than in other criminal women, supporting the contention that prostitutes represented the counterpart to criminal man.

For Lombroso, these physical anomalies were outward manifestations of an underlying condition of psychological abnormality, that of moral insanity. Absent from Lombroso's earliest explanations of the born criminal, moral insanity entered the third edition of *Criminal Man*, published in 1884, as a causative factor of criminal behaviour as powerful as, and often coupled with, atavism and degeneration. Borrowed from English and French theorists, moral insanity was a category applied to persons who were able to act rationally and sometimes even with intelligence but who were unable to distinguish right from wrong.²⁰ According to 'his own careful studies', Lombroso found moral insanity to be 'a defining characteristic' of born prostitutes and one that, much more than lust, explained why certain women were attracted to the trade.²¹ Greedy and slothful, they wanted financial gain without the fatigue of honest work.

Although moral insanity, as an internal psychological state, could not be measured in the same way as external physical characteristics, Lombroso marshalled a list of behavioural patterns among prostitutes to support his diagnosis. Prime among them was lack of maternal feelings, evident from the low percentage of prostitutes with children. Although Lombroso admitted that their profession might discourage prostitutes from bearing children, he nevertheless insisted that only moral perversity could prevent a woman from pursuing her natural, Darwinian purpose: that of motherhood. Despite their repugnance for motherhood, prostitutes manifested positive emotional traits including kindness, religiosity, love and fondness for animals. But Lombroso found each of these characteristics to be distorted in born prostitutes: their kindness was intermittent, their religiosity bordered on superstition, their love was directed at exploitative pimps and their affection for animals was excessive.

Like the morally insane, prostitutes also displayed an extreme variation in intelligence, 'ranging from those who are half idiots or half-wits to those who border on brilliance'.²² Even the clever ones displayed an intelligence that was 'narrow and riddled with gaps'.²³ Whether strong or weak, this intelligence allowed prostitutes to mask the depth of their depravity, which expressed itself not only in lack of modesty, but also greed, laziness, vanity, gluttony and love of alcohol. Even more indicative of the criminal tendency of prostitutes was their delight in subjecting their customers to theft and blackmail.

Lesbianism

Lombroso's discussion of female homosexuality is not as extensive as that of heterosexuality or prostitution, but fits integrally into his analysis of the latter. Rather than lesbianism, he uses the terms tribadism (*tribadismo*) or, more rarely, Sapphism (*saffismo*); and, in his typical fashion, he defines neither word clearly.²⁴ In *Criminal Woman* the lesbian does not constitute a distinct figure alongside the criminal woman and the prostitute, but is subsumed under the chapter heading of 'sexual sensitivity' in criminal women and prostitutes. Besides lesbianism, this same chapter explores excessive sexuality (*sessualità in eccesso*), frigidity (*poco sessualità*), sexual psychopathologies and sexual degeneration. Lesbianism is thus reduced to a sexual deviation, basically biological and atavistic in origin.

That every category on this list of sexual sensitivity is abnormal is consistent with Lombroso's general argument that women as a group

can never reach the evolutionary perfection of men; yet it is noteworthy that he does not simply label all criminal women as hysterics or nymphomaniacs, two categories dear to Victorian doctors fearful of female sexual expression. Lombroso does warn against that minority of female criminals and prostitutes who, after experiencing early ('precocious') onset of menstruation and 'deflowering', develop unbridled sexual appetites; such female lasciviousness outpaced even the most extreme male lust. But rather than excessive sexuality, Lombroso finds frigidity more frequent in criminal women and prostitutes; for him, this 'sexual blindness' correlates with the dullness of their other senses and is a sign of arrested evolution.²⁵ He goes on to regale the reader with anecdotes of criminal women and prostitutes afflicted with sexual psychopathologies such as sadism, or a preference for masturbation and oral sex over intercourse. He is hesitant, however, to classify female masochism as a psychopathology, because 'it seems to be natural in women, who even in relatively elevated societies are in a state of absolute subjection to men; in fact, many women love to throw themselves on their knees in front of their lovers'.²⁶

