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# Manly Militants, Cohesive Communities, and Defiant Domestics: Writing about Immigrants in Canadian Historical Scholarship

Franca Iacovetta

NOT SINCE THE MANIFESTOS issued two decades ago by women's historians<sup>1</sup> and proponents of the new labour history<sup>2</sup> have Canadian social historians been seriously challenged. Post-structuralism and discourse analysis has raised questions — intriguing to some, dismissed as extreme relativism, or politically dangerous by others — about our ability to really *know* the past.<sup>3</sup> The history of sexuality has opened the curtain on homosexuality and also begun the important work of

<sup>1</sup>For example, Alison Prentice and Susan Mann Trofimenkoff, eds., *The Neglected Majority: Essays in Canadian Women's History* (Volumes 1 and 2) (Toronto 1977; 1985); Veronica Strong-Boag, *The Parliament of Women: The National Council of Women in Canada, 1893-1929* (Ottawa 1976). See also Ruth Roach Pierson, "Colonization and Canadian Women's History," *Journal of Women's History*, 4, 2 (Fall 1992), 89-114; her "Experience, Difference, Dominance and Voice in the Writing of Canadian Women's History," in Karen Offen, Ruth Roach Pierson, and Jane Rendall, eds., *Writing Women's History: International Perspectives* (London 1991).

<sup>2</sup>A recent summary of these developments is Craig Heron, "Towards Synthesis in Canadian Working-Class History: Reflections on Bryan Palmer's Rethinking," *left history*, 1 (1993), 109-21.

<sup>3</sup>International works include Joan Scott, *Gender and the Politics of History* (New York 1988); Mary Poovey, *Uneven Developments: The Ideological Work of Gender in Mid-Victorian England* (Chicago 1988). Differing Canadian perspectives include Bryan D. Palmer, *Descent into Discourse* (Philadelphia 1990); Joy Parr, "Introduction," *Labouring Children* (Toronto 1980, 1994); Mariana Valverde, *The Age of Light, Soap and Water* (Toronto 1991).

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problematicizing heterosexuality.<sup>4</sup> My main concern here, however, is the challenge raised by scholars who consider race-ethnicity a critical category of analysis. Such an approach demands that we all, and not just the specialists of racial-ethnic minorities, integrate the histories of minorities fully into our analyses of the past. No longer is it adequate to confine the study of racial-ethnic identities to those women and men who stood outside the dominant English- or French-Canadian majority. We are also being challenged to develop better tools for uncovering the ways in which the processes of racialization and ethnicization have influenced historical phenomena. In response, a growing number of scholars are embracing what has become a favoured approach of social historians and others in the 1990s — one that takes into account the intersections among class, gender, and race/ethnicity and considers the ways in which experiences and identities and political and social phenomena can be shaped by a multiplicity of overlapping and even contradictory influences.<sup>5</sup>

Given the current popularity of the class-gender-race/ethnicity analytical framework (not to mention an already emerging backlash), it seems an appropriate time to offer an assessment of the treatment of immigrants in Canadian historical writing. It seems especially appropriate since social historians operating within this three-pronged paradigm generally seem least informed about immigration. Sophisticated understandings of class and gender, of the varied histories of Canadian workers and women, are not always matched by an equally strong grasp of the complex histories of Canada's immigrants, the varied contexts in which immigrant history has been written, or of the valuable insights offered by immigration specialists that might have broader applicability. By the same token, immigration specialists appear relatively untouched by recent theoretical and methodological developments that have affected sister fields, such as postmodern gender analysis and its emphasis on deconstructing language and multiple systems of meanings. The paper maps general trends in the field of immigrant history, then turns to a detailed discussion of works produced in the last 25 years. The assessments reflect my own efforts to grapple with the intellectual possibilities that the class-gender-race/ethnicity paradigm raises for writing not only immigrant history in Canada

<sup>4</sup>Canadian gay/lesbian history is under-developed, but consult Steven Maynard, "In Search of Sodom North": The Writing of Lesbian and Gay History in English Canada, 1970-1990," *Canadian Review of Comparative Literature*, 21 (1994), 117-32; Becki Ross, *The House That Jill Built: Lesbian Nation in Formation* (Toronto 1995).

<sup>5</sup>International works include David R. Roediger, *The wages of whiteness: race and the making of the American working-class* (London 1991); Vron Ware, *Beyond the Pale: White Women, Racism and History* (London 1992); Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham, "African-American Women's History and the Metalanguage of Race," *Signs*, 17 (1992), 251-74. Canadian contributions include Pierson, "Experience, Difference"; Vic Satzewich, *Racism and the Incorporation of Foreign Labour: Farm Labour Migration to Canada Since 1945* (Routledge 1991); Dionne Brand, *No Burden to Carry: Narratives of Black Working Women in Ontario 1920s to 1950s* (Toronto 1991).

but Canadian history more broadly. Far from advocating one particular vision of immigrant history the paper calls for greater experimentation with diverse and challenging approaches and topics. Rather than privileging entirely one method of historical enquiry over another — my own bias is in favour of a materialist approach that is also mindful of the importance of language, culture, discursive codes, and narratives in influencing male and female experiences, identities and understandings — the paper borrows loosely from various approaches in an effort to complicate matters, to encourage new ways of thinking and writing about immigrants in the Canadian past.<sup>6</sup>

### *A Bit of Context*

THE HISTORICAL LITERATURE on Canada's immigrants is a highly fragmented body of work, and its practitioners are a diverse collection of historians and others trained in different disciplinary traditions and methodologies and occupying divergent political positions. This paper focuses on historical works on immigrants, but it is worth noting that immigrant and ethnic (or racial-ethnic) history are not coterminous. Recent works on immigrants of colour, such as *West Indians*, for instance, have been written within a race-studies framework, although they are also important contributions to immigrant history. Ethnic history is not confined to the immigrant generation and, of course, minority history encompasses people of colour, such as First Nations, who are not immigrants. Generally speaking, however, since the 1970s the scholars whose work has contributed most significantly to the historical scholarship on immigrants have been situated within one or more of the three sub-fields of social history that are related to each other by similar if not identical research agendas: the new labour history (or working-class history), women's history, and ethnic history. Despite significant differences, these historians have shared a basic commitment to uncovering the lives of people whom conventional histories had dubbed powerless and/or sufficiently voiceless as to be written out of the historical record. Labour historians, including women's historians of labour, were initially drawn to immigrant history because of an interest in militancy and radicalism, and to a lesser degree, class formation. Notwithstanding some critical differences among them — particularly with respect to the analytic power of gender and the place of women within the left — they shared a similar socialist political and intellectual agenda, one that gave primacy to the recovery of traditions of resistance and protest.

<sup>6</sup>Useful overviews of immigration history include Howard Palmer, "Canadian Immigration and Ethnic History in the 1970s and 1980s," *Journal of Canadian Studies*, 17 (1982), 35-50; Roberto Perin, "Clio as an Ethnic: The Third Force in Canadian Historiography," *Canadian Historical Review*, 64 (1983), 441-57. On postmodern gender analysis and women's and labour history, see, for example, Joanne Meyerowitz, "American Women's History: The Fall of Women's Culture," *Canadian Review of American Studies*, (1992), 27-52; Ava Baron, ed., *Work Gendered: Toward a New History of American Labor* (Ithaca 1991).

By contrast, Canada's immigration specialists have comprised a larger and more diverse group of historians. They represent a racially heterogeneous community and their perspectives range across the political spectrum. We find here the presence of conservatives, liberals, and leftists, as well as feminists and anti-feminists. Although rarely discussed in public, historians working within heavily polarized ethnic communities have found it difficult to study left-right or Jewish-gentile splits without drawing criticism or a studied neglect from colleagues on the other side of the divide. The field has also attracted writers uninformed by or disinterested in recent developments in social history. Such tensions are not unique to ethnic history, of course, but they are certainly evident in this field.

During the past two decades, Canadian immigrant history has also revealed many US influences. Canadian specialists of European immigrants, for example, have imported the critique of Oscar Handlin developed by our US colleagues. Handlin, of course, was the prominent Harvard professor whose 1950s epic tales of European immigrant uprootedness, alienation, but eventual assimilation into the supposed American melting pot underwent a massive critique in the 1960s and 1970s. Led by scholars like Rudolph Vecoli, this critique was invaluable and laid the basis for a revamped North American immigration history. Canada never had the equivalent of a Handlin, yet we have assumed, rather than documented or refuted, that a Handlin model dominated our historiography.<sup>7</sup>

Having cautioned against our falling uncritically in step with a US-defined historical agenda, I would also stress that Canadian scholars were drawn to the US revisionist literature on immigration precisely because it offered a way of reconceptualizing immigrant lives so as to acknowledge agency, choice, adaptation, and resistance without ignoring racism and exploitation. Canadian scholars have also culled from an international and multi-disciplinary literature dealing both with Old World and New World contexts. It ranges from the work of family and community specialists, ethnographers, anthropologists, and folklorists, to studies of international labour movements and transatlantic economies. Some colleagues might see in this internationalization of immigrant history another indication of the 'sundering' of Canada's national history into so many specialties,<sup>8</sup> but practitioners in the field consider it a source of enrichment. Others have caustically dismissed the

<sup>7</sup>Oscar Handlin, *The Uprooted* (Boston 1951); Rudolph Vecoli, "Contadini in Chicago: A Critique of the Uprooted," *Journal of American History*, 51 (1964), 404-15; John Bodnar's synthesis of the revisionist works, *The Transplanted: A History of Immigrants in Urban America* (Bloomington 1985). Relevant Canadian texts include Robert Harney, ed., *Gathering Place: Peoples and Neighbourhoods of Toronto 1834-1945* (Toronto 1985); Varpu Lindstrom, *Defiant Sisters: A Social History of Finnish Immigrant Women in Canada* (Toronto 1992); Franca Iacovetta, *Such Hardworking People: Italians in Postwar Toronto* (Montréal 1992).

<sup>8</sup>Michael Bliss, "Privatizing the Mind: The Sundering of Canadian History, The Sundering of Canada," Donald Creighton Lecture, University of Toronto, October 1991; reprinted in *Journal of Canadian Studies*, 26 (1991), 83-102.

whole enterprise of social history as a study of the anecdotal and inconsequential. J.L. Granatstein's pointed quip, "Really who cares about the housemaid's knee in Belleville," readily comes to mind.<sup>9</sup> In response, I would note that the new immigration history as it developed and gained an audience in Canada in the 1970s and 1980s was, and remains, precisely the unashamed history of housemaids, not to mention the maladies, like housemaid's knee, that afflict people.

### *Some General Trends, Past and Present*

PREDICTABLY, given Canada's historic role as a receiving society, writing about immigrants has long been a feature of our historical scholarship. Over the decades, however, the priorities and perspectives of scholars interested in the subject have changed considerably. New approaches to familiar topics also have emerged.

An appropriate place to begin is the "nation-building" school of Canadian history, that school of nationalist historiography popular in the 1930s, 1940s and 1950s (and now undergoing something of a resurgence). Here, immigration was acknowledged as a key ingredient in transcontinental nation-making but the immigrants were largely ignored or relegated to cameo appearances. Donald Creighton, for instance, portrayed favourably John A. Macdonald's aim to settle the Canadian west by (mostly) white Americans and Europeans but comparatively little effort went into determining just who were those thousands of Bukovynians, Roumanians, Doukhobors and others who eventually carved homes out of the Canadian frontier and supplied Canadian employers with workers and railways with patrons.<sup>10</sup>

If we consider the eclectic collection of works produced between the 1920s and 1950s on immigrants in various regional and temporal settings in Canada, it is clear that the subject has also attracted specialists of various types. Such writers largely accepted the nation-building framework, but they filled in important details regarding the timing and pattern of settlement and to some extent the motives and backgrounds of the immigrants themselves. Much of this work deals with the English, Scots, and Irish immigrants of the 19th-century's Great Migration Era. Ultimately, however, it tells us far more about policy and settlement patterns than the day-to-day world of newcomers. While containing positive evaluations of certain non-British groups, namely north-western Europeans, a racial bias in favour of the British 'stock' and Anglo-Celtic mores pervades this literature.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>9</sup>Quoted in Christopher Moore, "The Organized Man," *The Beaver*, 71 (April/May 1991), 59.

<sup>10</sup>Donald Creighton, *John A. Macdonald: The Old Chieftain* (Toronto 1955); *Canada's First Century 1867-1967* (Toronto 1970). See also Carl Berger, *The Writing of Canadian History* (Toronto 1976).

