

become a classic for many decades.

For us, the peoples of the 'other Europe,' the book is a priceless gift. Davies went against the prejudices which still run deep in the corridors of academic power. In Davies' book, the history of Europe has been presented by a Westerner without massive silencing of voices from Europe's eastern half. Davies' boldness has been a shocking offense and scandal to many. In spite of many minor mistakes, the book introduces a major correction to our attempts to understand Europe's history. Δ

Editor's note: The seventh printing of the book, in May 1997, eliminated a good number of mistakes and typos present in the initial printings.

Marynia Don't Cry: Memoirs of Two Polish-Canadian Families

By Apolonja Maria Kojder and Barbara Głogowska. Foreword by Benedykt Heydenkorn. Toronto: University of Toronto Press. 1995. Multicultural History Society of Ontario-Ethnocultural Voices Series. ISBN 0-919045-65-0. 196 pages, 20 photos, 1 map. Paper. \$24.94.

Mark Wegierski

The so-called ethnic writing in Canada, unless it is done by currently fashionable minorities, is often relegated to the margins of literary and popular appreciation. This book, however, particularly Kojder's section ("A Mother's Legacy") says something meaningful about the human condition in the twentieth century. Głogowska's piece, "Three Generations," is a short addendum to the main family story told by Kojder, and it deals with Polish suffering during World War II, the difficulties of life in Canada before the 1960s, the hardworking endeavors of Polish immigrants to Canada and their adamant refusal to take advantage of the system. When reading the memoirs, we find ourselves light years away from present-day Canadian realities and political attitudes.

What we are seeing in Canada today is the dominance of one, hyperliberal culture, combined with multiracialism, rather than a pluralism of true cultural diversities.

It seems that in Canada today, virtually every

minority group is stridently crying about its past suffering and victimization, in order to assert its moral superiority over the majority and obtain appropriate entitlements and redress. Among the hidden casualties of a society consumed by victimology are those persons and nations that actually did suffer incredibly in the past, but whose histories are, for whatever reason, considered inappropriate or irrelevant to the current public debate. The sufferings of Poles in Nazi- and Soviet-occupied Poland during World War II clearly fall under this category. These two memoirs constitute an excellent reminder of those sufferings, and they also define more closely what true suffering, oppression, and victimization consist of.

Kojder's family history begins before World War I. The miseries of life under virtual serfdom in eastern Europe described in the book extended to about 70% of the population in that area. Only the strongest, healthiest, and most enterprising people could survive. Kojder recounts the extraordinary women of her family who managed to piece life together - often in the absence of men - after it was repeatedly shattered by war and hard times. The title of the book comes from some lines of comfort given from mother (Kojder's great-grandmother) to daughter in 1926: 'Marynia, don't cry. As long as I'm alive I'll help you. And maybe you'll survive because nobody will bother you. And later your children will help you.' (18)

The dissolution into banal, shallow, North American identifications of the majority of these persons of Polish descent... is also some kind of tragedy.

Kojder's family had achieved a relative degree of prosperity in eastern Poland by 1939, at least for poor peasants. But as a result of the Hitler-Stalin pact, eastern Poland was incorporated into the Soviet empire. In the winter of 1939-1940, the mass deportations of Poles to Siberia began. Persons were literally given an hour's notice before being herded on cattle cars that traveled for several weeks before reaching Siberia. Thousands died just in this passage. Once there, they were conscripted into back-breaking forced labor. In a deft touch, Kojder notes the degrees of unfreedom in the Soviet Union: as simple peasants, her family was 'only' subject to forced labor, not to the horrors of political incarceration. Deaths under forced-labor, semi-starvation conditions abounded, of course. Those who could not meet the heavy work assignments were not fed even the meager food of regular laborers, and quickly passed away.

What Kojder's narrative abundantly makes clear is that, even when the Soviet Union became an ally of the West as a result of Hitler's invasion, and Poles were theoretically allowed to leave Soviet territory, absolutely no help was afforded in the evacuation process. Tens of thousands died of disease or starvation *after* the agreement reached by Stalin and the Polish government-in-exile in London.

