

# Myrna Kostash:

## Ukrainian Canadian Non-Fiction Prairie New Leftist Feminist Canadian Nationalist

### **Preface:**

This interview is part of a larger project, “Diaspora, Indigeneity, Ethnicity,” funded by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada. Margery Fee and Sneja Gunew are studying contemporary writer-intellectuals in Australia and Canada whose work reflects their sense of belonging (however uneasily) to an ethnic or an indigenous community as well as to the wider nation, including George Elliott Clarke and Marlene NourbeSe Philip in Canada, and Antigone Kefala and Christos Tsiolkas in Australia. In the interviews they are conducting in the initial stages of the project, their main question (and sometimes the only question they have had to ask) has been “describe your intellectual formation.” Oddly, although these writers are frequently at the centre of controversy or acclaim, they seem rarely to have been asked to reflect on how they came to their current political beliefs or on how they have constructed an identity for themselves out of a set of contradictory discourses. Once the interviews are complete, we can begin to draw comparisons between the experiences of such writer-intellectuals in two settler colonies, Australia and Canada, in the context of their different histories of immigration and treatment of indigenous peoples. Lisa Grekul did the bibliographical and contextual research, arranged the interview itself, and produced and edited the transcript. Margery Fee also did editorial work on the manuscript. The interview was held in Vancouver, July 2000, shortly after the appearance of Kostash’s latest book, *The Next Canada: In Search of Our Future Nation* (2000, reviewed on page 174 of this issue of *Canadian Literature*).

SNEJA GUNEW Let's begin by asking you to give a kind of intellectual autobiography: important formative events, people and so on.

MYRNA KOSTASH I'm 56 years old. This is going to go back a ways.

SG I know, I know. There won't be time for any other questions really.

MARGERY FEE This is the question that holds all the answers.

MK I suppose political memory would mark the beginning of an intellectual memory as well. I can see myself reading the *Edmonton Journal* headline: "Stalin Dead!"<sup>1</sup> Now obviously the fact that this made an impression on me comes from the fact that I grew up in a household, in a community, for whom that was meaningful. I knew he was a bad man and it was a good thing he died. It's interesting I picked that because sometimes I think that if I follow the thread of how I feel about the Soviet Union and about the socialist world and the relationship of the Ukrainians to that world and to that history and to that experience, I would say that that was an important moment of an intellectual formation. And then the next one would have been the reception of the kids who were Hungarian refugees in '56. I have a vivid memory of them arriving in school when I was in grade 6. I was really ambivalent about them. On the one hand, there was something very pathetic about them and my heart went out to them, particularly because the school I was going to at the time was still very much a working-class East European neighborhood school in Edmonton.

Perhaps my ambivalence emerged later, my ambivalence toward that figure of what I call the tatterdemalion blown away from the Soviet Empire onto our shores. At the time we received them—they were pathetic, yet almost heroic figures—but later I would find them very ambivalent figures because they became encrusted with my understanding of nationalism from Eastern Europe: Hungarian anti-Soviet nationalism, Ukrainian anti-Soviet nationalism overlapped with the right-wing agendas in North America. So, I found myself increasingly alienated from that refugee figure, but nevertheless it was an important moment in terms of my relationship to those places and those events. The next important moment was the impinging on my consciousness in high school of internationalism, notably the apartheid struggle in South Africa which I found so awe-inspiring and then the emerging civil rights movement in the United States. Again I have a very vivid memory of myself as an undergraduate student wishing fervently that I was called to some kind of great political moment as these young people were in the southern United States and being stuck in this place called Edmonton where nothing really politically interesting happens.

SG So, when did it start happening politically for you, when did the call actually reach you?

MK It would have been when I went to Seattle as a graduate student in 1965/66 and joined the Students for a Democratic Society. The branch in Seattle was very pastoral, actually, quite bucolic. It wasn't anything like its membership in Berkeley or Michigan. It was the closest I'd got to the generational, political upheaval. The American-led New Left was the one I identified with right up until my momentous encounter with Canadian nationalism in the early 70s. So, it was a long period of this kind of transnational political allegiance to the international New Left. Within all of that was the fact that I was studying Russian literature; I did that as a kind of in-your-face gesture towards the Ukrainian community, to show that I didn't share their phobia about the Russians. I went through a period of eroticizing Bolshevism. I had pin-ups of Lenin on my wall. Mixed up in all of that as well were the drugs, the sex and rock 'n' roll. It was a very fertile little period. Nothing like that has ever happened again that's so concentrated. But that's true for any of us who grew up at that time who had this kind of consciousness; it was an immensely multi-themed experience from which all the separate threads of the rest of your life can be seen emerging.

I grew up in a household of teachers, Ukrainian Canadian teachers who themselves were children of very poor—on my mother's side—very poor Bolshie immigrants. My father's side was more educated and considered to be one of the founding families of Ukrainian Canadians in Western Canada.

SG Did you grow up with the language at all?