<sup>11</sup>For example, W.A. Carrothers, *Emigration from the British Isles* (London 1929); Helen Cowan, *British Immigration to British North America* (Toronto 1959); Norman Macdonald, *Canada: Immigration and Colonization 1841-1903* (Toronto 1963).

The significant presence of continental Europeans and Asians in Canada by the early 20th century also prompted various Canadian and 'ethnic' writers to map the histories of specific non-British groups. This literature ranges widely, from the ominous warnings of 'race suicide' and 'mongrel' populations voiced by bigots like H. Glynn Ward,<sup>12</sup> to the more sympathetic but patronizing and pro-Canadianization views of social reformers such as J.S. Woodsworth,<sup>13</sup> and to more sophisticated sociological studies of group settlement and adaptation.<sup>14</sup> Despite some differences in intent and emphasis, a pro-Canadianization and elitist impulse similarly informed the works of the so-called 'ethnic' writers of the 1960s and 1970s, whose usually Whiggish histories of 'their own people' had a decidedly celebratory or filiopietistic bent. It was expressed in several ways, including romanticized histories of the culture and homelands from which the members came, culturally determinist characterizations of the people under study that emphasized their proud, intelligent, and stoic qualities as well as their genius for 'success' (variously defined), and an understandable but misplaced concern to claim Canadian authenticity for the group by documenting the presence of early and/or famous forbearers.<sup>15</sup> In contrast to the literature on white immigrants from non-British backgrounds, where attention has long been paid to the people themselves, until relatively recently, the scholarship on immigrants of colour, especially African Americans and Asians, have dealt largely with the reception they received at the hands of white Canadians.<sup>16</sup> That Black history is particularly acquiring more

<sup>12</sup>H. Glynn-Ward, *The Writing on the Wall* (Vancouver 1921); F. Leighton Thomas, *Japan: the Octopus of the East and Its Menace to Canada* (Vancouver 1931).

<sup>13</sup>J.S. Woodsworth, *Strangers Within Our Gates* (Toronto 1909); his *My Neighbour* (Toronto 1911, 1972). See also Robert England, *The Central European Immigrant in Canada* (Toronto 1929); John Murray Gibbon, *Canadian Mosaic: The Making of a Modern Nation* (Toronto 1938); Charles Young, *The Ukrainian Canadians: A Study in Assimilation* (Toronto 1931); and on propaganda and "ethnic Canadians," Watson Kirkconnell, *Canadians All: A Primer of Canadian National Unity* (Ottawa 1941).

<sup>14</sup>For example, C.A. Dawson, *Group Settlement: Ethnic Communities in Western Canada* (Toronto 1936); Lloyd Reynolds, *The British Immigrant* (Toronto 1935). See also Marlene Shore, *The Science of Social Redemption: McGill, the Chicago School and the Origins of Social Research in Canada* (Toronto 1987).

<sup>15</sup>For example, John Kosa, *Land of Choice: The Hungarians in Canada* (Toronto 1957); Vladimir Kaye, *Early Ukrainian Settlements in Western Canada, 1895-1900* (Toronto 1964); P. Gaida, *Lithuanians in Canada* (Toronto 1967); A.V. Spada, *The Italians in Canada* (Montréal 1969); Standford Reid, *The Scottish Tradition in Canada* (Toronto 1976). See also Roberto Perin, "National Histories and Ethnic History in Canada," *Cahiers de recherche sociologique*, 20 (1993), 23-38.

<sup>16</sup>See, for example, the literature on mid-nineteenth century African Americans, including, Jason Silverman, *Unwelcome Guests: Canada West's Response to American Fugitive Slaves, 1800-1865* (Millwood 1985); William H. Pease and Jane H. Pease, *Black Utopia: Negro Communal Experiments in America* (Madison 1963); Fred Landon's essays, including "The Negro Migration to Canada After the Passing of the Fugitive Slave Act," *Journal*

visibility in the Canadian academy and among the general public reflects in part the demands of students in a multi-racial country to know this history and the growing efforts of educators to diversify the Canadian "story." As Owen Thomas recently observed, this trend also reflects the growing commercial cache of Blacks in our cultural tourism industry, a situation bound to encourage more history but of a yet unknown type and quality.<sup>17</sup>

Another aspect of writing about immigrants is an amateur tradition of genealogists and history buffs tracing the family tree or reconstructing the local clan or kin networks of a village or town. Such activity has been undertaken with particular enthusiasm by those who, by virtue of their membership in Canada's Anglo-Celtic majority, feel a sense of entitlement in this regard. A penchant for genealogy, for instance, has been much in evidence among the ancestors of the white United Empire Loyalists, who have felt confident in declaring their ancestors' position among Canada's founding races and, by extension, their own legitimacy as "true" Canadians. This work is valuable because of the often meticulous record-keeping involved but problematic because of the myth-making and elitism that underscores that activity. By contrast, scholarly work on the Loyalists, including studies of First Nations and Black Loyalists, has helped redress a popular bias in favour of elite white men and their families. Recent works also examine the escape and settlement experiences of the ordinary women and men who figured prominently in these migration streams.<sup>18</sup>

A fourth trend concerns efforts to document the reception that newcomers have received at the hands of the Canadian majority (English or French) and the usually hostile responses that each successive wave of immigrants has evoked. Whether evaluating Canada's popular image as a "haven" to fleeing minorities or dealing primarily with the adjustment patterns of specific groups, the rhetoric of social reformers, the public and private pronouncements of public figures, or deportation procedures, these studies represent an impressive body of work. They also amount

of *Negro History*, 5 (1920), 22-36; his "The Anti-Slavery Society of Canada," *Ontario History*, 48 (1956), 123-32; Peter C. Ripley, ed., *The Black Abolitionist Papers Vol II Canada* (Chapel Hill 1986). Recent social histories include Peggy Bristow, et al., eds., *We're Rooted Here They Can't Pull Us Up: Essays in African Canadian Women's History* (Toronto 1994). On Asian immigration see note 23.

<sup>17</sup>Owen Thomas, "African Canadian History and Commemorative Plaques in Ontario," Conference on Spectacle, Monument and Memory in History, York University, April 1995.

<sup>18</sup>On propaganda and the Loyalist heritage, see Carl Berger, *The Sense of Power: Studies in the Ideas of Canadian Imperialism, 1867-1914* (Toronto 1970). Scholarly works include C.M. Johnston, ed., *The Valley of the Six Nations* (Toronto 1964); Neil Mackinnon, *This Unfriendly Soil: The Loyalist Experience in Nova Scotia 1783-1791* (Montréal 1986); James St G. Walker, *The Black Loyalists: The Search for a Promised Land in Nova Scotia and Sierra Leone, 1783-1870* (New York 1976); Phyllis R. Blakely and John N. Grant, eds., *Eleven Exiles: Accounts of Loyalists of the American Revolution* (Toronto 1982); Janice Potter Mackinnon, *While the Women Only Wept: Loyalist Refugee Women in Eastern Ontario* (Montréal 1993).



to a scathing indictment of Canadians' treatment of racial and ethnic minorities.<sup>19</sup> Canada has yet to produce cross-national and sweeping overviews of racism and anti-immigrant sentiment comparable, for example, to John Higham's pioneering work for the United States.<sup>20</sup> With the exception of Howard Palmer's analysis of "patterns of prejudice" in Alberta, itself influenced by Higham,<sup>21</sup> Canadian specialists have focused instead on hostility directed at a particular group. Among the best studies of racism are recent additions to the literature on anti-semitism, including Irving Abella and Harold Troper's *None Is Too Many*,<sup>22</sup> and Kay Anderson's *Vancouver's Chinatown*, which is the most sophisticated work to date on anti-Asian racism and racialized discourses. The list of intellectual and political histories of anti-Asian racism is impressive<sup>23</sup> but the social history of Asians remains slim.<sup>24</sup> Much of the work on nativism and racism, furthermore, has not

<sup>19</sup>This literature is vast: see, for example, A.R. Allen, ed., *The Social Gospel in Canada* (Ottawa, 198); Valverde, *Age of Light, Soap and Water*; Harold Troper, *Only Farmers Need Apply* (Toronto 1972); Donald Avery, *'Dangerous Foreigners': European Immigrant Workers and Labour Radicalism in Canada 1896-1932* (Toronto 1979); Barbara Roberts, *Whence They Came: Deportation from Canada 1900-1935* (Ottawa 1988); Satzewich, *Racism*; and references in note 23.

<sup>20</sup>John Higham, *Strangers in the land: Patterns of American Nativism* (New Brunswick 1955) has undergone many reprintings.

<sup>21</sup>Howard Palmer, *Patterns of Prejudice: A History of Nativism in Alberta* (Toronto 1982).

<sup>22</sup>Irving Abella and Harold Troper, *None Is Too Many: Canada and the Jews of Europe 1933-1948* (Toronto 1982); Ester Deslile, *The Traitor and the Jew: Anti-Semitism and the Delirium of Extreme Right-wing Nationalism in French Canada from 1929-1939* (Montréal/Toronto 1993).

<sup>23</sup>Kay Anderson, *Vancouver's Chinatown: Racial Discourses in Canada, 1875-1980* (Montréal 1991); W. Peter Ward, *White Canada Forever: Popular Attitudes and Public Policy Towards Orientals in British Columbia* (Montréal 1988); Patricia Roy, "The Oriental 'Menace' in British Columbia," in J. Frieson and H.K. Ralston, eds., *Historical Essays on British Columbia* (Toronto 1976); also see her *A White Man's Province: British Columbia Politicians and Chinese and Japanese Immigration, 1858-1914* (Vancouver 1989); Peter Li, *The Chinese in Canada* (Toronto 1988); Forrest E. LaViolette, *The Canadian Japanese and World War Two* (Toronto 1948); A.G. Sunahara, *The Politics of Racism: The Uprooting of the Japanese Canadians during the Second World War* (Toronto 1981); Hugh Johnston, *The Voyage of the Komagata Maru: The Sikh Challenge to Canada's Colour Bar* (Delhi 1979).

<sup>24</sup>For example, Anthony Chan, *Gold Mountain: The Chinese in the New World* (Vancouver 1983); Edgar Wickberg, et al., *China to Canada: A History of the Chinese communities in Canada* (Toronto 1982); Hugh Johnston, "The Development of the Punjabi Community in Vancouver since 1961," *Canadian Ethnic Studies*, 20 (1988); Tamara Adilman, "A Preliminary Sketch of Chinese Women's Work in British Columbia," in B. Latham and R. J. Pazdro, eds., *Not Just Pin Money* (Victoria 1984); Women's Committee, Chinese Canadian National Council, *Jin Guo: Voices of Chinese Canadian Women* (Toronto 1992).

fully considered the gendered dimensions of anti-immigrant/minority discourses. Gendering the construct, "foreigner," would no doubt add to a fuller understanding of the contradictory strains that usually inform racist and ethnic stereotypes.

*Transforming the Field: New Immigration History 1970s-1990s*

NOTWITHSTANDING THE PERSISTENCE of certain trends in the field, the character and aims of Canadian immigration history since the 1970s have undergone profound changes. As with working-class and women's history, the new immigration history surfaced as a branch of what has long been called the new social history, with its emphases on doing history "from the bottom up" and on "agency." Just as US and British labour and women's historians significantly affected developments in Canada in these respective fields, Canadian immigration history was heavily influenced by the pioneering works of US immigration specialists who in the late 1960s began producing new social histories of immigrants. Primarily specialists of volunteer, European rural immigrants who entered the United States during the industrial years from the mid-19th century to the 1920s, these historians undermined the Handlin model of uprootedness and offered several intriguing findings and conclusions. In place of Handlin's abruptly dislocated rural villagers, they discovered artisans, peasants, and labourers responding rationally to the threats that spreading industrial capitalism in the European countryside posed to their customary ways of work and life. Handlin had depicted European emigrants as pre-modern peoples whose encounter with the industrial and urban world remade them into modern Americans. The revisionists punctured this modernization model, showing that Europe's sending towns had not been isolated from 'modern' (ie., capitalist) change, and that newcomers, rather than abandoning conventional modes of behaviour used them to adapt to urban, industrial life.<sup>25</sup>

To the very limited extent that Handlin considered gender differences, his immigrants were men robbed of their manly dignity and women prone to sexual assault. In an era before feminist historians' exposure of family violence led us, correctly, to question benign depictions of the patriarchal but corporatist family, the revisionists were primarily concerned to rescue immigrant men and women from racial-ethnic stereotypes and modernization theories that damned them as uneducated, uncouth, undignified, and ill-equipped to improve their lives. A

<sup>25</sup>Vecoli, "Contadini in Chicago"; Timothy Smith, "New Approaches to the History of Immigrants in Twentieth Century America," *American Historical Review*, 71 (1965-66), 1265-79; John Bodnar, "Immigration and Modernization: The Case of Slavic Peasants in America," *Journal of Social History*, 10 (1976), 47-71; John Bodnar, *et al.*, *Lives of Their Own: Blacks, Italians, and Poles in Pittsburgh 1900-1960* (Urbana 1982); Victor Greene, *The Slavic Community on Strike* (Notre Dame 1968); Virginia Yans-McLaughlin, *Family and Community: Italian Immigrants in Buffalo, 1880-1930* (Ithaca 1971); Kathleen Neils Conzen, "Immigrants, Immigrant Neighborhoods and Ethnic Identity: Historical Issues," *Journal of American History*, 66 (1979), 603-15; her *Immigrant Milwaukee 1836-1860*.

family-strategies approach, and a materialist framework that acknowledged the sexual division of labour within pre- and post-migration households, also confirmed the centrality of work in ordinary peoples' lives and recognized their efforts at self-empowerment.

