

Book Reviews

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.*

Greenwood Press must be warmly congratulated for their bold and innovative policy in bringing out books dealing with different societies and cultures in their important Family Studies Series. There is a crying need for such books. These most welcome publications allow social and cultural historians to expand the horizons of their curricula on Family Life to include the much neglected areas of study on Central, Eastern and Southern Europe, where more than three hundred million Europeans live and from where many of the past and present immigrants come to the North American continent. Hence, Bogna Lorence-Kot's book is a long overdue contribution to the study of Polish Family—a nation of more than 36 million people. There is currently great interest in Poland and an increasing number of publications appear in England and on the Continent each year, but these are mainly of a political genre. Lorence-Kot's work deals with the study of *wychowanie* or education and child-rearing in eighteenth-century Poland, a problem which engrossed contemporary Polish society and still fascinates many Central and Eastern European historians.

Lorence-Kot has undertaken a difficult, yet very fascinating and useful task. It is not always easy to write on the social and economic history of Poland due to the often exasperating paucity of primary sources such as family and governmental papers, letters, diaries, memoranda, family, and national archives, which have in the past two hundred years been systematically and deliberately destroyed either by the partitioning powers (Russia, Prussia, and Austria) in their drive to russify or germanize the nation, or during the two world wars, when the most vicious battles took place, leaving the nation and its cultural heritage devastated. This fact did not seem to deter the author, who produced a very competent, thought-provoking, informative piece of work, using available primary sources and consulting most secondary publications that deal with her area of study. The amount of work done is very impressive indeed.

Lorence-Kot's thesis is that at the root of the gradual socio-economic and political disintegration of the Polish society, during the course of the seventeenth and, above all, during the first half of the eighteenth-century, was the complete collapse of the educational system and its attendant attitude towards child-rearing. She perceptively describes the evolution of the educational system from the time of the counter-reformation when Poland's schooling was placed in the hands of the Jesuits and the Piarists respectively. Deprived of religious challenge from Protestantism, the system in the course of a century and a half became static and obsolete, turning out predominantly

semi-educated students unable to understand, let alone face and respond to the changing socio-economic and political reality of Europe that surrounded them. The church-dominated education identified itself with the worst aspects of "sarmatism" which frowned upon and rejected all "foreign" ideas which *szlachta* considered incompatible and even dangerous to their "golden freedoms" and their existing way of life. The first partition of Poland, in 1772, shook the nation's complacency and confidence to the very foundations, prompting a number of Piarists and the more enlightened magnates into an objective analysis of the root causes of the national disasters. The conclusion arrived at was that the nation, in order to survive had to embark first and foremost upon far-reaching educational reforms and above all the ruling class, the *szlachta* had to undergo a fundamental change in its attitude towards "*wychowanie*" (upbringing) of the children, which was viewed as the cornerstone of the nation's survival. Finally, in the chapter *The Aftermath*, Lorence-Kot neatly summarizes the long-term results of this most interesting educational experiment in eighteenth-century Europe, formulated by a nation on the brink of dismemberment by the three "enlightened" monarchies Russia, Prussia, and Austria.

There are, however, some errors which have to be corrected if the book is to be re-issued in paperback—a most sincere hope of this reviewer—as it will enable its wider circulation among students. For example, Emanuel Rostworowicz should be Emanuel Rostworowski (p.60); "Useful and Amusing Games" should be "Useful and Pleasant Pastimes" (*Zabawy Przyjemnei Pozyteczne*) (p.90); "Wurtemberg" should be "Wurtemberg" (p.104); *Mietrzanka*, should be *Mierzanka* (p.144); "in typical rococo style" would be much more clear if it was said "...reflecting a typical contemporary way of life..." (p.105).

All in all, it is a well written book, consistent, persuasively argued and scholarly. Both primary and secondary sources are well used in supporting the author's theses. The book is undoubtedly a good contribution to the study of Family Life and should find itself in all university libraries and can also be read with interest by the general public. The author deserves full credit for her work. Hopefully, Lorence-Kot's example will be followed by other historians and more monographs of this nature will soon appear in commercial and university press catalogues.

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