MK It was around me constantly. I never spoke it credibly as a child. My parents spoke to us in English.

SG Why?

MK Well, they said at the time it was so that we would never ever have any inhibitions, we would never have any barrier linguistically in Canadian society, that we would be English-speaking people.

SG But there was a belief around, I think that was in the '50s and '60s, that somehow you couldn't hold more than one language in your head.

MK No, we were meant to learn Ukrainian secondarily. But the first one, the one in which we were absolutely confident sure as hell had to be English. Now I see that argument as slightly different. I see it in terms of gender politics in the home because the fact is my father's Ukrainian was much better than my mother's and if they were to raise us in a Ukrainian-speaking home my mother would be subordinate linguistically, that's my

theory. When they chose English as the language of the family, then everybody was on the same level. They were considering to send us to Ukrainian school on Saturdays.

SG And did you go?

MK Yes. Didn't get much out of it. Did not become Ukrainian speakers—

SG Why the resistance, do you think?

MK Couldn't understand the value of what we were struggling to learn—actively thought that it was humiliating, actually. Another vivid memory—this is when I was a teenager—we'd moved away from that working-class East European neighborhood to one of the new middle-class suburbs in Edmonton, just after the teachers had organized and got huge raises and salaries, so we could move out. And having friends at home from school and my father speaking Ukrainian on the telephone to somebody and me being anxious to close the door so my friends wouldn't hear this language.

SG So, do you think it was a sense of class humiliation?

MK I don't understand it as class. Anybody who was Ukrainian was probably tarred with the same brush.

SG But what was that brush?

MK At the time I don't know how I understood it. I know that in grade school I was already persuading people that I was Greek instead of Ukrainian, and I could say, "Well, I'm Greek Orthodox," therefore I'm Greek.

SG Where did that come from?

MK Somewhere I figured that Greeks were more highly valued than Ukrainians, or at least nobody had any opinion about Greeks, there weren't any around, but boy, did they have opinions about Ukrainians. Now of course I can see that I had instinctively understood the hierarchy of cultures in Edmonton. As ubiquitous as Ukrainians are, that didn't give them any greater value. I remember being intensely embarrassed by my Baba and her friends when my mother and I would meet her downtown shopping, at the Eaton's Store, and Eaton's was notorious as the place where East Europeans congregated to shuffle around in between department stores. And these congregations of Ukrainians with the garlic breath and the bad clothes, I was so embarrassed by them. These are my people? Ooh. But there was a bourgeoisie, there was a Ukrainian Canadian bourgeoisie. My mother was very ambivalent toward them, and I picked up a lot from her too, I think. She came out of this working class—this sort of lumpen family herself. And when she married my father, she increased her status within the Ukrainian com-

munity because she married a university graduate who belonged to an important family. Her reaction to the Ukrainians who arrived in Edmonton after the Second World War, these DPs, was really quite violent. I didn't appreciate it at the time, but now I understand it. This was an immigration—unlike hers—[which] came from the cities. They were very urban, very politicized, very nationalist, very Europeanized and really resented the fact that they were exiles. And, more to the point, they were very disapproving of the Ukrainian Canadian culture that they found. We didn't speak properly, we'd become really anglicized, we didn't know how to behave in church, we had these Protestant-style churches, even though we called them Orthodox. The DPs' mission was to elevate us. My mother had a perspective on all this from being a volunteer in the church, the women's committee preparing the food for the weddings that some of the émigrés would have at the church, and resenting terribly this status of "kitchen Irish," you know, in service to these hoity-toity Ukrainian bourgeois from Europe. Their children intimidated the hell out of me when we ended up in the same youth groups together.

SG There must have been convergences.

MK Oh yes. I mean, these Ukrainian classes for example on Saturdays. One of the reasons why my sister and I rebelled and said we're not going to go there anymore is that we were dumb bunnies compared to the progeny of these DPs who spoke beautiful Ukrainian, knew how to do things, actually knew how to dress in some strange way that we didn't know.

SG So how did you compensate for that?

MK Became a left-winger and got out of there.

SG Studied Russian literature?

MK Yes, I decided early on that I had a choice to make and that was to stay inside the community and try to improve my prospects within it or get the hell out of there as a socialist hippie, and that's what I did.

SG And you had your sojourn in the national centre of hippie-land, the US, and then you said you had your encounter with Canadian nationalism in the 70s. How did that come about?

MK That's how I got started as a writer as well, professionally.

SG Because you were on an academic path at that time?

MK No, no, no. I did a Master's degree in Russian literature at the University of Toronto but I had no intention of doing a Ph.D. I didn't know what I was doing, just reading lots of books, wrote a thesis about Dostoevsky, of course. I can remember working on the concluding paragraph of that

thesis the night that Bobby Kennedy was shot. Anyway, I went off to Europe after I got my Master's degree, hitchhiked around for a year in 1969.