While US scholars took the lead in reshaping immigrant history, Canadian historians soon became critical contributors to the field and there has been considerable dialogue between scholars from both nations. Moreover, immigrant history continues to evolve in response to new research, of which the most challenging has been feminist-inspired studies of women, family, and community.<sup>26</sup>

Focusing on Canada, several approaches came to characterize historical treatments of immigrants during the 1980s and early 1990s. First, as historians increasingly sought to present the immigrant perspective — that is, to privilege the vantage point of the immigrants — there was a noticeable shift away from studying policy, policy-makers, and the views or stereotypes of host-society observers and towards documenting the immigrants' motives, strategies, and experiences. Scholars undertook to write internal histories of specific groups. This task involved efforts at reconstructing the material, emotional and social worlds of immigrants in the old society and new. Historians documented the internal dynamics of the ethnic community, and charted the development of ethnic organizations and the rise of ethnic group identities. The written records generated by immigrants and their associations and institutions, such as personal letters and diaries, the minutes of mutual benefit societies and union locals, foreign-language newspapers, and the audit books of remittance offices, became indispensable tools in a collective project aimed at giving voice to Canadian history's marginalized majority.

For those historians in a position to record living subjects, oral history was also embraced as a device that offered access to the stories of those traditionally silenced and provided a way of moving beyond the 'biased' accounts of 'outsiders.' Researchers hoped to enter the private and public arenas of immigrants from the perspective of the 'insider,' and to critically examine the customs, beliefs, behaviour, and even patriarchal structures of households and communities in ways that

<sup>26</sup>For example, see Hasia Diner, *Erin's Daughters in America* (Baltimore 1983); Donna Gabaccia, "Immigrant Women: Nowhere at Home?," *Journal of American Ethnic History*, 10 (Summer 1991), 61-87; Micaela di Leonardo, *The Varieties of Ethnic Experience: Kinship, Class, and Gender Among California Italian-Canadians* (Ithaca 1984); Elizabeth Ewen, *Immigrant Women in the Land of Dollars: Life and Culture on the Lower East Side* (New York 1985); Evelyn Nakano Glen, *Issei, Nisei, Warbride: Three Generations of Japanese American Women in Domestic Service* (Philadelphia 1986); also see the forum on immigrant women's history in *Journal of American Ethnic History*, 11 (1992); Miriam Cohen, *Workshop to Office: Two Generations of Italian Women in New York City, 1900-1950* (Ithaca 1992); Franca Iacovetta, "Writing Women into Immigration History: The Italian Canadian Case," *Altreitalie*, 9 (1993), 24-47; Ruth Frager, *Sweatshop Strife: Class, Ethnicity and Gender in the Jewish Labour Movement of Toronto 1900-1939* (Toronto 1992).

did not 'exoticize' the 'foreigner.' Specialists deploying retrospective interviews have contributed enormously to our understanding of immigrants as historical actors, uncovering hitherto hidden or obscured aspects of immigrant lives and writing an ethnic history that is respectful of its subjects.<sup>27</sup>

As with other enthusiastic advocates of this methodology, immigration historians have not always been sufficiently attuned to its attendant problems, including the thorny question: whose stories do we actually 'tell' when we reconstruct an informant's narrative? The presupposition that we can actually 'get at' the subjective experiences of our subjects has come under much criticism. So has the naive assumption that oral testimonies are an unmediated text, an authentic voice.<sup>28</sup> Critical points regarding the complex role that memory, self-interest, and self-preservation play in shaping retrospective testimonies and the interventionist role the researcher plays in creating the testimonial have been especially forcefully made in feminist works on the rape and torture narratives of women in wartime and in refugee camps. As Marlene Epp has observed, a pattern common to such recollections concerns the storyteller, who recounts the torture in a third person narrative, providing details that only a victim could know or describing a situation she could not possibly have escaped but all the while denying that it had happened to her.<sup>29</sup> Ethnic historians are not immune from such epistemological and political challenges simply because they may interview those who belong to their own racial-ethnic group and gender. But recognizing the limits of oral history hardly justifies dismissing it, any more than the fragmentary and biased character of preserved written records should prompt us to abandon the archives.

A second and related approach shared by new immigration historians concerns a commitment to documenting the agency of immigrants, especially those men and

<sup>27</sup>Robert Harney, *Oral Testimony and Ethnic Studies* (Toronto 1978); Marlene Epp, "The Memory of Violence: Mennonite Refugees and Rape in World War II," paper presented to the Canadian Historical Association Calgary, 1994; Virginia Yans-McLaughlin, "Metaphors of Self in History: Subjectivity, Oral Narratives and Immigration Studies," in her ed., *Immigration Reconsidered: History, Sociology and Politics* (New York 1990); and, more generally, Ronald J. Greele, ed., *Envelopes of Sound* (Chicago 1975); Raphael Samuel and Paul Thompson, eds., *The Myths We Live By* (London 1990).

<sup>28</sup>Anne Oakely, "Interviewing Women: A Contradiction in Terms," in Helen Roberts, ed., *Doing Feminist Research* (London 1975); Greele ed., *Envelopes*; Michael Frisch, "The Memory of History," *Radical History Review*, 25 (1981); Susan Gerger, "What's So Feminist About Doing Women's Oral History," *Journal of Women's History*, 2, 1 (Spring 1990); Paul Thompson, *Our Common History* (New York 1982); Pierson, "Experience, Dominance"; Sherma Gluck and Daphne Patai, eds., *Women's Words* (New York 1991).

<sup>29</sup>Epp, "Memory of Violence"; the essays by Patricia K. Robin Herbst and Amy Friedman in Ellen Cole, et al., eds., *Refugee Women and Their Mental Health: Shattered Societies, Shattered Lives* (Binghamton 1992); Annemarie Troeger, "German Women's Memories of World War II," in Margaret Randolph Higonnet, et al., eds., *Behind the Lines: Gender and the Two World Wars* (New Haven 1987).

women denied access to the centres of power and wealth, and to making the daily stuff of their lives — the household, neighbourhood, kin networks, ethnic hall, radical reading group, religious celebration, and nationalist organization — the chief subject. Far from simply providing justification for the study of private matters and inconsequential lives, this approach insists that agency in society is not exclusively the domain of the powerful and privileged. Subordinated and disadvantaged groups can also exercise choice, mount resistance (or alternatively, orchestrate their accommodation with the dominant ethos), and wield some influence. As Roberto Perin has argued, immigrants need to be understood as protagonists in the transformative processes in which they were involved.<sup>30</sup> And that includes the exploitative contexts they had to negotiate, whether that meant escaping worsening economic conditions or class tensions in their homeland, greasing the palms of recruiting agents and shipping captains profiting from the overseas traffic in humans, and joining kin and co-nationals in low-paid occupational clusters in the new economy. This perspective reflects, of course, a rejection of an immigrant-as-victim approach to the subject. It also reveals a dissatisfaction with causal models that offered either a shopping list of push-pull factors or reductionist economic explanations of the phenomenon: namely, that immigration equals the flow of labour to capital.<sup>31</sup> Exploring the particular contexts involved and the specific motives and resources that led certain individuals and groups, but not others, to migrate became important to new immigration historians. For example, the phenomenon of male sojourning was not simply the product of a given economic configuration, that is, reduced job opportunities at home and the presence of work opportunities elsewhere. It was contingent upon the willingness of men and their relations to choose that strategy over others and to take the risks and pay the costs (including separation and potential economic failure) that such a strategy entailed.<sup>32</sup> Case studies of immigrants undertaken during the past two decades have demonstrated not only that immigrants can orchestrate their migration and transplant coping strategies fine-tuned in the villages and towns of their homeland, but

<sup>30</sup>His Introduction in R. Perin and F. Sturino, eds., *Arrangiarsi: The Italian Immigration Experience in Canada* (Montréal 1989).

<sup>31</sup>For example, Philip Taylor, *Distant Magnet: European Emigration to the USA* (London 1971).

<sup>32</sup>Robert F. Harney, "Men Without Women: Italian Migrants in Canada, 1885-1935," in B.B. Caroli, L.F. Tomasi, R.F. Harney, eds., *The Italian Immigrant Woman in North America* (Toronto 1978); "Boarding and Belonging: Thoughts on Sojourner Institutions," *Urban History Review*, 2 (1978), 8-37; Bruno Ramirez, "Brief Encounters: Italian Immigrant Workers and the CPR, 1900-1930," *Labour/Le Travail*, 17 (1986), 9-27; Anthony Chan, "'Orientalism and Image Making: The Sojourner in Canadian History,'" *Journal of Ethnic Studies*, 9 (Fall 1981); and his *Gold Mountain*.

they actively recreate cherished features of their culture and community in the new context.<sup>33</sup>

New immigration historians have also contributed persuasive arguments for redefining the meaning of immigrant adaptation and adjustment. Their basis for doing so contrasts sharply both with earlier Whiggish interpretations that evaluated immigrant success in terms of the rapidity and thoroughness with which newcomers became Canadianized and with social-scientific models designed to measure economic and other indicators of 'integration' into the receiving society. Taking the notion of the immigrant perspective to its logical conclusion, revisionist historians have assessed immigrant lives not so much by externally-generated and class-biased standards of success, such as educational levels or entry into professional occupations, but, rather, by the immigrants' own standards of achievement. Such objectives might range from a desire for comparatively higher incomes, modest workplace improvements, family re-unification, to political freedom and exile, homeownership, or even some vague but heartfelt notion of 'a better future' for one's children. These desires were articulated with the recognition that success, however defined, does not come without considerable costs relating to class exploitation, racism, or fears about losing one's children to the new culture.

New fields of scholarship are often identified with key individuals who provided intellectual leadership at a critical juncture. Just as Canadian working-class history owes much to Gregory Kealey and Bryan Palmer and women's history to Veronica Strong-Boag, Alison Prentice, Ruth Pierson, and others, so does the new immigration history have its important players. A thorough review of Donald Akenson's prodigious output would have to consider his versatile academic career, which includes a high-profile stint posing as feminist expert on cross-dressing women, but here he deserves credit for renewing scholarly interest in the 19th-cen-

<sup>33</sup>For example, Howard Palmer and Tamara Palmer, eds., *Peoples of Alberta: Portraits of Cultural Diversity* (Saskatoon 1985); Ross McCormack, 'Cloth Caps and Jobs: British Immigrant Workers 1900-1930,' in J. Dahlie and T. Fernando, eds., *Ethnicity, Power and Politics in Canada* (Toronto 1981); John Zucchi, *Italians in Toronto: Development of a National Identity, 1875-1935* (Montréal 1988); Bruno Ramirez, *Les Premiers Italiens de Montréal* (Montréal 1987); Donald Akenson, *The Irish in Ontario* (Montréal 1984); his *Being Had: Historians, Evidence and the Irish in North America* (Port Credit 1985); Cecil J. Houston and William Smythe, *Irish Emigration and Canadian Settlement* (Toronto 1990); Bruce Elliot, *Irish Migrants in the Canadas: A New Approach* (Montréal 1988); Franc Sturino, *Forging the Chain: Italian Migration to North America* (Toronto 1990); Marianne McLean, *The Peopling of Glengarry County* (Montréal 1991); Gerald Tulchinsky, *Taking Root: The Origins of the Canadian Jewish Community* (Toronto 1992); Orest T. Martynowch, *Ukrainians in Canada: The Formative Period 1891-1924* (Edmonton 1991); Milda Danys, DP: *Lithuanian Immigration to Canada After the Second World War* (Toronto 1986); Iacovetta, *Such Hardworking People*; Carmela Patrias, *Patriots and Proletarians: The Politicization of Hungarian Immigrants in Canada* (Montréal 1994); the Generation Series.

tury and rural Irish. Bruno Ramirez' capacity for operating within French- and English-Canadian communities remains impressive. The single most important figure to emerge in Canadian ethnic history, however, was the late Robert F. Harney, a US-born and Harvard-trained historian of Italy at the University of Toronto who turned to Canadian immigration and became closely associated with US revisionists like Vecoli. From the late 1970s onward, Harney's influence in Canadian immigrant history was critical not only because he produced a rich body of work, in his case mostly on Italians, but because he developed sophisticated and innovative approaches for the field as a whole. Particularly important was his work on labour agents, the commerce of migration, and sojourning.<sup>34</sup> Scholars were also attracted to Harney's contagious enthusiasm for immigrant studies, his shrewd negotiating skills when reaching out to racial-ethnic communities, and his success in accessing state funds to establish a research institute and publishing house, the Multicultural History Society of Ontario (MHSO). Harney's efforts prompted many graduate students, his own and other's, and established scholars to take up the histories of immigrant groups. Those from non-English speaking backgrounds were encouraged to use their language skills to retrieve the histories of their group. Even while Harney, the American expatriate, felt himself an outsider to the Canadian historical community,<sup>35</sup> he played a pivotal role in establishing a scholarly legitimacy and sound intellectual base for doing immigrant history in Canada.