In the end, however, Lombroso admitted that rates of sexual psychopathology were significantly lower in women than in men. Because of their innate biological conservatism and lack of variability, women were slow to evolve upwards but were also shielded from such numerous instances of falling back into the extreme atavistic past. In the rare cases where women displayed truly degenerate sexual behaviour – nymphomania, lust murder, or sadism – they replicated the patterns of their 'primitive' ancestors, where nudity was the norm and women were lent by fathers and husbands to visiting male guests. As Lombroso writes in his section on the history of prostitution, 'at the beginning of evolution, modesty was unknown; in sexual relations, great liberty was the rule and ... prostitution was the normal condition'.²⁷ While a strong sex drive characterised both men and women in 'savage' societies, evolution had brought clear differentiation. Man's sexual passion remained strong but acquired refinement as his increasing powers of intellect and sensibility made him susceptible to female beauty. 'Normal' women, on the other hand, developed a sense of modesty and aversion to sexual intercourse; their love for men represented only a desire for submission and for children.

The only sexual deviation that Lombroso found to be widespread in women was lesbianism, which, he wrote, 'is really one of the special characteristics of female prostitutes'.²⁸ Like criminals and prostitutes, lesbians fell into two categories: born lesbians (*saffiche-nate*) and occasional

lesbians. The first group, born lesbians, was smaller but more dangerous, because their behaviour was biologically determined and recapitulated the sexual excesses of savage women or even animals. According to Lombroso, 'In herds where there are no bulls, cows will find a substitute among their own kind. Similarly, in large hen houses where males are rare, one chicken will play the cock'.²⁹ In women, the most telling sign of organic atavism was the masculinity of certain lesbians. Strong and often violent, they cut their hair short and liked to dress in men's clothes. Lombroso gave an example of 'R':

a woman of 31 years, an artist, [who] had masculine facial lines, a masculine voice and short hair; she wore men's clothes and had a man's gait. In childhood she loved playing with boys and taking the part of soldiers and brigands. In contrast, she had no interest in girls' games or in women's work... Women's talk bored her, with its chatter about makeup, ornaments and flirtations. Nonetheless she loved to embrace and kiss women and to stroll under their windows, and she was torn by jealousy if she saw them with men... Her erotic fantasies fastened solely on women. She felt she could never love a man deeply. Her father was neuropathic and her mother insane... Her brother, too, was very strange.³⁰

For Lombroso, this case clearly represented a born lesbian, or, 'criminal woman-man', because she came from a degenerate family and had shown a masculine character from an early age.³¹ Her virility extended to her intelligence, in this case her artistic skill; Lombroso also found another type of cultural activity rampant among lesbians: 'a mania for writing letters' (*smania epistolare*).

While delighting in detailed descriptions of born lesbians, Lombroso admitted that most lesbian activity was occasional in nature: that is, encouraged by environmental circumstances rather than inherited depravity. He offered three causes for the development of lesbianism in women who otherwise displayed neither organic anomalies nor an excessive sexual drive. His blame fell heaviest on prisons and brothels, where younger women were initiated into lesbian practices by older, lascivious born prostitutes. Because he held that women were imitative rather than creative, any female group was prone to 'collective orgies', including inmates in insane asylums, girls in boarding schools and even nuns in convents.³² The second important factor was old age, which – according to Lombroso – represents 'in and of itself a type of degeneration'.³³ Because women became more masculine as they aged, growing

facial hair and losing the feminine shape of their bodies, they were also prone to sexual inversion or attraction to members of their own sex. Finally, Lombroso sympathised with prostitutes who rejected heterosexual love because of 'the disgust produced in them by male abuse'.³⁴ Subject to violence or perverted sexual demands by men, not only prostitutes but also 'normal' married women understandably turned to members of their own sex for passionate relationships.