Well, by hitchhiking through Europe I dropped out of the ferment in 1968 because I went down into Yugoslavia, Greece and Turkey. When I got back to England in 1970, I discovered two things: I discovered that there was a women's movement. A friend I went to visit in England, an expatriate Canadian, handed me a stack of documents, leaflets and small little pamphlets and said, "I think you might find these interesting." The only one I remember in the whole pile was Anne Koedt, *The Myth of the Vaginal Orgasm*, and it just changed my life.

SG Still a classic text.

MK Changed my life, or at least re-routed it, because feminism came right on the heels of the sexual revolution and I realized how incredibly resentful I was towards men in terms of my sexual experience, and this conviction that I had been frigid the whole time because I wasn't having these vaginal orgasms, right? I walked back down into the kitchen after I'd done the reading and told Sandy, "Well, I guess I'm a feminist, I believe all of this." So when I got back to Canada a year later, I just walked straight into the women's movement in Toronto. But Canadian nationalism hit me at the same time. In England I had been trying to write short stories hoping to be published in British magazines and had no luck whatsoever. But one night I was visiting these same friends, these ex-pats, and we were watching television together and it was a BBC dramatization of the Chicago Seven Trial. The trial itself had taken place while I was away already in Europe. So this was my first look at it, this British dramatization of it, and I was very, very struck by it and appalled and aghast at what had happened, but what *really* struck me, was that for the first time it finally sank in that none of these things—these events that were dramatized and the experiences of the people in them—had happened to anybody I knew. I didn't know anybody who had been in Chicago, I didn't know anybody who had had that kind of violent experience with police because I was a Canadian. I was so struck by this revelation, I ran upstairs and I hastily wrote this—what was later called gonzo journalism<sup>2</sup>—I realized it came out of the New Journalism which I was reading constantly, I was reading *Rolling Stone* magazine. I penned this thing about my own revelation of the specificity of a Canadian experience within this larger North American New Left.

SG I've not read that one, so what was the tenor of it?

MK Very smart-ass, cheeky, as though I had just figured something out that

nobody else had figured out. Deriding, in a sense, my earlier self, my younger self for identifying so completely with the American experience, but at the same time I realized now that I had absolutely no content for the Canadian. All I knew was that it wasn't that thing in Chicago, but what it was I didn't actually find out until I wrote my book about the '60s. My book about the '60s was my way of trying to fill in the gaps. So, that piece of New Journalism got published in *Saturday Night* magazine, in June of 1970. I was paid \$150.

MF \$150. That's pretty good.

MK So when I came back to Canada, to Toronto, in the spring of 1971, I started this intense reading of everything—Canadian studies, basically. I had missed the entire October Crisis. I was gone from the beginning of '69 to early '71. So, I had to catch up with that too. I read books about what had happened in October. The book that I remember being most mind-expanding was Kari Levitt's book *Silent Surrender*. It was the same thing as *The Myth of the Vaginal Orgasm*. It just blew the whole paradigm open. What I remember more vividly was the extent to which we were colonized economically and that we didn't own our own resources and that we were a branch plant economy, that American corporate enterprises dictated what was going to happen to us. And we were colluding with this. Oh, and of course, the second thing I read was George Grant's *Lament For a Nation: The Defeat of Canadian Nationalism* (1965). God! It's sensational. But then it was all part and parcel of my realizing that the sort of total uncritical identification with the American New Left was exactly that, uncritical, and I needed to re-examine my relationship to the idea of the left in the light of Canadian experience. And so this specific Canadian New Left and then the loony left as the Brits might refer to it within the NDP that emerged in the 1970s. I was never a member, but I was a member of something called the Canadian Liberation Movement, which was very short-lived.

They were fully formed (as far as I could tell because I missed the formative part of it), these Canadian entities, political, cultural, social, it was an emerging intellectual history that was specifically Canadian. Very interesting experience in the Canadian women's movement around all of these issues. I was involved in what was then still experimental Women's Studies, it was interdisciplinary—that's what made it experimental. People like me were invited to teach in it—activists, and journalists and so on, as well as people like Kay Armatage on their way up into the official Women's Studies hierarchy eventually. So, as a teacher in that program, I think in 1973, I helped students organize a

women's cultural festival at University of Toronto. We still didn't have our heads straight. The drawing card for the whole program was a rock-and-roll dance played by the Chicago Women's Revolutionary Rock Band. It never occurred to us that we might have found some Canadian musicians. At the same time we thought of ourselves as passionate Canadians. These women from Chicago rolled into town and came in with their van full of instruments and whatnot, and proceeded to sit around and chat with each other and smoke while we Canadians unloaded the van.

MF . . . Kitchen Irish . . .

MK That's right! There's the kitchen Irish again.