Any system of categorization is artificial, but I would suggest that recent historical writing about immigrants falls roughly into the three general areas indicated by my paper's title. By 'manly militants,' I refer to studies of immigrant men's involvement in workplace conflicts and radical politics. Whereas both labour and ethnic historians have uncovered manly militants, the immigration specialists have most closely examined the communities and everyday life of newcomers, usually by means of the single group or community study approach. As my term

<sup>34</sup>Harney's work on Italians includes: "The Commerce of Migration," *Canadian Ethnic Studies*, 8 (1977), 42-53; "Boarding and Belonging"; "Men Without Women": "Ambiente and Social Class in North American Little Italies," *Canadian Review of Studies in Nationalism*, 2 (1974), 208-24; "Montreal's King of Italian Labour: A Case Study of Padronism," *Labour/Le Travail*, 4 (1979), 57-84; Harney and Scarpaci, eds., *Little Italies in North America*; Caroli, Harney, and Tomasi, eds., *Italian Immigrant Woman in North America*. See also his "'So Great a Heritage as Ours': Immigration and the Survival of the Canadian Polity," *Daedalus*, 117, 4 (Fall 1988), 51-95; his Introductions to numerous *Polyphony* issues; and George Pozzetta and Bruno Ramirez, eds., *The Italian Diaspora: Migration Across the Globe, Essays in Honour of Robert F. Harney* (Toronto 1992). On Akenson's foray into women's history see his *At Face Value: The Life and Times of Eliza McCormack/John White* (Montréal 1990); Bronwyn Drainie, "An academic imp among the feminists," *Globe and Mail* (Toronto) 15 June 1995 E1; on the Irish, note 33.

<sup>35</sup>See his "Ethnic Studies: Handmaiden of Multiculturalism," paper presented to the Canadian Historical Association (June 1984).

'cohesive communities' suggests, such studies have highlighted the stability and self-sufficiency of ethnic colonies. I have invoked the label 'defiant domestics' to discuss the work on immigrant women because relevant studies reveal a preoccupation with paid work, especially domestic service, and with labour activists.

### *Manly Militants*

ALTHOUGH OFTEN INTERESTED in similar subjects, Canadian immigration and labour historians generally have operated in relative isolation from one other.<sup>36</sup> Animated debates over the primacy of class vs ethnicity sometimes dissolved into hopelessly dichotomized views of history. Tensions were reinforced by a mutual distrust between the Marxist-inspired historians who dominated the new labour history and conservative scholars present among the ranks of ethnic historians. Segregation was reinforced by the rise of parallel but separate infrastructures, namely, journals, research centres, and conferences. Yet, it was precisely this commitment to recovering working-class lives and the alternative cultures of the oppressed that provided opportunities for collaboration between immigrant and labour history. Such collaboration has produced an impressive scholarship on the immigrant working classes and the ethnic left in Canada. This literature spans most British and European groups and Asians and it considers individual leaders, formal organizations, and rank-and-file workers. It examines single racial-ethnic groups and mixed-racial/ethnic working-class communities. The influences of internationally renowned labour historians such as E.P. Thompson and Herbert Gutman are evident. Gutman's work on the proletarianization of US farmers and European peasants and artisans in early industrial America, and the patterns of conflict and resistance that accompanied that process, has particularly informed studies of former Old World peasants, artisans, agricultural labourers, and pedlars who became industrial workers in Canada.<sup>37</sup>

A closer look at developments within Canadian working-class history should illuminate my general observations. The early writings by new labour historians produced rich social histories of the first generations of the Canadian working class in the 19th- and early-20th centuries. These works stressed the capacity of largely British and English-Canadian artisans and skilled workers to resist the industrial regime, to struggle for workshop control, and to provide leadership for an emergent labour movement during an era of industrial transformation. That this work on an

<sup>36</sup>Bruno Ramirez, "Ethnic Studies and Working-Class History," *Labour/Le Travail*, 19 (1987), 45-8; Rudolph Vecoli, "Class and Ethnicity: Italian Immigrants and Working-Class Movements in the United States: A Personal Odyssey," *Journal of the Canadian Historical Association*, N.S. 4 (1993), 293-306; Dirk Hoerder, ed, *'Struggle a Hard Battle': Essays on Working-Class Immigrants* (New York 1985).

<sup>37</sup>Herbert Gutman, *Work, Culture and Society in Industrializing America: Essays in American Working-Class and Social History* (New York 1977); Lindstrom, *Defiant Sisters*; Iacovetta, *Such Hardworking People*; Frager, *Sweatshop Strife*.



Anglo-Celtic labour aristocracy still attracts serious attention attests to its significance.<sup>38</sup> By noting that it was rooted in an analysis of class, culture, and to a lesser extent, gender,<sup>39</sup> yet did not problematize race/ethnicity, I am not interested in merely exposing absences. Rather, I want to ask how we might apply the insights of immigrant history and race studies, including work on the construction of whiteness in Britain and America, to explore whether the construction of the Canadian craftsman was a racialized as well as a gendered and class-delineated process. Since many of the skills and traditions that informed the craftsman's masculinity and (vulnerable) privilege among Canada's working classes were transplanted from Britain, we might explore how such men negotiated the resettlement process, the role played by wives and children, and whether the tradesmen's skills and traditions arrived intact or underwent modification. What difference might it make to our portraits of these men if we took into account their Englishness or Scottishness? How does Irishness complicate the picture? Was their class perspective informed by notions of British manhood, the British race, imperialism, jingoism? We know that British and Anglo-Canadian artisans drew on imperialist metaphors and contrasting images of free (manly) versus slave labour, but we could probe further the racialized context of these and other constructs critical to the early labour movements. Little attention has been paid to artisans from non-Anglo-Celtic backgrounds, though an exception is Joy Parr's analysis of the interplay between masculinity, skill, and 'Germanness' among furniture makers in Hanover, Ontario.<sup>40</sup>

<sup>38</sup>Bryan D. Palmer, *A Culture in Conflict: Skilled Workers and Industrial Capitalism in Hamilton, Ontario, 1860-1914* (Kingston 1979); Gregory S. Kealey, *Toronto Workers Respond to Industrial Capitalism, 1867-1892* (Toronto 1980); several essays in Craig Heron and Robert Storey, eds., *On the Job: Confronting the Labour Process in Canada* (Toronto 1988); Sally Zerker, *The Rise and Fall of the Toronto Typographical Union 1852-1972: A Case Study in Foreign Domination* (Toronto 1981); Ian Mackay, "Capital and Labour in the Halifax Baking and Confectionary Industry during the Last Half of the Nineteenth Century," *Labour/Le Travailleur*, 3 (1978), 63-108; John Battye, "The Nine Hours Pioneers: The Genesis of the Canadian Labour Movement," *Labour/Le Travailleur* 4 (1979) 25-56; Craig Heron, "The Crisis of the Craftsman: Hamilton's Metal Workers in the Early Twentieth Century," *Labour/Le Travail*, 6 (1980), 7-48; and his "Towards Synthesis in Canadian Working-Class History."

<sup>39</sup>Recent gender histories include Christina Burr, "'That Coming Curse' — The Incompetent Compositress": Class and Gender Relations in the Toronto Typographical Union during the Late Nineteenth Century," *Canadian Historical Review*, 74, 3 (September 1993), 149-74.

<sup>40</sup>*The Gender of Breadwinners: Women, Men and Change in Two Industrial Towns, 1880-1950* (Toronto 1990). On the neglect of Québec see Joanne Burgess, "Exploring the Limited Identities of Canadian Labour: Recent Trends in English-Canada and in Quebec," *International Journal of Canadian Studies*, 1-2 (1990).

From the start, the new labour history included a greater diversity of topics and approaches<sup>41</sup> than is suggested by its early association with artisans. The 19th-century Irish working-classes particularly attracted attention. Influenced by Clare Pentland's pioneering discussion of Irish workers as Canada's first industrial proletariat, new labour historians documented the work lives, class conflict, violence, and resistance cultures of Irish (male) workers. Recent work, including Peter Way's fine study of canal workers, suggests the real possibilities of applying a race and gender analysis to Irish working-classes in North America.<sup>42</sup>

Beginning in the late 1970s, ethnic and labour historians also began uncovering a rich history of non-British immigrant militancy and radicalism, particularly for the intensely studied 1880s-1930s era. Earlier, conventional stereotypes of 'foreign' workers as 'unorganizable' — as suffering from false class-consciousness on account of their commitment to ethnic loyalties, or easily duped by employers and conservative elites — were superseded by more complex portraits of ethnic workers who at times engaged in dramatic confrontations at the workplace. By this time, a debate had emerged among North American scholars over the relationship between class-consciousness and ethnic identity. On one side were those, such as the US radical historian Gabriel Kolko, who stressed the fragmentation of the early-20th-century working class that derived from sojourning (that is, successive waves of temporary workers) and ethnic cleavages. In response, various ethnic and labour scholars documented the contribution of European radicalism brought by immigrants to the North American labour scene and particular moments when groups of racially and ethnically diverse workers came together in common struggle. These studies do not undermine a fundamental tenet of the Kolko structuralist thesis — namely, that male sojourning and racial-ethnic conflicts hampered labour solidarity — but they showed how immigrants could simultaneously display class consciousness and a deep commitment to ethnic identity. They brought to light the hitherto unexplored world of immigrant radicals and their historic role in building workers' movements in North America.<sup>43</sup>

<sup>41</sup>For a summary of these themes see Heron, "Towards Synthesis"; Bettina Bradbury, "Women's History and Working-Class History" *Labour/Le Travail*, 19 (1987), 23-43.

<sup>42</sup>H.C. Pentland, "The Lachine Strike of 1843," *Canadian Historical Review*, 29 (1948); *Labour and Capital in Canada, 1850-1860* (Toronto 1983); Michael Cross, "The Shiners' War: Social Violence in the Ottawa Valley in the 1830s," *Canadian Historical Review*, 54 (1973), 1-26; Ruth Bleasdale, "Class Conflict on the Canals of Upper Canada in the 1840s," in Michael S. Cross and Gregory S. Kealey, eds., *Pre-Industrial Canada 1760-1849* (Toronto 1982); Gregory S. Kealey, "The Orange Order in Toronto: Religious Riot and the Working Class," in Gregory S. Kealey and Peter Warrian, eds., *Essays in Working Class History* (Toronto 1976); Peter Way, *Common Labour: Workers and the Digging of North American Canals 1780-1860* (Cambridge 1993).