Lombroso's analysis of the female homosexual in some ways looks back to early nineteenth-century conceptions and in other ways is new. In *Criminal Woman*, the figure of the lesbian is not yet fully formed, but represents a subspecies of the prostitute. His largest group, the occasional lesbian, behaves according to more traditional understandings of sexual behaviour as a matter of choice. All forms of sexuality outside marriage are immoral, and each individual is capable of sinning with both men and women. Thus occasional lesbians exercised free will, although – as women – their will was weak and susceptible to the bad example of more degenerate colleagues. On the other hand, born lesbianism was a total identity for those women who had inherited an atavistic tendency to lascivious behaviour. Because of biological determinism, these women were not morally responsible for their attraction to members of their own sex and could not be cured. As a precursor of modern sexology, Lombroso was one of the few Italians of his day willing to break the silence about lesbianism and collect information in an attempt to understand it. Yet he was far from celebrating the diversity of sexual practices – such as homosexuality – in the manner of Havelock Ellis, more truly the founder of sexology.³⁵

The influence of Lombroso

What effects did *Criminal Woman*, with its analyses of female heterosexuality, prostitution and homosexuality, have on Italian society, culture and politics? For many years, Lombroso has been dismissed as an outdated and ridiculous figure whose writings had little impact on larger debates on Italian policy. Yet he was the leader – indeed, he was called '*il maestro*' by his followers – of a large group of lawyers, physicians and psychiatrists constituting the positivist school of criminology, whose theory of the born criminal dominated debates on criminal justice during both the Liberal and Fascist periods. Like many of his colleagues, Lombroso wrote for general publications including *Nuova antologia*, a periodical that, like the *New Yorker* today, was widely read by the educated classes and published articles on history, politics and social issues

as well as fiction and poetry. Because of his prestige, Lombroso was invited to comment not just on law and crime but also unrelated subjects, such as foreign policy. Rather than academics restricted to the ivory tower, positivist criminologists were what we today call public intellectuals, eager to popularise their findings and to influence legislation. Many of Lombroso's followers could be found both in Parliament and the administrative ranks of the Ministries of Interior and Justice, taking with them the crusade to institutionalise his ideas.³⁶ They championed criminological positivism as a secular alternative to Catholicism, a 'lay faith' upon which to build the institutions of the young state.³⁷

I would suggest that Lombroso's ideas had significant but differing impacts on a series of groups of women in Italian society: prostitutes, criminal women, lesbians and 'normal' women. By identifying prostitution as the typical form of female crime, Lombroso both criminalised prostitution and sexualised female criminality. Raising the spectre of the atavistic born prostitute, Lombroso's theory helped to perpetuate the official state policy of restricting prostitutes to the *case chiuse* ('closed houses', or brothels). According to national legislation passed immediately upon unification, the state legalised but tightly regulated the practice of prostitution.³⁸ Prostitutes had to register with local police, schedule biweekly vaginal examinations and, if found to be infected with venereal disease, undergo treatment in a *sifilicomio*, a special prison-hospital for prostitutes. The law minutely disciplined (using Michel Foucault's term) the everyday life of registered prostitutes, restricting the hours when they could leave their brothels and the places where they could walk.³⁹ Leaving the profession was difficult, because prostitutes had to submit to three months of police surveillance even after documenting an alternative source of income.