MF This is too symbolic. (laughter)

MK And I went up to them because they were these big bull dykes with their groupies following them around from all over the United States—I went up and I said, "We could use some extra manpower here." And this woman turns to me and says, "Ain't no manpower around here, baby." That was that, never did get any help. Later I learned that in that same period—'72-'73—remember the Canadian feminists instrumental in organizing a meeting between American feminists and the women from North Vietnam, and they met in Vancouver? Because it was impossible for the anti-war people in the United States to meet the Vietnamese.<sup>3</sup> So, that was organized here, through women in Vancouver, but the Canadians were not invited to be part of the discussion. This is how it was told to me anyway. They were asked to supply the coffee and sandwiches. A lot of American women ended up in Toronto. They'd come up with draft dodgers or they'd come up on their own account. The radical feminists—that's who they were. And I see now that that was in fact an Americanizing location, and I was never, ever sympathetic to it.

SG To the radical feminists?

MK Right, despite my consciousness-raising about vaginal orgasms. I never went that route—I was always a socialist feminist, I always understood that feminism was about the larger liberation.

SG And the socialist feminists in the States have had a much harder time of it than those in Britain or Australia or here.

MK I left Toronto in '75 and started another part of my life altogether. All kinds of things happened for me at once. I became a professional writer in a serious way, freelancing. I was immersed in Canadian Studies, and identifying as a Canadian nationalist, and positioned myself as a socialist feminist, but I wasn't an activist. I struggled with this for a long time and finally made my peace with it years later: that my writing was my



activism and that was how I made my contribution. But I felt very guilty for the longest time that I wasn't out organizing, that I was writing books instead.

SG When you said that you became thoroughly Canadianized with Canadian nationalism, was this a comfortable experience?

MK Oh yes.

SG Did that change at all, say around or maybe before the writing of something that brought you back to the initial community you were so eager to leave?

MK I still don't understand that. The only discomfort I've ever had with Canadian nationalism is with my friends in Western Canada who are regionalists and who bear that historical grudge and suspicion of centralizing politics in Ottawa, or an NDP that's run from Ontario. I've never identified myself as a regionalist in that discourse.

SG Not so much that, but I think you were saying in various interviews in relation to *All of Baba's Children* that when you were doing this work it suddenly gave you a new place, a new perspective to position yourself that you hadn't had before which was very much a redefinition of yourself as a Canadian.

MK Multiculturalism emerged as a discourse from Canadian nationalism as a kind of corrective. By that time I was already back in the West. When I went back to Alberta, multiculturalism was a fully formed movement, if you like, among Ukrainian Canadians and I realized then how important it was in terms of understanding Canada as a more complex place than just an Anglo-Franco dichotomy.

SG Can you remember what your feelings were when you first heard about this new concept?

MK But you know what, those feelings went way back, were much more primordial than Canadian nationalism.

SG What do you mean?

MK It had to do with the valorization of being Ukrainian finally, because Ukrainians are really, really important in multiculturalism in Western Canada and more to the point, the Ukrainians who had emerged as multiculturalist activists in Alberta, in Edmonton in the mid-'70s, which is when I returned, were from this DP generation, the children of those DPs whom I'd so feared and was so humiliated by as a child. Here they were, we all were, twenty years later, and they were fantastically romantic figures to me because they were Left, very Left, they were very feminist, and at the same time were very critical of the Soviet Union and had a way of sympathizing with Ukraine in a way that was completely con-

sistent with the rest of their political stance and this was absolutely mind-blowing to me.

It was all of a piece. I wrote about it at the time that these were all parts of being alienated. I mean, I used language then I wouldn't use anymore—the “other.” For example, in *All of Baba's Children* I have a chapter called “Racism.” Well, I would never use that word now in relation to the experience that Ukrainians have. You can't if you're white. This is jumping ahead of myself. I made a career of this. I saw myself—what did I call myself—a Ukrainian Canadian Non-Fiction Prairie New Leftist Feminist Canadian Nationalist.

SG Does it form an interesting acronym? (laughter)

MK I would change the order of those things, but all of those seem to me to form some kind of coherent self.

SG But to what extent did you have to plead a case?

MK Not in the West, I didn't have to plead the case in the West.

SG But you were being published in the East.

MK Well, that was part of what astonished me actually, that there was in fact a constituency out there that picked up on this, that *All of Baba's Children* was read across the country. I had readers outside the Ukrainian community because I already had a reputation as a writer, as a Canadian writer, an un-ethnicized writer and as a feminist as well. And *Saturday Night* magazine which had published me in the first place, were the ones that ran the piece that became notorious because they called it “Baba Was a Bohunk” and I had to live this down. Although I do use the word in my essay. It was published in advance of the book, and it was while I was writing the book that I wrote “Baba Was a Bohunk” and that's what in fact precipitated the phone call from one of these glamorous Ukrainian Canadians who had arrived at the University of Alberta and whose circle I then became very close to. They were very piqued by this article, and wondered who I was and wondered what I was up to, and that was the beginning of the huge change in my life. So, the fact that *Saturday Night* magazine had run this article indicated to me that there was—I just simply assume that speaking as a Ukrainian Canadian within this official multiculturalism was really kosher.

SG What was your perception of the official multiculturalism?