When World War II ended, Poland's boundaries were shifted by 200 miles westward, which meant there was no return possible for Kojder's family. Kojder lists twenty relatives who had not survived the war. Among these were her father's brother, Antek, who was executed by the Soviets in 1940, probably at Katyń. A further tragedy struck the family in late 1945, when her father's cousin, Władysław Kojder, a prominent leader of the independent Polish Peasants' Party in newly-liberated Poland, was murdered by the communist secret police. Kojder notes that the actual perpetrators remain unknown and unpunished to this very day. Many years after the fact, the family found out that Stanisław Pieczko, her father's brother-in-law, had died in 1947, having refused Soviet citizenship, 'in the gulag location of Oktsiubinsk, Kazakhstan, of hunger and poisoning from his job in a chemical factory.' (99)

As opposed to all this misery, one would have thought Canada would offer a sunny contrast. However, by the standards of the engaged, post-1960s lifestyle most of us are accustomed to and vociferously demand as our 'natural right,' Canada also appears, in both Kojder's and Głogowska's pieces, as 'no picnic.' It is rather ironic that before the 1960s, eastern Europeans and white ethnics in general were seen as 'too ethnic,' while in the post-1960s period, they are seen as 'not ethnic enough.' For example, questions about ethnic origin in the Canadian census were not used as a basis for affirmative action initiatives, as is the case today with so-called 'visible minorities.' It could be argued that what we are seeing in Canada today is the dominance of *one*, hyperliberal culture, combined with multiracialism, rather than a pluralism of true cultural diversities.

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Kojder lists twenty relatives who did not survive World War II.

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Apolonja Kojder pointedly writes: 'Sometimes I heard...that the natives wanted compensation for the land the white people had taken from them. And I'd wonder why nobody talked about the land that had been taken from my parents and grandmother by the Russians....' (136)

The reviewer would recommend the reading of this book for those who want to find out what life in the earlier part of the twentieth century - and probably throughout most of human history - was really like. In the reviewer's opinion, the book offers a highly valuable perspective especially for those who feel themselves so direly oppressed today. Comparing those earlier situations with today's situations would allow the reader to get a feel for the extremities which characterize this century. Extending, for example, from the almost casually accepted mass murders of innocent persons under totalitarian regimes, to the unwillingness of current Western democracies to properly punish even the most heinous crimes or to uphold the sovereignty of their borders in the face of a burgeoning immigration tide.

It would be highly desirable for this book to appear

in Polish translation. Apolonja Maria Kojder, who is currently working on her doctorate in Education at the University of Toronto, is one of only a few persons of the generation born in Canada, the offspring of the postwar immigrant wave 'of a troubled time,' who have maintained a significant degree of Polish heritage. Out of those tens of thousands of persons of Polish descent born in Canada between 1945 to 1965, only a handful have maintained a significant degree of identification with Polishness.

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Further study is called for, as to why such a comparatively large generation melted almost completely into the North American mold. What can be immediately noticed is that this generation lived in an era of transition. At the beginning, assimilation was sharply demanded, and 'ethnics' were not especially popular, but afterwards the era of so-called multiculturalism began. After the introduction of multiculturalism policy in Canada in the late 1960s, when in fact the main ethnic groups in Canada were eastern and southern Europeans, it might have seemed that, finally, these groups would get their chance for 'a place in the sun.' But it turned out that the further evolution of multiculturalism in Canada entailed the mass immigration of visible minorities. It often happened that in the space of five or so years, there would arrive in Canada more persons from some visible minority group (e.g., to cite some of the latest examples, Somalis or Tamils), than there had arrived of representatives of some white ethnic group in the space of a century. Multicultural policy thus effectively turned out to be a policy of multiracialism, where the focus of concern was to be not the longstanding 'white ethnic' minorities, but the newly arrived visible minority groups.

The dissolution into banal, shallow, North American identifications of the majority of these persons of Polish descent (who could be termed, somewhat poetically, 'the last generation of the Polish Second Republic') is also some kind of tragedy.

Apolonja Kojder ends her book with a tribute to her father, who died much too early in a tragic accident on the railway, while trying to save the life of a fellow worker:

'My father's favorite quotation was a line from Adam Mickiewicz's "Oda do młodości," or "Ode to Youth:" "Without a heart, without a soul — man is but a skeleton....' (138)

The endeavors and efforts of persons of this Polish-Canadian generation who, like Apolonja Maria Kojder, persevered in their Polishness, and in a patriotic outlook on Polish matters, should be especially cherished. Δ