For Lombroso, the closed houses offered an excellent alternative to prison for prostitutes who, as criminals, needed to be separated from honest society. While intended to control the spread of physical and moral disease, the tolerated brothels nevertheless allowed access by men, whose imperious sex drives needed to be met. Such thinking helped to defeat the feminist reform movement of the late nineteenth century, called the abolitionist movement, which sought to release prostitutes from state control over their bodies and their work. This attempt by early female emancipationists to redefine prostitutes as working women deserving rights equal to other female citizens had little hope of success in face of a prestigious theory equating prostitution with criminality and atavism.⁴⁰

Criminal Woman also perpetuated and accentuated the notion that all female crime was rooted in women's sexual organs and more generally

in women's role in the struggle for existence. Thus not only supposedly female crimes like prostitution but also murder and even theft tended to be analysed in sexual terms. Women's reason and self-control, held to be weak in the best of cases, could not stand up to the tyranny of the uterus and practically vanished during puberty, menstruation, pregnancy, nursing and menopause. In some cases, Lombroso and his colleagues preached tolerance for female crimes, including those of infanticide and abortion, with the argument that social constraints – and not inborn atavism – pushed young, single women to such extreme actions. Female born criminals were, on the other hand, considered double monsters, because 'criminals are exceptions among civilised people, and women are exceptions among criminals'.⁴¹ Fewer in number than their male counterparts, female born criminals were nevertheless, according to positivist criminology, more savage, cruel and lascivious.

As in the case of prostitutes, Lombroso generally supported the Italian government's treatment of female criminals, who were incarcerated in institutions administered by female religious orders. Despite being Jewish and firmly wedded to secular values, Lombroso applauded the employment of nuns in women's prisons, because he believed women to be especially susceptible to religious (that is, irrational) inducements to reform.⁴² While born criminals were forever lost, occasional female criminals needed to regain their honour and sexual purity. Despite the extreme poverty of most female inmates, Lombroso said little about economic training in women's jails and penitentiaries. Female prisons, modelled on convents, clearly represented a gendered model of punishment, for male prisons of the same period were staffed by civilian guards and emphasised reform through work. As alternatives to prison for very light crimes, positivist criminologists suggested other gendered solutions, such as marriage, to return women to their biological destiny, or severe hair-cuts to counteract their vanity.

It is more difficult to hypothesise the effect of Lombroso's ideas on lesbian women because so little research exists on the history of homosexuality, or even ideas about homosexuality, in modern Italy. Lombroso's attempt to categorise lesbians as a subset of prostitutes undoubtedly tainted their reputation with atavism and criminality. According to *Criminal Woman*, lesbian sexuality was pathological and incompatible with evolution, which decreed increasing modesty and maternity for women. On the other hand, by subsuming lesbianism under prostitution, Lombroso may have diverted attention away from lesbian behaviour and life outside brothels and prisons, thus minimising any 'moral panic' about the possibility of normal society being affected

by this vice. In this way lesbians in Italy may have remained unnoticed and in some sense freer because of the displacement of anxiety on to prostitutes. Interestingly, the Italian legal code of 1889 prescribed no punishment for male or female homosexual activity.⁴³ In the 1920s and 1930s, when homosexuality became a political issue, repression fell more heavily on men than on women.

In the case of 'normal' women, Lombroso's theories constituted a direct assault on the movement for female emancipation, despite his protestations to the contrary in the introduction to *Criminal Woman*. It was not by chance that positivist research on women peaked in the 1890s, the period which saw the establishment of the first major feminist organisations in Italy.⁴⁴ Some of these organisations were 'bourgeois' and focused on issues important to middle-class women such as the right to education, control over their own property and entrance into the professions. Others were 'socialist' feminist organisations which fought for better wages and improved conditions for working women. More radical issues that gained support from both bourgeois and socialist women after the turn of the twentieth century were female suffrage and divorce.

Lombroso's extended diatribe on the inferiority of women reveals a desire – partly unconscious – to combat changes in women's role and status under the cover of scientific objectivity. In the face of feminist demands for increased equality in education, family law, work and political rights, Lombroso juxtaposed a supposedly Darwinist universe where evolution was increasing the differentiation between the sexes and decreed that women's biology would prevent them from ever catching up with men. This doctrine posed particular problems for Italian feminists because of its modern scientific pretensions. They had always put their faith in the objectivity and modernity of science as a countervailing force to traditional religion, yet both religion and science appeared to be united in prescribing the inferiority of women. In addition, because promulgated by a man of the Left, Lombroso's message deprived the fledgling feminist movement of a much-needed ally.