MK Well, as a member of this group in Edmonton which was called *Hromada*, meaning community, we saw ourselves as left, we had a left critique of official multiculturalism.

SG Do you remember what that was?

MK That we should understand that there was a class politics involved here as well and that official multiculturalism was just a way of pacifying the ethnic communities and allowing them to have their song and dance.

SG Even then?

MK Oh, yeah, yeah. We understood all of that. What we had hoped would happen is that we would then overlap in our project—which we saw as cultural, a cultural and political project—with like-minded leftists from other ethnic communities—and we never found them!!

SG So, what would have been the other likely groups?

MK We thought maybe the Métis.

SG That's a good place to bring it in.

MK The Red Power.

SG What were the relations with the Métis and the First Nations?

MK None. In fact, I was a much more innocent, and naive undergraduate when I still lived in Edmonton in the early 60s. Do you remember model parliaments? I joined the Liberal club at the University of Alberta in my first year.<sup>4</sup> We won the elections for the model parliament. I was named Minister of Culture and Immigration because Ellen Fairclough in Diefenbaker's cabinet had been the first woman cabinet minister so I guess they had to give me the same portfolio, right? And I, out of thin air, decided, as Minister of Immigration responsible for what were then called Indians, I was going to do something about the reservations, never having been on one, of course. So, I evolved this elaborate bill that was going to demolish them. You know, assimilation was a good thing, bring them into the city. . .

MF This is very Liberal.

MK Very Liberal. Then Chrétien did it some ten years later.<sup>5</sup> I don't know where I got this. Anyway, I don't know how the word got around, but I was visited then by members of the NDP Club—I think it was still CCF then, I'm not sure—this is the social democratic group right? And among them was Maria Smallface,<sup>6</sup> first real Indian I met, and she was from one of these reservations, and she said, "Sit down and I'm going to tell you about what it means to be an Indian on a reservation." And that's where I had my first "oh" about the importance of the reservation to the cultural continuity and the sense of home place. So, together we redrafted my bill which I then presented to my cabinet colleagues in the full expectation that there was going to be a revolt and I expected they were going to say, "This is not possible, this isn't Liberal policy, this is something else" and that I was going to cross the floor and join the NDP on the opening day of parliament. But in fact, what happened

instead was that there was a vote of non-confidence by the opposition—that was the end of the government. So, I never got to do this. That was what I understood about Native Canadians at the time, and it wasn't until I returned to live in Edmonton in 1975 and met Maria Campbell that I thought again about First Nations' experience. But, nevertheless, we Ukrainian-Canadians thought that maybe there was something to be done with the Métis because of the whole Gabriel Dumont/Louis Riel legacy in Western Canada, you know, that was one of our stories. A very important person to me was George Melnyk, also Ukrainian Canadian but from Winnipeg, from a post-war immigration but in the working class. He grew up literally on the wrong side of the tracks in Winnipeg and he arrived in Edmonton about the same time I did and wrote an essay called "The Indian as Ethnic."<sup>7</sup> And that was very, very important. It led to our first meeting, because I was fascinated by the idea of ethnicity, or, as we, the third generation, understood it among Ukrainian Canadians, that in fact it was a Canadian identity. That this experiment that we were involved in in Western Canada (because we've been longer in Canada than the Ukrainians in the east) was in fact evolving a particular kind of Canadian self and that we were doing this along with other ethnics. George was theorizing a view of Aboriginality as one of these ethnicities. Now, that also got blown out of the water later.

SG What was the reception for these ideas outside?

MK Well, I kept getting asked to speak about it. First at the Women and Words Conference,<sup>8</sup> and I was on a panel, a very important one here.

MF That stuff is archived at UBC.

MK Weren't papers published for a while?

MF Not all of them.

MK I'm not sure that the panel I was on was reproduced. But there was a panel put together to talk about how our ethnicity affected our writing, and it was a panel that had an Aboriginal writer from Winnipeg and I don't know who that was.<sup>9</sup> It was this complete hodge-podge. We had nothing in common with each other. One person I had most in common with was the Aboriginal woman because we were both born in Canada. All the others were immigrant writers. I was an English speaking writer, others spoke about having to learn English as a second language and so on, and those who were not white who spoke about racism, I thought about it after, what were we all doing on this panel together? It was a very important moment for me because I realized that we were all there just because we had funny names and I was still being constructed as an exotic other, even though I saw myself as being profoundly implicated in the Canadian project.

SG In a sense, what you're more aware of is a kind of stratification that happened vis-à-vis the women's movement, right, because you were saying earlier on that you became aware more of different groups within the women's movement. That was easier to perceive in some ways than a stratification that happened in terms of cultural difference. Well, through ethnicity and the whole kind of consciousness around it, people began to be more aware of different ethnic groups within the larger kind of Canadian, as of course they knew about the Francophone groups. But I guess what I'm trying to push a little bit here is when you were constructing a very interesting and complex notion of ethnicity within the Canadian milieu, you must have been having kind of a dialogue with people outside your community who have a different point of view or were questioning certain aspects of this ethnicity, this new ethnic self.

