

Book Reviews



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Looking into my Sister's Eyes: An Exploration in Women's History. Jean Burnet. *Toronto: The Multicultural History Society of Ontario, 1986. Pp. 245.*

Looking into my Sister's Eyes is a useful and interesting collection of articles which deals with various aspects of immigrant women's experiences as mothers, ethnic minorities, members of ethnic organizations, transmitters of culture and domestic as well as paid workers. Few of the articles really let us see into our sister's eyes. Together, however, they enrich our knowledge of women's history and add the important factor of gender to the history of immigrants in Ontario. The book comprises thirteen articles dealing with eleven different immigrant groups: Italian women before and after the second war, British women in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, Jewish women from Western and Eastern Europe, Fins, Poles, Greeks, Chinese, Macedonians, Armenian refugees Mennonites and Ukrainians. Most of the articles deal with the twentieth century. As editor Jean Burnet points out, the groups studied represent only a few of the visible minorities who have migrated to Ontario over the last two centuries. Hopefully studies of other groups will follow, including perhaps some of French Canadian women.

All were papers given at the 1985 conference on Immigration and Ethnicity in Ontario. They are of variable quality, and several would have been vastly improved by some rigorous editing. Most point to the centrality of women's roles as wives and mothers; roles that included the transmission of language and culture, organization of schools and ethnic associations and paid work in some groups. How and when women put their energies into cultural activities or links with their countries of origin varied dramatically among the groups, depending on the historical events occurring in their homelands. An important contribution of these essays is the way they make clear that most of these women, indeed most of the ethnic communities were not uprooted from their homelands. Political developments in their countries of origin were not only followed closely, sometimes dividing the communities in Ontario, but also directly influencing and shaping the strategies and adjustment of the immigrants.

As wives and mothers, the roles that immigrant women could and did play varied with the ideology, culture and

proscriptions of different immigrant groups. Males in most immigrant groups appear to have feared the influence of New World freedoms on their wives and daughters, and expected them to conform to traditional role models which may or may not have ever constituted reality. The essays make clear that immigrant women did not simply comply with imposed roles and restrictions. Polish women who found work during the 1930's (101), Macedonian women who increased their involvement in the Church and in Political groups (135), and the Finnish domestics so brilliantly described by Varpu Lindstrom Best who refused to work for exploitative mistresses moved beyond traditional definitions of their place and role to assert their own contribution and importance in their community and in their chosen society and to reshape the definitions of gender within their cultural group.

This *Exploration in Women's History*, is most successful in the articles that carefully link the old world to the new, women's role in the family to their culture and to the wider economy and the interaction with the host society. Franca Iacovetta and Franca Sturino on Italian women, Varpu Lindstrom Best on Finnish domestics, Frances Swyripa on Ukrainian women and Isabel Kaprielian on the Armenians, go furthest in contributing to the "new and richer nap to the fabric" of Ontario history sought by the book's editor. At times in some of the articles the meaning of women's involvement in ethnic societies is lost in a mass of details about their development. Editor, Jean Burnet, maintains that it is not necessary "to be a feminist or a militant "ethnic" to want to tease out from Ontario history the part played by immigrant. . . women." It is, however, somewhat surprising in a book on women's history to read "The child who grew up in Toronto did not see the world through the eyes of his. . . Old World educated teachers" (p.119).

The book should be read as a whole, so that the parallels and contrasts between the experiences of each group are clear. Marta Danylewycz, to whom it is dedicated, would have been both proud of its strengths and hopeful that further work in this important area would counter its weaknesses.

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Child-Rearing and Reform. A Study of the Nobility in Eighteenth-Century Poland. Bogna Lorence-Kot. *Westport, Connecticut; London, England; Greenwood Press, 1985. Pp. 170.*