In conclusion, Lombroso established sexuality as central to the definitions of appropriate female roles and the explanations of their deviant behaviour. Constrained by maternity from excelling in evolutionary development, women as a group would always remain inferior to men in intelligence, strength, moral character and artistic sensitivity. The terms heterosexuality/homosexuality defined gradations within women as a group, with heterosexuality defined as higher because it was both natural and necessary to perpetuate the species. Unthinkable as an

attribute of 'normal' women, lesbianism became a subset of criminality and prostitution. Born criminals and prostitutes were linked in their virility: that is, the failure to progress from the stage of identity between the sexes to one of sexual differentiation. By identifying sexual ambiguity – whether that of the lesbian or of Bell Star – as a sign of atavism and moral insanity, Lombroso made criminology central to the new science of sexology as it emerged in the early years of the twentieth century.

Notes

1. Cesare Lombroso and Guglielmo Ferrero, *La donna delinquente, la prostituta e la donna normale* (Turin: Roux, 1893), p. 467. Because Ferrero, Lombroso's future son-in-law, was a decidedly junior partner in this project, I am attributing the major ideas to Lombroso.
2. *Ibid.*, p. 468.
3. *Ibid.*
4. *Ibid.*
5. The classic Enlightenment text was Cesare Beccaria's *On Crimes and Punishments*, published in 1764. On the positivist school of criminology, see Mary Gibson, *Born to Crime: Cesare Lombroso and the Origins of Biological Criminology* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2002). Two excellent intellectual biographies of Lombroso are Delia Frigessi, *Cesare Lombroso* (Turin: Einaudi, 2003) and Renzo Villa, *Il deviante e i suoi segni* (Milan: Franco Angeli, 1985).
6. Lombroso set out his racial theories several decades earlier in *L'uomo bianco e l'uomo di colore* (Padua: Sacchetto, 1871) and in the first edition of *L'uomo delinquente* (Milan: Hoepli, 1876).
7. Lombroso's treatise was quickly translated into English, in 1895, under the title of *The Female Offender*. The English edition, however, radically abridged the original and omitted the entire first section on 'normal' women, almost all references to sexual organs and sexual practices, and much of the material on prostitution. A new translation, which reincorporates this material, is forthcoming; see Nicole Rafter and Mary Gibson (eds), *Criminal Woman, the Prostitute, and the Normal Woman* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2004). Quotations in this chapter are taken mostly from material that does not appear in the original English edition.
8. Lombroso and Ferrero, *La donna delinquente*, p. 2.
9. *Ibid.*, p. 4.
10. *Ibid.*, p. 10.
11. *Ibid.*, pp. 12–13.
12. *Ibid.*, p. 55.
13. *Ibid.*, p. 57.
14. *Ibid.*, p. 56.
15. *Ibid.*, pp. 125–6.
16. *Ibid.*, p. 358.
17. The earliest feminist criminologists felt it necessary to refute Lombroso and his legacy before constructing alternative theories of female crime. See Dorie Klein, 'The Etiology of Female Crime: A Review of the Literature', *Issues in*

