MARYNIA DON'T CRY: MEMOIRS OF TWO POLISH-CANADIAN FAMILIES

Apolonja Maria Kojder and Barbara Glogowska. Toronto: Multicultural History Society of Ontario, 1995.

by Eva C. Karpinski

Ethnicity and history bind together the two narratives of immigration presented in this volume of the Ethnocultural Voices Series. Apart from that, they are completely different, almost disparate, projects in two genres: one is a personalized memoir written by the granddaughter of the woman whose name appears in the title, while the other is a family history recorded in a rather artless manner by a family friend. Indeed, Glogowska's conventional and clichéd account seems like an appendix to Kojder's warm and empathic, epic-like tribute to four generations of women in her family. It is Kojder's voice that makes the book worth reading.

As the title of the section authored by Kojder suggests, "A Mother's Legacy" is a woman-centered narrative which gives testimony to female resilience and strength exhibited under adverse circumstances. The life stories of her great-grandmother, grandmother, and mother reflect the old familiar pattern of gendered experiences of women who have to fend for themselves and struggle on their own while their fathers and husbands are away at war or in foreign lands as immigrants. Kojder celebrates strong female bonds, especially those between mothers and daughters in successive generations. The mother-daughter pair in her family archive becomes a symbol of continuity, providing her with the wealth of positive role models to emulate. She even makes her great-grandmother and grandmother come across as proto-feminists in that they reject a folk custom of "capping" as degrading to women and remain skeptical towards their patriarchal religion.

What is at stake in all these stories recalled by Kojder is the survival of the family as a unit sustained by women's work and solidarity. The Kojder women have all been helping each other through poverty and hardships experienced in rural Poland between the wars, during the deportation to Siberia in 1940, and in exile, in a forced labour camp. They have promoted the idea of a female support system and demonstrated amazing survival skills. Their stories abound in fascinating details of home remedies and most unexpected edibles. And although it may occasionally seem that the narrative relies too much on the image of women as nurturers securing food for their families, one has to remember that for these women the real enemy was hunger and illness rather than patriarchy.

However, the documentary value of Kojder's story rests not solely in its being a record of women's experiences. At the same time, she commemorates other silenced histories, those of a particular class and an ethnic group, that have been too marginal or politically subversive to find their place in the official history. Her book restores to collective memory what has been erased from it, namely the forgotten fact of mass deportations of Polish civilians to the Soviet Union and their forced labour during Second World War. While demanding recognition of this chapter of Polish history, Kojder is far from idealizing prewar Poland with its system of classes and ranks. Both her grandmother and mother were so disgruntled and disillusioned with life in Poland that instead of returning to their homeland after the war, they chose emigration to Canada, where the grandfather had resided since the 1920s. Before they

left, Kojder's mother was reunited with her husband after four years of being separated by war. Their ordeals supply a necessary corrective to unreflexive nationalism that has been a norm among other Polish immigrants. In this sense, Kojder's narrative fills another gap in the history of Polish immigration in Canada: although one can find numerous examples of middle-class or even working-class accounts, there are hardly any records of immigration seen from the perspective of impoverished farm workers, perhaps because theirs has been largely an oral culture. Kojder's story is exceptional in granting them a position of the subject of history.

One more interesting aspect of the text concerns the question of authorship and the narrative voice. Most of the story, which seems like a record of received oral histories, is told by an impersonal omniscient narrator who reconstructs the past from a few remembered anecdotes. Towards the end, however, there occurs a sudden shift from stylized objectivity to a more personal tone. The appearance of the "I" suggests that Kojder has abandoned the academic corset of a historian and has situated herself in the story. In a self-reflexive twist, we learn that she actually managed to persuade her mother to write the memoirs which Kojder then used in preparing this book. Thus the story of its production repeats the familiar motif which has been the book's subject matter throughout: with her mother's memoirs as a literary source, it is Kojder's turn now to tap the matrilinial support system that has existed in her family. However, she ends her narrative by quoting her father's favourite lines from a famous Polish Romantic poem by the national bard Adam Mickiewicz. Given the presence of so many powerful mother-figures in Kojder's story, such a conclusion to her text can only undermine its overall effect. We are left to wonder why the last words belong to the father.

THE APARTHEID OF SEX: A MANIFESTO ON THE FREEDOM OF GENDER

Martine Rothblatt. New York: Crown Publishers, 1995.

by Peg Tittle

Back in the late '70s or early '80s, when the title "Ms." was becoming part of our vocabulary, I wrote a "letter to the editor" (and actually sent it to *Ms.* magazine) protesting that while the term was an improvement over "Miss" and "Mrs." because it at least stopped labelling us according to our marital status, "Ms." (and "Mr.") persisted in labelling us according to our sex. How, I wondered, in the feminist fight for a gender-neutral society, could we ignore this sexism in our very names? (*Ms.* never responded.)

Rothblatt explores the same question—"If sex-based differences are irrelevant, then what is the point of saying one is either male or female?"—in a book very aptly titled *The Apartheid of Sex:* it is an apartheid indeed when we are segregated from the moment of birth (literally) into male and female.

Rothblatt's main argument against this apartheid of sex is quite simple: sex is a complex continuum from very male to very female (sexual continuism) rather than a simple duality of male or female (sexual dimorphism); therefore, any labelling of individuals as male or female is an injustice to those individuals, especially if such labels are to have social, economic, or legal importance.

Several aspects of sex are dealt with—genitalia, chromosomes, hormones, reproductive capacities, and thought patterns. In every case, Rothblatt reveals the continuum and the consequent injustice of using that aspect to categorize people as either/or.

Along the way, most causal connections between those aspects are examined and found to be not at all clear. There is no causal connection between genitals and thought patterns, for example; as the Olympic testing committees have found, there isn't even a clear connection between genitals and chromosomes.

Also along the way, Rothblatt points out that any "biology is destiny" argument is simply out of touch with current reality: science and technology can change biology (consider plastic surgery); it can also make it irrelevant (consider bottled infant formula and backhoes).

Several suggestions are made for dismantling this apartheid: adopt laws that prohibit the classification of people according to sex except for *bona fide* medical reasons—this would especially include the elimination of sex on marriage applications; encourage the concept of self-defined sex; create gender-neutral pronouns (though I prefer expanding use of the one we already have—"it"); desegregate public washrooms; replace the sex categories in sport with weight or height-based categories.

What makes this book especially good, for me, are the simple counterexamples Rothblatt presents to undermine traditional arguments (and so many traditional arguments are undermined in this book!). Consider, for example, this comment about keeping women out of combat positions during the Vietnam war because of their size: "Yet the Vietnamese won that war with male soldiers who, on average, were *shorter* than the average American woman" (my emphasis). Or consider this rebuttal to the insistence on heterosexual marriage because the purpose of marriage is to raise a family: "Were childbirth still the reason for marriage, then postmenopausal marriages would be illegal and non-procreative marriages could be annulled in secular fora."

Rothblatt's summary is clear: "The legal separation of people into male and female sexes is unfair because it deprives everyone of the right of creative self-expression. It is also unfair because separate is never equal." I think I'll start using "it" more often; and next time I'm asked to check "male" or "female," I'll check "other."