MK You mean outside the ethnic communities themselves?

SG Outside the Ukrainian one, because you said you didn't have much contact with any other group.

MK I know that we thought that we were involved with what we would now call some sort of meta-politics. We thought—and I remember writing about this all the time up until a very important moment at a writers' festival in Calgary—that what we as Ukrainian Canadians were involved with was just one of the locations in which an anti-colonialist culture struggle was taking place.

SG What were you colonized by?

MK Coca-Cola.

SG No other colonization?

MK No. No. We didn't expect the Anglos to be in this as ethnics, obviously.

SG Why?

MK We never conceded ethnicity to the Anglos.

SG Did they try to argue their own ethnicity?

MK Oh yes. I mean, Susan Crean and I had this argument all the time. And, in fact, it forced her to understand herself as a specific kind of Anglo-Canadian and not just English-Canadian, that she understands now that she has an ethnicity rooted in the certain way of being English in Ontario.

SG But what did you mean that you didn't allow them, you didn't concede this to them?

MK We didn't concede them ethnicity because they wouldn't have had the same experience of the hierarchized relationship. They were in a dominant cultural, political and social position vis-à-vis us.

- SG So when I said there was no other colonization, obviously you were aware of a certain form of colonization by the dominant group.
- MK Yes, but with them we shared the larger colonization of international corporate capitalism. And that's why I could be a Canadian nationalist, powerfully identified with my friends like Susan Crean in Ontario on this issue, and be a Ukrainian Canadian multiculturalist in Alberta because it was all part of the same struggle.
- SG Not always though, that's the point isn't it?
- MK Well, we would have these little nuanced moments and eventually the whole thing just fell apart around race.
- SG How did it all fall apart?
- MK When I started thinking about it, that the Women and Words panel's collective relationship to the people who had organized us is that we were all funny names, we were all funny names.
- SG Did that change your relationship to Englishness, or even English?
- MK I don't think so, I mean, it just didn't bother me. I just sort of acknowledged that that was the case. It wasn't a site of struggle, the English. I mean, when they got out of hand, or if they were disrespectful, for example, the anecdote about finding myself in the first edition of the *Oxford Companion to Canadian Literature*—Kostash Myrna, see Ukrainian writing.<sup>10</sup> And yet, it's interesting that I found that so bothersome because that is in fact the way that I had constructed myself, and then when I see it reflected back at me from within the discourse of the dominant . . . and the only reason I'm there at all is that my then boyfriend who was asked to write the section on Ukrainian Canadian writing, he mentions my name, and so that's how I get in there at all. Now I'm in there on my own—Kostash, Myrna with her own entry written by Antanas Sileika in the current edition of the *Oxford Companion to Canadian Literature*.
- SG You didn't feel you were up against it constantly?
- MK People around me did—kept reminding me. *All of Baba's Children*, I realize, I suppose, in a way was fueled by this accumulated resentment. But you see, my quarrel when I wrote *All of Baba's Children* was also with elements of the Ukrainian community, so I never felt a simple relationship to the English. Certainly in *All of Baba's Children* I felt I was writing on behalf of a beleaguered minority who were misrepresented.
- SG Well, the obvious other and much more official beleaguered minority at that time were the Francophones, the Québécois. How did that affect your relationship with the dominant group?
- MK It didn't at all. We were Western Canadians, we were not in a struggle

for national sovereignty, we didn't construct ourselves as a suppressed nationality, it wasn't the same categories at all. We had a broad sympathy for them, especially when we thought of the Soviet Ukrainian struggle. Those who still had some sort of national consciousness saw it as a diaspora. I've never felt part of a diasporic community because I feel so profoundly Canadian. Others felt that the Ukrainians in Canada were a diaspora.

If I were to really sit down and re-think the whole thing I would see that I did have my on-going quarrel, as it were, with Anglo Canada, but that that was subsumed within a much larger political imperative, and that was the struggle against Americans. And in that, I was allied with a large number of Anglo-Canadians. My Ukrainian-ness in relation to the non-Ukrainian Canadian left did not become obvious until I was associated with the editorial board of *This Magazine* and that's much later. I ran right up against Ukrainophobia.

SG Do you want to talk about that?

MK It's very hurtful. Everything changed with *All of Baba's Children* and I don't know why I wrote it. I wrote it from this Canadian nationalist feminist Torontonian self that was a writer by 1975, really quite established. I left all of that to go back to Alberta and to live in this small Ukrainian town and do a book about my parents' generation—I have no idea why. I had every intention of going back to Toronto once I'd finished the research, and that never happened. What happened was two things: one was the reaction of the Ukrainian community to the book, which was completely unanticipated by the publisher as well. It became something of a sensation, and I was asked to speak everywhere, and sometimes to hostile audiences—notably in Toronto.

SG What was the nature of the hostility?