<sup>43</sup>Gabriel Kolko, *Main Currents in American History* (New York 1976); Edwin Fenton, *Immigrants and Unions* (New York 1970). Contributions to the debate included Greene,

In tackling this theme, some historians focused on a particular group that dominated protest and unionism within an industry. Representative Canadian studies include Ian Radforth's work on Finns in Ontario's 20th-century logging industry and Ruth Frager's study of Jewish needle trades workers in interwar Toronto. As with other ethnic groups that contained a radical constituency, only a minority of Finns or Jews had already been radicalized at home; upon arrival, they established an array of cultural and political organizations. Many of the apolitical immigrants were radicalized in the new contexts primarily as a result of a growing sense of grievance over their class exploitation and the influence of a lively oppositional world that was dominated by an effective leftist leadership. The interplay between politicized newcomers and rank-and-file workers also emerges in studies of multi-ethnic industries and locales that saw immigrant and Canadian workers overcome 'difference' and launch effective class action. Donald Avery's *Dangerous Foreigners* was an important pioneering work on the subject. More recent studies, including Allen Seager's work on Alberta's multi-ethnic mining districts of the Crow's Nest Pass and Patrias' study of a Depression-era strike launched by an ethnically diverse and largely working-class, industrial community of Crowland (Welland), Ontario, particularly graphically illustrate how effective cross-ethnic class solidarities were forged. In accounting for the remarkable degree of unity among immigrant, ethnic and Anglo-Canadians, both authors stress the common experience of workplace exploitation, a rich tapestry of ethnic working-class and radical networks, and a core of militants who negotiated effective alliances.<sup>44</sup>

The most intriguing recent contribution to this topic is Gillian Creese's work on Asian workers. As is well known, the modern Canadian labour movement generally pursued a strategy of excluding Asian workers, and in British Columbia, where Asians were concentrated, white-dominated unions and workers' organizations commonly adopted racist positions. They supported campaigns to boycott Chinese businesses, to replace Asian labour with white labour, and to disallow the

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*Slavic Community on Strike*; Craig Heron, *Working In Steel* (Toronto 1988); Frager, *Sweatshop Strife*.

<sup>44</sup>Ian Radforth, *Bushworkers and Bosses: Logging in Northern Ontario, 1900-1980* (Toronto 1987); Frager, *Sweatshop Strife*; Avery, 'Dangerous Foreigners'; Allan Seager, "Class, Ethnicity, and Politics in the Alberta Coalfields" in Hoerder, ed., 'Struggle A Hard Battle'; "Socialists and Workers: The Western Canadian Coal Miners, 1900-21," *Labour/Le Travail*, 16 (1985), 23-60; Carmela Patrias, *Relief Strike: Immigrant Workers and the Great Depression in Crowland, Ontario 1900-1935* (Toronto 1990). For other contributions see, for example, the special issue on ethnic radicals, *Canadian Ethnic Studies*, 10 (1978); P. Krawchuck, *The Ukrainian Socialist Movement in Canada, 1907-18* (Toronto 1979); John Potestio and Antonio Pucci, eds., *The Italian Immigrant Experience* (Thunder Bay 1988). The Canadian literature on cross-ethnic solidarities among women is thin; see Ester Reiter, "First Class Workers Don't Want Second Class Wages: The Lanark Strike in Dunnville, Ontario," in Joy Parr, ed., *A Diversity of Women: Ontario 1945-80* (Toronto 1995).

employment of white women alongside Asian men. Familiar explanations of this action have focused on economic factors, namely the fierce labour competition between higher-waged whites and low-waged Asians, and the fears that white unionists had of Asians prepared to tolerate sub-standard wages and conditions.<sup>45</sup> Creese has modified the story by uncovering instances of Asian workers' militancy and of cross-racial solidarity between Asian and white workers in Vancouver. The labour movement, she shows, adopted a strategy of racial solidarity during two brief periods of heightened labour radicalism in Canada: the World War I era (1917-21) and the Depression. During the first era, Chinese, Japanese, and East Indian workers, usually in combination with whites, participated in a wave of strikes in the greater Vancouver area, mostly in the lumber and fishing industries. Such collaboration was even more pronounced during the Depression, when Asian workers were actively recruited as comrades, and their issues (equal pay, eliminating the 'Oriental' contract system) were placed on the labour movement's agenda.<sup>46</sup>

Given the radical research sympathies that had drawn historians to the study of immigrant workers during the 1970s and 1980s, it is not surprising that they focused on the 'exceptional' militants. Workers who did not engage in strike action, or indeed, acted as strikebreakers, were largely ignored, except in a few instances. Craig Heron's studies of steelworkers, and Ramirez' consideration of Italian migrants in resource and railway jobs, both offered sound structural and cultural explanations for the apparent disinterest of Europeans, especially sojourners, in the mainstream Canadian labour movement. Their studies suggest that migrant workers were not entirely docile, but their limited commitment to workers' struggles was influenced by the brevity of their encounter with Canadian workplaces and workers and their relative absence (vis-à-vis Canadian workers) from the better skilled and more protected jobs. As sojourners bent on returning home with a nest egg, and as highly dispensable workers operating in a constantly replenished labour market, one effective way to protest exploitative conditions was to escape them.<sup>47</sup>

As Canadian working-class history's focus on craftsmen in the industrializing era widened to include later-arriving immigrants from Europe who entered the new mass industries like steel-making as well as logging and mining, scholars demonstrated that workers deemed by outsiders to be unskilled developed critical if more specialized skills. Such workers could also derive considerable manly pride from

<sup>45</sup>For example, A. Ross McCormack, *Reformers, Rebels, and Revolutionaries: The Western Canadian Radical Movement 1899-1919* (Toronto 1977); Ward, *White Canada Forever*.

<sup>46</sup>Gillian Creese, "Solidarity or Exclusion?": Vancouver Workers Confront the "Oriental Problem," *BC Studies*, 80 (1988), 24-51. See also her "Organizing Against Racism in the Workplace: Chinese Workers in Vancouver Before the Second World War," *Canadian Ethnic Studies*, 19 (1987), 35-46; "Class, Ethnicity and Conflict: The Case of Chinese and Japanese Immigrants 1880-1923," in R. Warburton and D. Coburn, eds., *Workers, Capital and the State in British Columbia — Selected Papers* (Vancouver 1988).

<sup>47</sup>Ramirez, "Brief Encounters"; Heron, *Working In Steel*.

that fact, suggesting that 'manliness' among working men was not the exclusive property of the highly skilled.<sup>48</sup> If the earlier work on artisanal 'manliness' did not consider 'Britishness,' neither did these newer studies of immigrant workers explore the links between masculinity and ethnicity. There is little effort to understand minority male workers' gender identities with respect to workplace or labour process issues, or in terms of Old World cultural and patriarchal values, pre-migration traditions of male sojourning and male breadwinning, and how such patterns were negotiated in the new context. Whether the subject was Finnish communists, Ukrainian miners, or Italian freight-handlers, the analysis of manliness if it appeared was cast in terms of class considerations, but not their intersection with racial-ethnic ones. An exception is Harney's now 15-year old essay on Italian sojourners in remote railway, lumber, and mining camps between 1885 and 1930; it explores how such men struggled to meet the requirements of heterosexual manhood as they understood them amid the brutalizing conditions of the Canadian frontier and while separated from the wives, children, and hometown people to whom they felt an allegiance. By contrast, Anthony Chan's study of Chinese workers in British Columbia provides fascinating descriptions of the bachelor cultures of lone men — crowded boarding houses, opium parlours, and gambling establishments — but leaves the issue of masculinity unexamined. His work also suggests the need for rigorous analyses of how Chinese men's association with 'female jobs' (the houseboy, the laundry worker) shaped their self-identity as men.<sup>49</sup> New gender histories of immigrant workers and their households and communities have begun to explore such interconnections, but much of this work is still unpublished.<sup>50</sup>

### *Cohesive Communities*

IN RECENT YEARS, scholars have quite rightly urged that more attention be paid to the links between workers and families, households, and neighbourhoods, and to

<sup>48</sup>For example, Heron, *Working In Steel*; Heron and Storey, eds., *On the Job*; Radforth, *Bushworkers and Bosses*; Seager, "Alberta Coalfields"; his "Finnish Canadians and the Ontario Miners' Movement," *Polyphony*, 3 (1981), 35-45; issue on ethnic radicals, *Canadian Ethnic Studies*; Martynowych, *Ukrainians in Canada*; Patrias, *Relief Strike*; and other references in fn. 44.

<sup>49</sup>Harney, "Men Without Women"; Chan, *Gold Mountain*. On Chinese men and "female" jobs, see Ronald Takaki, *Iron Cages: Race and Culture in Nineteenth Century America* (New York 1979).

<sup>50</sup>It includes Nancy Forestell, "All That Glitters Is Not Gold: The Gendered Dimensions of Work, Family and Community Life in the Northern Ontario Goldmining Town of Timmins, 1909-1950," PhD thesis, OISE/Toronto, 1993; Robert Ventresca, "Cowering Women, Combative Men? Femininity, Masculinity and Ethnicity On Strike in Two Southern Ontario Towns, 1964-66" paper presented to Canadian Studies Annual Meeting, Montréal, June 1995; Constance Backhouse, "The White Woman Labour Laws in Western Canada," (mss. 1994; my thanks to the author for sending it to me).

documenting the daily activities and struggles of workers and members of working-class families to achieve a modicum of security in a patriarchal, capitalist society.<sup>51</sup> Immigration historians have not addressed sufficiently the gendered nature of work and family life, but their community studies have contributed enormously to our growing knowledge of immigrant workers' lives outside the workplace, especially those non-militant workers rarely given a face in labour histories. Specialized studies of Ukrainians, Italians, Poles, Mennonites, Hungarians, and other communities in a variety of Canadian locales have explored to varying degrees the private and social arenas that workers inhabited off the job — households, neighbourhoods, social and political clubs, places of worship, language classes, and theatre. Much of this work has appeared in the form of detailed case studies of a single racial-ethnic group in which the overall emphasis is on the gradual but successful adaptation to the new society and on the institutional completeness of ethnic communities. While recent works on the 19th-century Irish and on the homesteaders of turn-of-the-century western Canada have dealt with rural contexts, 20th-century works highlight urban locales, especially Montréal and Toronto.

The racial-ethnic community approach was and remains popular among immigration historians precisely because it offers a valuable framework for demonstrating the richness and diversity of immigrant life. What earlier observers dubbed ethnic ghettos or marginal communities were shown instead to have been dynamic colonies of settlement characterized by a vibrant associational life, complex internal class and political divisions, and a decided 'ambience.' Scholars have emphasized the innovative ways in which immigrants recreated valued pre-migration rituals and organizations but also initiated new ones. These studies tend to highlight the movers and shakers, or ethnic elites, of the immigrant world, be they the shopkeepers and other 'ethnic' small businessmen applauded for building institutional infrastructures; the steamship agents and other 'middle men' who though possibly despised were critical links in the commerce of migration; and middle-class intellectuals and religious figures of various political persuasions who supplied leadership to the community's associational life. But they are also sensitive to the subtle differences of rank and power evident in a community comprised predominantly of working-class and lower middle-class members, where the smallest gradations of wealth, education, and status take on enormous significance. Whether dealing exclusively with the immigrant generation or considering multi-generational patterns, such studies also deploy a similar analysis of immigrant adjustment. In reacting to the new challenges of their adopted society, it is usually

<sup>51</sup> An fine example is Bettina Bradbury, *Working Families: Age, Gender, and Daily Survival in Industrializing Montreal* (Toronto 1993). See also Rayna Rapp, Ellen Ross, Renate Bridenthal, "Examining Family History," *Feminist Studies*, 5 (1979), 174-200; Louise Tilly and Miriam Cohen, "Does the Family Have a History?: A Review of Theory and Practise in Family History," *Social Science History*, 6 (1982), 131-79.

argued, the newcomers were neither completely untouched nor completely remade into Canadians. Rather, an unique synthesis emerged in the form of the distinct racial-ethnic community being scrutinized.

