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## Review of Wedded to the Cause: Ukrainian Canadian Women and Ethnic Identity, 1891 1991

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*Wedded to the Cause: Ukrainian-Canadian Women and Ethnic Identity, 1891-1991.* By Frances Swyripa. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1993. Preface, illustrations, photographs, bibliographic note, notes, index. xii + 330 pp. \$55 cloth, \$22 paper.

The history of Ukrainian-Canadian women has never before been told so completely from the women's perspective, and Swyripa has made a valuable contribution to the historiography of Canada's female pioneers. By exploring the activities and goals of various women's organizations, she examines these women's sense of their own identity both within the boundaries of the Ukrainian community itself and within the larger Canadian context. Swyripa's main thesis is that a wide gulf exists between what she calls the "grass-roots" conception of Ukrainian-Canadian identity, embodied in the apolitical image of Baba the homebody, and the "community elite" conception of a politically engaged pioneer heroine drawing her inspiration from historical models in Ukraine.

She points out that Ukrainian-Canadians' sense of ethnic identity is particularly strong because of the nature of their immigration and settlement patterns in Canada. Ukrainians came in three distinct waves (1891-1914, 1920-39, 1945-52), each bringing its particular political baggage with it. The first wave, composed primarily of illiterate peasants, lived on the prairies in isolated bloc settlements; this isolation, coupled with their odd (to Anglo-Canadian eyes) appearance, impeded their assimilation into the Canadian mainstream even though they were the least self-consciously Ukrainian, having come from a "homeland" divided among three separate empires. In addition, the first wave was divided politically between the "Nationalists" who had become imbued with a desire for Ukrainian sovereignty while still in Europe and the "Progressives" who saw Ukraine only in terms of the larger class struggle being waged within the Russian empire. The second wave contained a large number of refugees from the failed attempt at Ukrainian statehood after the Russian Revolution; more urbanized and better educated than those in the first wave, they intensified the drive for an articulated sense of Ukrainian identity with a Canadian one and further weakened the Progressive position. The third wave, post-World War II's "displaced person," added 40,000 more such immigrants seeking to strengthen their European homeland's sense of itself as a nation.

Swyripa also points out that because Ukrainian attitudes towards women were heavily misogynistic, the agendas of Ukrainian-Canadian women's organizations were largely determined by a male elite (mainly teachers and priests in the settlements). Furthermore, these agendas placed an unfair burden on women by viewing them as the primary force for nurturing a sense of Ukrainian identity in future generations of the Canadian born. Thus, while the Progressives and Nationalists may have had different political agendas, their attitudes towards the role of women were remarkably similar: men set the goals, women carried them out. The women, particularly those in the first

wave, were often caught in a double bind: told to get better educated and to work, but only to become better (Ukrainian-Canadian) wives and mothers, teaching their families how to maintain their ethnic identity through language, culture, and the appropriate political stance toward the homeland. Ironically, this pressure to produce resulted in images of "Ukrainianness" within the Canadian mosaic which have become, as Swyripa presents them, the women's ultimate revenge on their men-folks.

By examining the prevalence of her image as the embodiment of Ukrainian-Canadian-ness in various commercial and cultural enterprises, Swyripa concludes that the apolitical Baba amid her womanly crafts (food, dance, Easter eggs, and embroidery) is the most pervasive myth held through successive generations. In contrast, her male counterpart, Dido, is virtually invisible in the mythical landscape. Swyripa's structural framework reinforces this conclusion by implication. She begins with an anecdote about Queen Elizabeth II's Ukrainian ancestry and ends with an imagined meeting with Elizabeth and the iconic Baba, thereby suggesting their primary connection with each other: both women mythically powerful precisely because they are politically powerless. Thus, Ukrainian-Canadian women have exacted a certain price for being burdened with the male agenda to politicize women yet keep them out of positions of power. Baba is the most prevalent—and therefore the most powerful—image of Ukrainian ethnicity held in the Canadian consciousness. If the women were indeed "wedded to the cause," they have managed to effect an unspoken divorce within this marriage simply by focusing on the apolitical aspects of their own experience.

Some questions do arise as one reads this well-documented interpretation of Ukrainian-Canadian women's place. Does the fact that Baba is the most pervasive image suggest the collapse of the Ukrainian-Canadian political agenda, or did the politically motivated group simply turn its attention more directly towards involvement in mainstream politics? Does her

appeal merely reflect the fact that 90% of Ukrainian-Canadian women have never belonged to any of the highly politicized women's organizations? Is the image used primarily because it "sells" to outsiders or is it a deeply held view of Ukrainian-Canadian ethnic origins? Swyripa does not really provide answers to these larger questions. She also tends to emphasize the prairie settlers and deals only briefly with the impact of the two later waves. Out of more than fifty photographs, only eight portray women east of Manitoba, and of those, only four are post-World War II. It is thus not clear if the image of Baba is as pervasive in other parts of Canada or within Ukrainian-Canadian groups outside the prairies. A full consideration of these issues may well require another volume. Meanwhile, Swyripa has done an admirable job of recording the experiences of an important segment of the Canadian prairie population.

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