MK The attack was that because I didn't read or speak Ukrainian at the time, right, I could only consult English language sources, I didn't really know what was going on. I had a very imperfect understanding of Ukrainian history, and the conclusions I drew from it. That it was basically a very naive and unsophisticated account of things. That was the kind version. The unkind version was that I had completely misrepresented Ukrainians when I talked about their misogyny and anti-Semitism, and particularly because I valorized the Red, the Commie experience within it. I was a renegade. The reaction in Western Canada was more nuanced because it was really what I was talking about, their experience. So, for them, it was a combination of pride and satisfaction in seeing their lives given this kind of display and some queasiness

around the politics that I brought to that. What surprised me in the writing of it was how deeply angry I felt about what had happened to these people. And I was angry not just in relation to the Anglo domination—that's certainly there—but angry about the way certain elements of the Ukrainian-Canadian community had colluded in suppressing the real story. And so my critical position was also as a revisionist thinker, having arrived in the midst of the community, the third generation as a feminist socialist nationalist writer looking at all this history again and how it looked to my generation. And that was the sensation, as far as the community itself was concerned. Then I got taken up by this glamorous group of left-wing revolutionary Ukrainian nationalists and feminists, *Hromada*, who in themselves all had very interesting subsequent lives, as you can imagine, once Ukraine was independent. From them I relearned that it was possible to be on the left and to be a critic of the Soviet Union at the same time. I had been de-Sovietized, of course, by the experience of Prague '68. But it was through these Ukrainians in Edmonton that I came into contact with the idea of the Ukrainian dissident movement in the Soviet Union, and once I made contact with that idea, I was just off with it. Because into Edmonton came—this would have been the late '70s—the charismatic figure of Leonid Plyushch,<sup>11</sup> who was a Ukrainian Marxist dissident, never stopped being a Marxist, had been imprisoned in a psychiatric hospital, fed all these psychotropic drugs because he had been part of the Helsinki Committee—do you know what I'm talking about? This was when Jimmy Carter was President of the United States and signed the Helsinki Accords with Soviet Premier Brezhnev and a number of other Western countries, to respect the human rights of their respective citizens. Immediately a bunch of citizens, intellectuals got involved as Helsinki Rights Citizens' Monitoring Committees—they took it upon themselves to monitor how the Soviet Union behaved in relation to human rights. Plyushch was part of that, he got arrested. Later I would discover also the figure, Vasyly Stus, on whom I based the "doomed bridegroom" who turns out to have had an even more tragic destiny, but Plyushch survived.<sup>12</sup> He was eventually expelled, came to Canada on a speaking tour, came to Edmonton and we were all a-flutter because we had this wounded hero in our midst. I asked to interview him. I couldn't speak Ukrainian then, so I took along with me one of my colleagues, one of my *Hromada* friends, to do the translating and I was deeply moved by the story of his life and said to him at the end of the interview that I was very moved, but I was surprised at how moved I felt and how close I felt to him



because in fact we had grown up on different planets basically, completely different experiences, and he says, “no, no, no, we come from the same village,” and I just about died. Something went straight in about this idea that I came from the same village as this man who is a Ukrainian, Soviet Ukrainian. His acknowledgment or recognition galvanized me and, really, was one of the formative moments for *Bloodlines* and what then took me repeatedly to Eastern Europe to try to find that lost relationship. Not with the national community, the “nation,” but a very particular strand in it, the dissident, the repressed, the heroic, the wounded, and so on, and that’s why the independent Ukraine holds no interest for me.

SG So, we started off the story though with your—

MK About Ukrainophobia, okay. So, because of the reaction to *All of Baba’s Children*, I became—as I wrote at that time—a re-born Ukrainian Canadian, and with this new pride, went forth through multicultural politics and eventually into politics of Eastern Europe in the waning days, as we see now, of the Soviet Union. I was a member of the editorial board of *This Magazine* and whenever I was in Toronto I was invited to their meetings. I had two revelatory moments there with Ukrainophobia among my comrades. These weren’t just Anglos—Rick Salutin was one of the editors. I had written this story of Plyushch for them in which I narrated my rebirth as a Ukrainian and my decision to identify with their history, their experience. Now admittedly I didn’t nuance it too much, but I was immediately challenged by Rick Salutin and by John Lang.

SG Challenged on what grounds?

MK “Do you really mean all Ukrainians? What about those Ukrainians who supported pogroms, what about those Ukrainians who subverted the union movement in Northern Ontario, the fascists, the anti-Semites, those Ukrainians too?” And of course, I didn’t mean them, right? I expected some kind of acknowledgment from my friends of this momentous identification that I’d come up with to re-identify with my own ethnic group. Surely it was worthy of some sort of support or something. I would have said, “Well no, I don’t mean those Ukrainians, I mean Plyushch.” But it hurt me that that was their first response, that that was their notion of what being Ukrainian meant and they were incredulous that I would want to associate with a community that they stigmatized in that particular way.