But while the community study has done much to give face and voice to immigrants, it has led to some excesses and distortions of its own. Not least of these difficulties was a tendency, more evident earlier on than recently, towards rushed and superficial histories of specific racial-ethnic groups. The most graphic illustrations of this problem can be found in the Generation Series, that uneven series of volumes on Canada's ethnic groups launched in the 1970s with monies from the then Secretary of State for Multiculturalism. As Perin has observed, with some exceptions (for example, the volumes on Hungarians and Portuguese), the monographs in this series have little to offer social historians. Intended as books of synthesis, most authors were unable to draw on a firm base of historical research. The weakest volumes are ahistorical in approach, and the analyses deploy rigid and static concepts of family, culture, community activism, and ethnic persistence. At best, women receive superficial attention. The series has all the characteristics of a project prematurely mounted.<sup>52</sup>

Even confining ourselves to relatively sophisticated works, some worrying tendencies emerge.<sup>53</sup> In seeking to rescue immigrants from their traditional status as history's downtrodden masses, new immigration historians have revealed an overly zealous desire to celebrate agency, resiliency, and immigrant success. This tendency has resulted in a steady stream of case studies of immigrant groups and communities that downplay or ignore the ways in which the state, class position, racism, patriarchy, and other structural and cultural barriers can seriously curb choice or create insurmountable barriers. In presenting respectable portraits of immigrants, comparatively little attention is paid either to the tragic casualties of the migration process — the deserted wives of the old village who spent their remaining lives 'waiting' for their men in 'America' to return home or call them over, the men dead or permanently disfigured from unsafe jobs, the women and

<sup>52</sup>Perin, "Clio as an Ethnic"; the books in the Generation series include: Karl Aun, *The Political Refugees: A History of Estonians in Canada* (Toronto 1986); Baha Abu-Luban, *An Olive Branch on the Family Tree: The Arabs in Canada* (Toronto 1980); Peter Chimbos, *The Canadian Odyssey: The Greek Experience in Canada* (Toronto 1980); Gulbrand Loken, *From Fiord to Frontier: A History of Norwegians in Canada* (Toronto 1980); N.F. Dreisziger, et al., *Struggle and Hope: The Hungarian-Canadian Experience* (Toronto 1982); Manoly Lupul, ed., *A Heritage in Transition: Essays in the History of Ukrainians in Canada* (Toronto 1982); Henry Radecki and Benedykt Heydenkorn, *A Member of a Distinguished Family: The Polish Group in Canada* (Toronto 1976); Anthony Rasporich, *For a Better Life: A History of the Croatians in Canada* (Toronto 1983); Edgar Wickberg, et al., *From China to Canada* (Toronto 1982).

<sup>53</sup>Several such examples may be found in the references contained in notes 24, 33, and 34 (and, for the US, 25).

children living in terror of an abusive husband, boarder, or employer — or to the psychological scars the migration experience engendered even for the more successful immigrants. A 'rags-to-riches' storyline, as Harney once observed, is also dangerous in that it creates the false notion that immigrants who genuinely exploit opportunities inevitably achieve success. The immigrant experience is really many diverse experiences and responses; it is a social phenomenon shot through with such a multiplicity of meanings that cannot adequately be captured by the dichotomy: immigrant versus victim. Frameworks that move us beyond a simple dualism, that challenge us to probe dialectical tensions, that encourage us to capture rather than conveniently explain away or downplay 'uneven developments,' to use Mary Poovey's phrase,<sup>54</sup> should be explored and debated. The transitional contexts in which immigrants constantly negotiated their class, gender and racial-ethnic identities particularly requires more careful scrutiny.

Another worrying trend concerns the Whiggish and linear analysis evident in immigrant community studies, where, with time, cohesive societies and an ethnic group identity inevitably develop out of clusterings of newcomers. It has also led to studies that seriously downplay political, class, gender, and other differences within such collectivities even while they are identified. Many community-based studies refer to class and political tensions, for example, but few carefully examine the nature and repercussions of such conflicts, although two important exceptions include Orest Martynowych's *Ukrainians in Canada*, the best study yet to appear recently in Ukrainian-Canadian studies, and Patrias' exploration of the left versus right camps within Canada's Hungarian communities.<sup>55</sup>

This tendency towards homogenizing immigrant experiences has also taken the form of analyses that, implicitly or explicitly, assume that male elites — the ethnic community's public figures, institution-builders, and spokespeople (self-proclaimed or otherwise) — genuinely represent the community and that their actions reflect expressions of ethnic-group identity. This insistence upon identifying an ethnic identity with the rhetoric and actions of ethnic elites, for example, shapes many of the Generation Series monographs. But this thread also runs through sophisticated histories, including John Zucchi's pioneering monograph on Toronto's pre-World War II Italians. Zucchi carefully identifies the various constituencies that made up the city's early Italian communities — for example, workers, clerics, small businessmen, pro- and anti-fascists — and offers fascinating material on the great class and cultural divide that separated newly-arrived immigrants from 'their' clerics, but his main intention is evident from the book's subtitle, 'Development of a National Identity.' It sits uncomfortably atop his own evidence of the continuing regional, class, political, and other differences that shaped relations within the group.<sup>56</sup>

<sup>54</sup>Mary Poovey, *Uneven Developments: The Ideological Work of Gender in Mid-Victorian England* (Chicago 1988); Harney, "Ethnic Studies."

<sup>55</sup>Martynowych, *Ukrainians in Canada*; Patrias, *Patriots and Proletarians*.

<sup>56</sup>Zucchi, *Italians in Toronto*.



In seeking to rescue immigrant communities from marginal status, the revisionists have in some cases also produced insular portraits of these communities, portraits that ignore the 'others' in their neighbourhood, including other newcomers, or the 'outsiders' whom the immigrants inevitably encountered within and outside their neighbourhood. We know that immigrant communities are not composed entirely of the members of one racial-ethnic group, that immigrants inevitably come into contact with 'others,' and that plenty of immigrants have lived outside the mainstream ethnic community, either by choice or circumstance. But few studies devote much space to these patterns. Few Canadian studies, moreover, explore the relations between racial-ethnic groups even though we know that mutual suspicion or outright animosity among immigrants of different racial-ethnic background is a recurring theme in Canada's history. Harold Troper and Morton Wienfeld's examination of Jewish-Ukrainian relations in the context of Nazi war criminal investigations is a notable exception.<sup>57</sup> Similarly, few immigrant community studies consider carefully the many encounters that occurred between immigrants and those members of the host society who also affected immigrant life: medical officials, social workers, factory managers, school teachers, family-court lawyers and judges, and neighbours. Immigrant life is rendered more rich when the range of relevant phenomena and interplay of forces are considered. These encounters are complex phenomena and exploring them carefully may move us towards a better comprehension of the connections and intersections between public institutions and private lives. Schooling patterns exhibited by immigrant children, for example, could reflect as much the intrusion of the state into family life as the strategies of immigrant parents. Recent work on the impact of the welfare state in women's and workers' lives, including Linda Gordon's impressive study of family violence and child protection agencies in Boston, points to the profoundly gendered, racialized, and class-based character of these encounters.<sup>58</sup>

Where Canadian immigrant community studies have been especially weak is in detailing the lives of women and probing gender relations. This literature generally has assumed heterosexual male behaviour and male-dominated public activity to define the immigrant experience. Such neglect of women and gender relations is particularly ironic given that the new immigration history has especially highlighted the role of family and household members and kin networks in the emigration and resettlement process. Like non-feminist family historians who eschew a gendered perspective, some ethnic historians have obscured women's lives even while they applaud struggling families. Women are subsumed under the

<sup>57</sup> Harold Troper and Morton Weinfield, *Old Wounds: Jews, Ukrainians, and the Hunt for Nazi War Criminals in Canada* (Markham 1989).

<sup>58</sup> Linda Gordon, *Heroes of Their own Lives: The Politics and History of Family Violence* (New York 1980); Gordon, ed., *Women, the State and Welfare* (Madison 1990). The schooling example is from Miriam Cohen, *From Workshop to Office: Two Generations of Italian Women in New York City, 1900-1950* (Ithaca 1992).

rubric of 'the family' and are thereby rendered invisible. The family itself becomes reified; it is presented as a disentangled unit rather than a collection of people (with differing interests and influence) and is credited with ensuring the greatest (and equal) good for all its members. Hence, immigration historians talk of the family decision to emigrate, the family's work ethos, and the familialist values of immigrants without really exploring how members within families negotiated such decisions and values. They talk of the flexible family capable of withstanding capitalist and other pressures, but feminist insights regarding gender and power dynamics within families and households are entirely ignored. Few immigration historians, for example, have treated the family as an arena of multiple relations, usually between members with unequal power. The argument that ethnic families were characterized by a corporatist work ethos that bound the members of the household together does not mean that the family was necessarily an egalitarian institution. We know otherwise: family life was a contested terrain. It could be simultaneously a site of support and oppression, particularly for women.

Donna Gabaccia has observed, for instance, that in the US few immigrant community studies treat women's lives seriously. Those that do integrate women's experiences tend to focus on those forms of public behaviour that most closely correspond to male activity, especially wage-earning patterns, workplace employment, and labour activism. These observations apply equally to Canadian ethnic community studies: neglected or ignored are precisely those phenomena, such as childbearing and rearing, housework and other forms of reproductive work, sexuality, and marital relations, that are specific to women's lives. In part, this absence, as Gabaccia suggests, reflects the assumption that such behaviour had little direct impact on immigrant community life, as defined by public activities and institution-building.<sup>59</sup> Rectifying this bias will require, of course, more than simply adding in aspects of women's so-called private lives; it will entail efforts to examine the interplay between 'private' and 'public' behaviour for both men and women. This is a strength of Royden Loewen's work on Mennonite communities in Manitoba and Nebraska: he integrates women's reproductive lives, farm roles, religious worldview, and their encounters with urban and secular forces, into his central analyses concerning the patterns of change and continuity that characterized Mennonite life over several generations.<sup>60</sup> Indeed, I would urge redefining our working notions of community life so as to give credence to the 'unofficial' but equally important forms of social life at which women excelled: as the friends and confidants of the other women of their neighbourhood, as the social covenors of their extended circle of kin, and as the behind-the-scenes organizers of many public events. Such a view of community life would get us beyond conventional institu-

<sup>59</sup>Gabaccia, "Immigrant Women: Nowhere At Home?"; Iacovetta, "Writing Women into Immigration History."

<sup>60</sup>Royden Loewen, *Family, Church and Market: A Mennonite Community in the Old and New Worlds 1850-1930* (Toronto 1993).

tional histories that relegate women to the brief section on the ladies' auxiliaries. It would make *their* networks and the very stuff of *their* everyday lives a primary concern. Gendering community life will surely produce more nuanced and multi-layered portraits of immigrant communities.

### *Defiant Domestic*

THE HISTORICAL LITERATURE on Canada's immigrant women has been dominated by two major themes, both of them related to work and working-class issues and both concerning women who were in important respects exceptional: domestic servants and labour activists. In the case of some groups, such as the interwar Finns whose histories Varpu Lindstrom has particularly brought to our attention, some of the women were both domestics and defiant. Other themes have also emerged in this scholarship, including the homesteading activities of pioneer women in the Canadian west and the volunteer activities of women within their respective racial-ethnic colonies.<sup>61</sup> But immigrant maids and ethnic activists have received disproportionate attention.

The subject of domestic service, especially its exploitative features, has long interested Marxist, labour, and women's historians and historical social scientists in Canada. By the 1980s scholars were paying closer attention to the critical role that immigrants played in shaping this history.<sup>62</sup> Taken together, this literature reveals several shifts in focus and approach. It has undergone, for instance, a general shift from an earlier preoccupation with recruitment and domestic training

<sup>61</sup> Works on homesteading include Linda Rasmussen, *et al.*, eds., *A Harvest Yet to Reap: A History of Prairie Women* (Toronto 1976); Eliane Leslau Silverman, *The Last Best West: Women on the Alberta Frontier 1880-1930* (Montréal 1984); on community activities see note 71.