- Criminology*, VIII (1973), 3–30 and Carol Smart, *Women, Crime, and Criminology: A Feminist Critique* (Boston, MA: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1976).
18. Lombroso and Ferrero, *La donna delinquente*, p. 571.
19. *Ibid.*
20. In a long footnote to the chapter on moral insanity in the third edition of *L'uomo delinquente*, Lombroso cites the well-known authorities James Cowles Pritchard and Benedict Augustin Morel, as well as Italian members of the positivist school. See Cesare Lombroso, *L'uomo delinquente* (Turin: Bocca, 1884), 3rd edn, pp. 543–4.
21. Lombroso and Ferrero, *La donna delinquente*, p. 527.
22. *Ibid.*, p. 544.
23. *Ibid.*, p. 546.
24. Nerina Milletti traces the origins of the words *tribade* and *saffismo* in her pioneering article entitled 'Analoghe sconnessioni. Tribadi, saffiste, invertite e omosessuali. Categorie e sistemi sesso/genere nella rivista di antropologia criminale fondata da Cesare Lombroso (1880–1949)', *DWF* (1994), pp. 50–122.
25. Lombroso and Ferrero, *La donna delinquente*, p. 401.
26. *Ibid.*, p. 405.
27. *Ibid.*, p. 258.
28. *Ibid.*, p. 407.
29. *Ibid.*, p. 184.
30. *Ibid.*, pp. 423–4.
31. *Ibid.*, p. 422.
32. *Ibid.*, p. 412.
33. *Ibid.*, p. 414.
34. *Ibid.*
35. Havelock Ellis was the first to both classify and celebrate alternative sexual practices to monogamy within marriage. In 1896, his book *Sexual Inversion* denied that homosexuality was a disease, although he focused on men to argue for its compatibility with psychological health.
36. For example, Enrico Ferri was a member of the Chamber of Deputies, Raffaele Garofalo a senator, and Salvatore Ottolenghi the director of Italy's national police academy, the *Scuola di Polizia Scientifica*.
37. The phrase is that of Eugenio Garin. See his 'Il positivismo italiano alla fine del secolo XIX fra metodo e concezione del mondo', *Giornale critica della filosofia italiana*, Series 5, I (1980), p. 4.
38. On the regulation of prostitution, see Mary Gibson, *Prostitution and the State, 1860–1915* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1986); Lucia Valenzi, *Donne, medici e poliziotti a Napoli nell'Ottocento* (Naples: Liguori, 2001); and Alberto Forzoni, *Prostituzione e sanità ad Arezzo* (Provincia di Arezzo: Le Balze, 2003).
39. Foucault's categories of discipline, enclosure, surveillance and examination apply equally well to the regulated brothels of Italy as to prisons. See *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (New York: Vintage, 1979), pp. 170–94.
40. An example of the writings of one feminist critic can be found in Rina Macrelli, *L'indegna schiavitù: Anna Maria Mozzoni e la lotta contro la prostituzione di stato* (Rome: Editori Riuniti, 1981).

41. Lombroso and Ferrero, *La donna delinquente*, p. 434.
42. The Italian model differed from that of the USA and England, where the earliest female administrators in women's prisons were lay and often feminist reformers. See Nicole Hahn Rafter, *Partial Justice: Women in State Prisons, 1800–1935* (Boston, MA: Northeastern University Press, 1985); Estelle Freedman, *Their Sisters' Keepers: Women's Prisons Reform in America, 1830–1930* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, 1981); and Lucia Zedner, *Women, Crime, and Custody in Victorian England* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1991).
43. Lesbianism was rarely mentioned in European penal codes. Unlike Italy, however, male homosexual behaviour, specifically sodomy, was not only stigmatised but also illegal in many countries such as Great Britain and Germany. See George Mosse, *Nationalism and Sexuality: Respectability and Abnormal Sexuality in Modern Europe* (New York: Howard Fertig, 1985), pp. 27–8.
44. During the 1880s and 1890s, local *Leghe di Tutela degli Interessi Femminili* were founded throughout Italy, modelled on the first chapter founded in Milan by Anna Maria Mozzoni. Succeeding organisations included the *Unione Femminile* (1899), the *Consiglio Nazionale delle Donne* (1903) and the *Comitato Nazionale Prosuffragio* (1904). On the *Unione Femminile*, which actively challenged the regulation of prostitution, see Annarita Buttafuoco, *Le Mariuccine* (Milan: Franco Angeli, 1985).