<sup>62</sup> A valuable overview of this literature, much of it in article form, is Marilyn Barber, *Immigrant Domestic Servants in Canada* (Ottawa 1991). The list includes Genevieve Leslie, "Domestic Service in Ontario," in Janice Acton, ed., *Women At Work: Ontario 1850-1930* (Toronto 1974); Barbara Roberts, "'A Work of Empire': Canadian Reformers and British Female Immigration," in Linda Kealey, ed., *A Not Unreasonable Claim: Women and Reform in Canada 1880s-1920s* (Toronto 1979); Varpu Lindstrom, "'I Won't Be a Slave!' - Finnish Domestic in Canada, 1911-30," in Jean Burnet, ed., *Looking In My Sister's Eyes: An Exploration in Women's History* (Toronto 1986); her *Defiant Sisters*; Isabel Kaprelian, "Women and Work: the Case of Finnish Domestic and Armenian Boarding House Operators," *Resources for Feminist Research*, 12 (1983/4), 53-60; Marlene Epp, "The Mennonite Girls' Home of Winnipeg: A Home Away from Home," *Journal of Mennonite Studies*, 6 (1988), 100-14; Franca Iacovetta, "Primitive Villagers and Uneducated Girls: Canada Recruits Domestic from Italy," *Canadian Woman Studies*, 7 (1986), 14-8; Milda Danys, *DP*; Makeda Silvera, *Silenced* (Toronto 1983); Frances Henry, "The West Indian Domestic Scheme in Canada," *Social and Economic Studies*, 17 (1968), 83-91; Agnes Calliste, "Canada's Immigration Policy and Domestic from the Caribbean: The Second Domestic Scheme," in Vorst, ed., *Race, Class and Gender*.

schemes and with the predicaments of middle-class Canadian mistresses keen to find a maid, to the class experiences and perspectives of the immigrant domestics themselves. Writing about domestic servants thus parallels developments in immigration history, particularly as regards the shift from outsider to insider perspective. Whereas the voluminous official records and correspondence generated by successive government- and company-sponsored domestic recruitment schemes have enabled scholars to examine the biases and implementation of immigration policy, the sources that have proven especially valuable to women's history, namely diaries, letters, and, where applicable, oral testimonies, have helped scholars unpack the immigrant's perspective. Studies that have drawn upon both 'insider' and 'outsider' records, including Marilyn Barber's instalments on British maids,<sup>63</sup> and Parr's work on juvenile domestics, have revealed the complex interplay between those on the scheming and those on the receiving end of immigration schemes.<sup>64</sup>

A second and related shift concerns the recognition of the changing racial-ethnic composition of Canada's immigrant female domestic workers from the 19th century to the present. Thus, a literature once dominated by historical work on British women who arrived during the late-19th and early-20th centuries now includes studies of European domestics who came during the era of World War I and the interwar period, especially Finns, as well as historical and sociological examinations of the post-1945 recruits from among the Displaced Persons camps of war-torn Europe and, later, from the so-called non-western sources such as the West Indies and South East Asia. In undertaking their respective case studies, scholars explored the ways in which immigrant domestics have encountered discrimination and exploitation, how they found ways of adapting to and challenging their conditions, and, how, especially in the case of recent Caribbean and other domestics of colour recruited as temporary guest workers, they tried to overcome the harsh official barriers to their permanent settlement in Canada.<sup>65</sup>

Yet, the work on immigrant domestic workers remain slim in several respects. First, the labour history of domestic workers' efforts to organize themselves into

<sup>63</sup>Marilyn Barber's works include "The Women Ontario Welcomed: Immigrant Domestics for Ontario Homes, 1870-1930," *Ontario History*, 72 (1980), 155-66; "Below Stairs: The Domestic Servant," *Material History Bulletin*, 19 (1984), 37-46; "Help for Farm Homes: The Campaign to End Housework Drudgery in Rural Saskatchewan in the 1920s," *Scientia canadensis*, 9 (1985); "Sunny Ontario for British Girls, 1900-30," in Burnet, ed., *Looking Into My Sister's Eyes*.

<sup>64</sup>Barber, "The Woman Ontario Welcomed"; "Sunny Ontario for British Girls, 1900-30," in Burnet, ed., *Looking Into My Sister's Eyes*; Parr, *Labouring Children*.

<sup>65</sup>Calliste, "Domestics from the Caribbean"; Silvera, *Silenced*; Roxanna Ng, *The Politics of Community Services: Immigrant, Class and State* (Toronto 1988); essays in *Canadian Woman Studies*, 8 (1979) and 10 (1989); essays in *Resources for Feminist Research*, 16 (1987).

unions deserves more careful attention, even if it is mainly a history of set-backs.<sup>66</sup> Also, the (changing?) character of the mistress-servant relationship, and indeed the relations between the domestic and all the other members of the household or institution she served, needs to be held up to more historical scrutiny. To date, scholars have tended to focus on the perceptions of the 'mistress' toward her 'servant', or, more commonly, the domestic's (usually grim) depiction of working conditions. These studies have done much to expose to our view 'hidden' class, race, and sexual exploitation, but further examinations of the daily encounters between 'foreign' maids and their 'clients' would produce rich histories of everyday life. We also need more comparative studies of immigrant maids, as well as comparative studies of foreign-born and Canadian-born maids. I would have thought, too, that more debate might have occurred over the contrasting, even conflicting, portraits of domestic service offered in the literature, which range from unmitigated drudgery to desirable jobs. These contrasting images reflect not so much differing political or theoretical positions, for many of the scholars writing this history share a pro-feminist, pro-labour and anti-racist politics, but, rather differing disciplinary concerns. Social scientists have been primarily concerned with delineating the exploitative features of domestic work, while historians have highlighted the (admittedly limited) agency of immigrant women as they negotiated the demands and constraints of the job.<sup>67</sup> In addition, other female migration movements, including prostitution rings, have received less careful study, though an exception is Parr's work on the English hosiery workers recruited for Ontario cotton mills, a group of women workers who by virtue of their highly-valued industrial skills and capacity as breadwinners were even more exceptional than domestics.<sup>68</sup>

The other immigrant women who have captured serious scholarly attention in Canada, namely those involved in radical and labour politics, were also exceptional. Their chroniclers have been largely socialist-feminist labour and immigration historians and historical sociologists who, since the 1980s, have uncovered a vibrant past of immigrant women involved in strikes, unions, and left-wing political organizations particularly during the periods before 1950. Most of these scholars incorporated the political views and activities of ethnic women into their general or national histories of Canadian radical women. A minority of them, including Frager and Lindstrom, mined the foreign-language sources of a non-Anglo-Celtic

<sup>66</sup>On contemporary efforts, Toronto Organization of Domestic Workers, *Intercede Reports*; Sedef Arat-Koc and Tely Villasin, "Report: Ontario 1990"; I would also like to thank Kathryn Scarfe for her excellent observations regarding this topic.

<sup>67</sup>For example, Lindstrom, "'I Won't Be a Slave'"; Barber, "Sunny Ontario"; Silvera, *Silenced*. See also Gabaccia's comment on the US literature in her "Immigrant Women."

<sup>68</sup>Parr, "The Skilled Emigrant and Her Kin: Gender, Culture and Labour Recruitment," *Canadian Historical Review*, 68, 4 (December 1987), 529-51; and her, *The Gender of Breadwinners*.

group to uncover the ideological underpinnings of the 'woman question' as it was framed by male and female comrades and to document the female presence on the ethnic left. Frances Swyripa's multi-generational study of Ukrainian-Canadian women's organizations and the differing gender politics within conservative and radical camps, stands alone in its efforts to examine both left-wing and right-wing ethnic women.<sup>69</sup>

If the sympathetic histories of radical immigrant women are confined to the extraordinary minority, it is equally true that the recovery of strong, assertive, and defiant women who dared challenge the capitalist patriarchal order, and their male comrades, helps undermine popular and erroneous stereotypes of immigrant women as necessarily more submissive than North American women. In addition to offering portraits of intriguing women these historians inserted themselves into an international debate concerning the relationship between socialism and feminism.<sup>70</sup> Most of the Canadian contributions have supported one side of the debate, arguing that the socialist (or communist) critique of class relations offered within it the possibility of a feminist critique of women's subordination and a platform for women's rights. Insisting that the very process of women's political mobilization within the left facilitated, indeed required, the breaking down of 'traditional' female roles, these studies document the discourses and actions of those women, especially among the intelligentsia, who developed elements of a feminist critique and advanced women's rights issues such as birth control, day care, and equal pay. Like her colleagues, Frager also details the various campaigns and activities of left-wing women, in this instance, Toronto's east European Jews. But her evidence, which includes oral histories and particularly sheds light on rank-and-file women, leads Frager to support the opposing side of the debate: that the socialist preoccupy-

<sup>69</sup>See, for example, Linda Kealey, "Canadian Socialism and the Woman Question, 1900-1914," *Labour/Le Travail*, 13 (1984), 77-100; her "Sophie," *New Maritimes*, 6 (1987), 12-3; the essays by Frager, Swyripa, Kealey and Sangster in Linda Kealey and Joan Sangster, eds., *Beyond the Vote: Canadian Women and Politics* (Toronto 1989); Joan Sangster, *Dreams of Equality: Canadian Women on the Left* (Toronto 1989); Ruth Frager, *Sweatshop Strife*; and her "Class, Ethnicity and Gender in the Eaton's Strikes of 1912 and 1934," in Iacovetta and Valverde, eds., *Gender Conflicts*; Lindstrom, *Defiant Sisters*; "The Socialist Party of Canada and the Finnish Connection, 1905-1911," in Dahlie and Fernando, *Ethnicity, Power and Politics*; Janice Newton, "Women and *Cotton's Weekly*: A Study of Women and Socialism in Canada, 1909," *Resources for Feminist Research*, 8 (Fall 1980), 58-60; her "The Alchemy of Politicization: Socialist Women and the Early Canadian Left," in Iacovetta and Valverde, eds., *Gender Conflicts*; her *The Feminist Challenge to the Canadian Left 1900-1918* (Montréal 1995); Frances Swyripa, *Wedded to the Cause: Ukrainian-Canadian Women and Ethnic Identity 1891-1991* (Toronto 1993).

<sup>70</sup>Frager sums up the debate in *Sweatshop Strike*. On the international debate, see, for example, Barbara Taylor, *Eve and the New Jerusalem: Socialism and Feminism in the Nineteenth Century* (New York 1983); Mary Jo Buhle, *Women and American Socialism 1870-1920* (Chicago 1983).

pation with class oppression and class struggle was so pervasive that it precluded a rigorous analysis of women's oppression as women, and relegated women's rights issues to a secondary status. The women's own acceptance of a Jewish, male-dominated, and left-defined worldview that privileged class and ethnicity over gender, Frager concludes, thwarted the articulation of a feminist challenge to the movement, even while the women took pride in their own assertiveness and their actions necessarily challenged traditional gender roles for Jewish women.

Even readers who feel Frager downplays the defiance of radical Jewish women should nevertheless heed her cautionary words regarding the problematic treatment in historical writing of the terms feminist and proto-feminist. She suggests that a concept of gender role-elasticity — the stretching of traditional gender roles — might be more useful for understanding women's lives than an approach that searches for feminist foremothers. The desire to track socialist-feminist pioneers ought not lead scholars to deploy, however unintentionally, an ethnocentric yardstick by which North American women activists appear more confrontational, more critical of their culture and men, and thus somehow more 'feminist' than their counterparts among, say, Ukrainian, Hungarian, Polish, and other 'foreign' locals. The specific racial and ethno-cultural context in which foreign-born women in Canada joined and critiqued the Left must be understood. Nor do culturally determinist generalizations about the 'natural' propensity of highly radical ethnic groups like the Finns for socialism and feminism get us very far. We need to develop frameworks that deliberately place at centre-stage the multiplicity of influences and challenges, multi-layered meanings, and even seemingly contradictory behaviour engendered by the reality of being a leftist immigrant women within a male-dominated movement in a hostile foreign country.

In contrast to the well-developed literature on domestics and leftists, the historical work on the vast majority of "unexceptional" immigrant women, most of whom entered Canada under various family classification categories and settled in family units, consists of a smattering of articles and collections of essays on individual groups, and some recent oral histories. While some authors concentrate on the domestic worlds inhabited by immigrant housewives, others have documented the pronounced social activities of women determined to ensure the 'ethnic cohesion' of their community. Immigration specialists influenced by women's history have been most active in the latter case, producing valuable studies of, for instance, Armenian women's cultural and educational work within communities that established themselves in Canada in the aftermath of the genocide, Jewish women's long-standing association with charitable and human rights work within their respective communities, and the church-related activities of Mennonite, Macedonian, African-Canadian, Greek, and other minority women.<sup>71</sup> Historians as

<sup>71</sup> For example, the essays in Burnet, ed., *Looking Into My Sister's Eyes: Polyphony*, 8 (1986); *Canadian Woman Studies*, 8 (1985); Brand, *No Burden To Carry*; Martha Bohachevsky-Chomiak, *Feminists Despite Themselves: Women in Ukrainian Community Life, 1884-1939* (Edmonton 1987); the Generation Series.

well as social scientists have concentrated on the paid labours of immigrant women, especially married women, in the post-1945 Canadian labour force, focusing on macro-analyses of labour force participation, workplace experiences, or women's contributions to family economies.<sup>72</sup>

More than simply reflecting different research interests, however, the literature devoted to 'ordinary' immigrant women (like that on domestic servants) has been written by specialists deploying different analytical approaches. The most significant difference exists between historians and social scientists in the field. Heavily influenced by the family strategies and community focus of the new immigration history, the treatment of women by immigration historians of women has been characterized by an emphasis on the varied contributions that women made to resettlement and the cultural adjustments of families and to the connective life of the ethnic community. Thus, while women receive separate treatment, the primary concern is to elaborate on family and community cohesion. That concern reflects the project of new immigration historians to revamp earlier, pathological depictions of immigrant families and community and also to insist that women were resourceful players in both contexts. But it can have the unfortunate consequence of rendering immigrant women as simply so much connective tissue. Much is thus made of their identification with family and their capacity to hold together family, kin and ethnic community, but their daily predicaments and desires remain insufficiently explored.

By contrast, the historical social scientists who have written about immigrant women (usually though not exclusively for the post-1945 era) have drawn on the more explicitly feminist and class- and race-based theories developed particularly within sociology and Women's Studies; hence, the focus on domestic violence, illiteracy, and lack of access to industrial training programs, ghettoization in low paying, dead-end female jobs, and racism. As in the United States, where similar patterns prevail,<sup>73</sup> the best illustration of this greater emphasis on victimization in the sociological literature is the triple-oppression model that highlights the work on immigrant and minority women. Attempts to discern the ways in which minority women have been oppressed, as immigrants, women, and workers, offer a way of examining the structural determinants of immigrant women's oppression and the racial and gender inequities of the labour force of advanced industrial economies. By alerting us to the structural, racial-cultural, gender, and ideological barriers to immigrant and minority women's integration and self-empowerment, this literature

<sup>72</sup>Most works in the sociology of contemporary immigrant women are not included here, but interested readers can consult Rosemarie Schade, *The Development of Materials Towards the Creation of an Inclusive Curriculum: Bibliography for Canadian History 1882-1992* (Montréal 1992); Sheila Arnopolous, *Problems of Immigrant Women in the Canadian Labour Force* (Ottawa 1979); Laura Johnson, *The Seam Allowance* (Toronto 1982); Ng, *Politics of Community Services* (Toronto 1987).

<sup>73</sup>Gabaccia, "Immigrant Women"; references include those contained in notes 65 and 72.



and feminist theory in general serve as a valuable check on the unbridled agency and naive depictions of co-operative family units in ethnic history. Yet, the almost exclusive emphasis on victimization will leave many social historians, and students of women's history in particular, unsatisfied. Such portraits of immigrant women fail to consider whether the women themselves perceived of their lives in entirely bleak terms and preclude any discussion of agency. The resolution to this victim-versus-agency conundrum will not be easily achieved, but one place to start is with more rigorous and closely textured analyses of the dialectical interplay between agency and oppression that has shaped minority women's lives. Arguments about the centrality of family to immigrant women's lives, for example, need not descend into simplistic conclusions about such women's truncated self-identities or their incapacity for self-emancipation. Nor should it lead us to ignore the complex power dynamics inequities and multiple relationships that helped shape family life and women's lives in particular.

Whatever the perspective employed, it also remains the case that historical works on Canada's immigrant women have focused on their paid and unpaid labours and their (complicated) relationship to family and the family economy. Other aspects of these women's lives have been ignored. We have written about immigrant women, for example, as though they do not have a sexuality. In contrast to the United States, where recent work has explored the leisure and popular culture of immigrant women, Canadian scholars have remained largely silent on these topics.<sup>74</sup> Studies of working-class immigrant women have only awkwardly incorporated anecdotal bits about the role that visionary dreams, premonitions, folk remedies, and even gossip played in cultivating immigrant women's culture. The neglect of second-generation ethnic women who grew up in Canada has also meant there has been little historical exploration of how young women (and, for that matter, young men) negotiated their identity while living simultaneously within different cultural worlds that could prescribe conflicting rules about sex, marriage, manhood, womanhood, and family. Gay histories of racial-ethnic men and women are also sure to break new ground.

Not only is it time to expand the scope of immigrant women's history in Canada, but also to rescue it from its second-class status within the larger field of Canadian women's history. To be sure, Canadian women's historians have been especially sympathetic to the field, and feminist immigration historians like myself have found them critical allies. Such support is crucial for feminists working in sub-fields other than women's history (ones that remain male-dominated), espe-

<sup>74</sup>Kathy Piess, *Cheap Amusements: Working Women and Leisure in Turn-of-the-Century New York* (Philadelphia 1986); Ewen, *Women in the Land in Dollars*; and Cohen's critique in *Workshop to Office*. New work in Canadian consumer history has begun to address to these themes: see Cynthia Wright, "Spectacle to Shopper: Eaton's and the Making of the Immigrant Consumer Market in Toronto," paper presented to the Canadian Historical Association, Annual Meeting, Calgary, June 1994.

cially when we challenge the comfortable parameters of that field. This point was brought forcefully home to me by a reviewer's hostile assessment of a since-published article that Karen Dubinsky and I submitted in which we detailed the horrific situation that drove an immigrant mother of four children to kill her abusive husband: feminist bunk/bad history.<sup>75</sup> Fears that studies of immigrant male violence might encourage age-old racist views about immigrant men is understandable. After all, ethnic historians have spent two decades debunking erroneous myths that have unfairly branded foreign-born and minority men as more prone to violence and sexual assault than their Anglo-Celtic, North American counterparts. The answer, however, hardly lies in silencing the history of domestic violence within immigrant households or the lives of abused immigrant women.

Support among historians of Canadian women for scholarly work in immigrant women's history, however, has not yet translated into a full integration of the two fields of inquiry. On the one hand, immigrant histories of women remain largely specialized works on particular groups of women undertaken as projects of historical recovery. As such, they contribute much to our growing knowledge about certain immigrant women and groups but shed little light on the relationship of racial-ethnic women to larger historical processes, events and patterns. Also, as Ruth Pierson observed, works on immigrant and minority women, like those of lesbians, "have been marginalized through publication in separate anthologies and through insufficient integration into the mainstream of Canadian women's history."<sup>76</sup> On the other hand, critical debates that for two decades have preoccupied Canadian feminist historians — debates regarding gender formation, women's bodies and sexuality, life-cycle approaches, politics, working women, etc. — generally have not been directly informed by the vantage points and experiences of minority women who stood outside the mainstream of English- or French-Canadian society.

However, recent work in the field, itself characterized by an increasing interest in 'difference' between and among women from varied backgrounds, along with the early output of a new generation of gender historians, holds real promise for a more integrative women's history in this country. Immigrant women who inhabited arenas beyond the workplace and left circles, for example, are now commanding more attention, as women's historians are beginning to integrate immigrant and minority women as well as debate issues of race-ethnicity in their research on postwar suburbia, consumerism and department stores, mining and other working-class communities, hospitals and asylums, social workers, and the administration

<sup>75</sup> Anonymous review; Karen Dubinsky and Franca Iacovetta, "Murder, Womanly Virtue and Motherhood: The Case of Angelina Napolitano," *Canadian Historical Review* 72 (1991), 505-31. Interestingly, this piece later won the prize for best article published in the *CHR* for 1991.

<sup>76</sup> Pierson, "Colonization and Canadian Woman's History."

of mothers' allowances and worker's compensation.<sup>77</sup> Some recent documentary collections, anthologies, and surveys in Canadian women's history have made diversity a central organizing framework.<sup>78</sup> Feminist history that draws on legal records to date has offered some of the most sophisticated considerations of race-ethnicity as a historical category of analysis in women's history. In Constance Backhouse's *Petticoats and Prejudice*, the varied legal predicaments of Black, Metis, French Canadian, and English-Canadian women who came before the law in 19th-century Canada are interwoven into the author's gendered analysis of 19th-century property arrangements, infanticide, and other legal matters. Dubinsky's impressive study of heterosexual conflict in rural and small-town Ontario is similarly informed by a sensitivity to class and racial-ethnic differences, while Carolyn Strange expertly deploys the class/race/gender paradigm in her analysis of urban wage-earning women in a turn-of-the-century industrial city.<sup>79</sup>

### Conclusion

HISTORICAL WRITING about Canada's immigrants has had a long and rich history, but there remains a considerable list of individuals, groups, and events that deserve their historians. Not only do we need more specialized studies of less-known immigrants and immigrant communities, but we need comparative analyses of immigrants and rigorously gendered analyses of ethnic politics and activism, marital relations, households and family life, workplaces, and communities. The central theme running through the twists and turns that this article has taken is a vision (however hazy) of a more inclusive and synthetic approach to treatments of immigrants and minorities and the category of race-ethnicity in Canadian history. It is a call for a more integrative approach to the study of immigrants, one in which the interconnections of class, gender, and race-ethnicity are considered not as fixed and immutable entities but as processes — processes that in some contexts might

<sup>77</sup>For example, Veronica Strong-Boag, "Their Side of The Story: Women and Suburbia," in Parr, *Diversity of Women*; Forestell, "All That Glitters"; Margaret Little, "'No Car, No Radio, No Liquor Permit': The Moral Regulation of Single Mothers in Ontario, 1920-1993," PhD thesis, York University, 1994; Lykke De La Cour, "Women and Mental Illness: The Cobourg Asylum," PhD thesis, University of Toronto, in progress; Wright, "Spectacle to Shopper."

<sup>78</sup>For example, Beth Light and Ruth Roach Pierson, eds., *No Easy Road: Women in Canada 1920s to 1960s* (Toronto 1990); Alison Prentice, et al., *Canadian Women: A History* (Toronto 1988); Gillian Creese and Veronica Strong-Boag, eds., *British Columbia Reconsidered: Essays on Women* (Vancouver 1992); Ruth Roach Pierson, et al., *Canadian Women's Issues: Strong Voices* (Toronto 1993).

<sup>79</sup>Constance Backhouse, *Petticoats and Prejudice: Women and Law in Nineteenth Century Canada* (Toronto 1991); Karen Dubinsky, *Improper Advances: Rape and Heterosexual Conflict in Ontario 1880-1929* (Chicago 1993); Carolyn Strange, *Toronto's Girl Problem: Perils and Pleasure of the City 1880-1930* (Toronto 1995).

act in concert, mutually reinforcing each other, but at other times impose contradictory influences on women's and men's and girls and boys lives. As Nancy Hewitt has observed, the racial-ethnic identities of immigrants, like their class and gender identities, did not arrive fully blown upon their arrival in the new world, but were regularly negotiated amid changing and changed circumstances. Recent work in the US on what scholars have called the "inbetween" racial status of white immigrants from eastern and southern Europe — that is, their position of racial inferiority vis-a-vis white Americans and racial superiority vis-a-vis African Americans — offers a fascinating and concrete illustration of how theoretical insights about the construction of 'whiteness' can illuminate our understanding of white immigrants as well as immigrants of colour. Drawing on an impressive array of songs, immigrant stories, and public discourses, James Barret and David Roediger, for example, show how the 'new immigrant' southern and east Europeans who dominated migration to the US between 1885 and 1924, and who remade the American working class, actually underwent a process of becoming white.<sup>80</sup>

A more integrative approach to immigrants will require considerable work and certainly far more exchange between various historical sub-fields and different disciplines that have tackled the subject of immigrants and minorities. If, for example, my paper calls for the gendering of immigrant life so, too, does it advocate that historians of workers, women, and the family take seriously the diversity of Canada's peoples. If it calls for more rigorous analyses of racialized discourses and the immigration reception activities of Canadian reformers, so, too, does it advocate that our studies of racism/nativism take serious account of the hostile relations among and between immigrants and minorities. As James Barrett observes, historians have paid little attention to how successive waves of immigrants and 'ethnics' have interacted with each other to produce particular class and cultural configurations and to act as assimilating forces on each other.<sup>81</sup>

We need to continue to enlarge the parameters of what constitutes immigrant history, to push and pull at the boundaries which in the last twenty-five years have defined the field — the well-adjusted families, manly militants, hardworking ethnics, defiant domestics, and cohesive communities — and begin to include the very people, events, and processes that do not fit comfortably into the current frameworks but nevertheless belong in any synthetic history of immigrants and minorities: the criminals and the mentally anguished, the victims of crime and

<sup>80</sup>Nancy Hewitt, Commentary, Wayne State Labour Conference, Detroit, October 1994; James Barret and David Roediger, "In Between Peoples: Race, Nationality and the New Immigrant Working Class," paper presented to the Commonwealth Conference on American Exceptionalism, University of London, Winter 1995. (My thanks to Greg Kealey for this reference.)

<sup>81</sup>James Barrett, "Assimilation from the Bottom Up: Immigration and the Remaking of the Working Class in the United States, 1880-1930," *Journal of American History*, 79 (1992), 996-1020.

violence, and inter-ethnic racism. Finally, and most difficult of all to articulate, we need to explore ways of writing the history of immigrants and minorities in Canada that do not affirm immigrant status as *othered*. In an immigrant nation like Canada, whose very foundations as a white settler society were forged in racism and the subjugation of native peoples and whose multi-ethnic and multi-racial reality has long been a critical factor influencing economic, social, intellectual, cultural and political developments, all Canadian historians need to ask serious questions not only about the particular experiences of certain immigrants and minorities but also about how we can fully integrate race and ethnicity, majority and minority lives, into all of our analysis of the Canadian past.

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