And the second time it happened at *This Magazine* was when I proposed a piece they eventually ran under duress. It was anthologized by

Susan Crean in *Twist and Shout*, an anthology of feminist writing from *This Magazine*. Susan Crean edited it and reprinted that piece. It's called "Will the Real Natasha Please Stand Up." It was my critique of fellow travelling Canadian leftists who played exactly the same role as intellectuals did in the Cold War who made their trips to the Soviet Union and saw no problems, saw that there was no difficulty there. They were making these trips to the Soviet Union as part of their politics in the home country. They were doing it in the face of McCarthyism. They didn't much care what the experience of a Soviet citizen was. In that respect the memoirs of Shostakovich<sup>13</sup> were really important to me as well because he describes what it was like to be one of those Soviet artists that was trotted out to meet these official delegations from Friends of the Soviet Union, you know, groups in Canada and the United States, and despising these fellow travellers from the west who were not really seeing what was going on. In the same way, Lawrence Martin, who was the *Globe and Mail* reporter in the Soviet Union in the '80s, was reporting about going off to the provinces and being very impressed about how clean everything was and that dogs didn't shit in the street and children were well behaved. Germaine Greer went to Cuba—this was reprinted in *Granta Magazine*—she was invited to some women's conference, party conference.<sup>14</sup> She was bowled over by the fact that Fidel Castro came to the conference and spoke the first day. "Can you imagine any Western leader doing this at a women's conference?" No, you couldn't. And she stayed on to visit in Cuba, and finally understood the roots of machismo, Latin American machismo and it's in the fact that the women are so powerful that machismo is a countervailing force to female power. I thought she'd gone completely gaga.

And then the third moment was Heather Robertson, who's my generation, my politics, in Canada, who met a woman called Natasha at a world peace congress meeting in Halifax and who—surprise—within days had an official invitation to go to Moscow because of her new friend—

SG That didn't make her suspicious? (laughter)

MK No, no because her friend Natasha was married to the guy who was the director of this notoriously KGB-riddled institution called the Institute for the USA and Canada Studies of the Russian Academy of Sciences.<sup>15</sup> So, off she goes to Moscow—has a great old time with Natasha—but she is ever the vigilant journalist and says, "Gee, why are all these people lined up outside the grocery shops?" And Natasha said, "That's because the shops are so small that they can't all fit in at once." This is what

passed for journalism concerning the Soviet Union in the early '80s. In fact, into the Gorbachev era as well. I had done my travelling in Ukraine and I was by then already able to read and speak Ukrainian. I read books and taught myself how to do this again. I was aware of what the discussion was that was taking place within Ukrainian media themselves about women and society, so I proposed this piece to *This Magazine* to attack this kind of blinkered journalism from well-meaning leftist intellectuals in the west. Well, my colleagues on the board, they were very upset and feared that they would lose subscribers if they ran this kind of thing at the same time as the Reagan administration's war against the revolutionaries in Nicaragua. The thing to understand is, you couldn't be seen to give comfort to the enemy, blah, blah.

SG It's a familiar policy.

MK Yes, it's very familiar and I got caught in it. They did run the piece, they edited it. But, just as they feared, people canceled their subscriptions because they were tired of this neo-Reaganite crap from Kostash. So, it was those two moments when I realized that my proud new identity as a Ukrainian was not universally admired and that it had this other aspect to it in terms of the outside community. And all of that then I think really came to a head around the war crimes stuff, Ukrainian war criminals in Canada, the Deschênes Commission.<sup>16</sup>

SG Came to a head in what sense?

MK For me personally. It was one of those situations which, when I was with Ukrainians, I was fiercely defensive of Jews and the Jewish point of view on all this in Canada. When I was among Jews, I was very sensitive to their Ukrainophobia and Slavophobia and identified and tried to explain the Ukrainian position to them. It was an extremely uncomfortable position to be in because if you were talking to the one group the other group heard you as a sell-out. But the fact of the matter was that I felt that for all the phobia, the Slavophobia among Jewish Canadians, there was a prior issue and that was that Ukrainians had to come out of their state of deep denial about their relationship with Jews. Anyway, it came to a head for me in terms of my relationship with the *Hromada* group. Not everyone felt the same way, even though we were all socialist feminist Ukrainian Canadian patriots or whatever. My boyfriend of the time notably was very sensitive to how there was this always latent anti-Ukrainian sentiment—not just amongst Jews, but in the society at large and it comes up around this war crime issue. Of course the issue for Ukrainian Canadians was the John Demjanjuk case.<sup>17</sup> People got really obsessed with that. By that time race politics had emerged in the writing community so it sort of crossed over.

SG We'll have to chase that up but I remember reading in one of your pieces about feeling silenced—and I can't remember whether it was a general writers' meeting or a women's meeting.

MK That was the one in Calgary which would have been in I think '88 or '89, just when I was starting to write *Bloodlines*. I finished my travel in Eastern Europe and I went to, it was when we still had the National Book Festival, it was still being financed, so communities had various literary events, Calgary had this festival and recruited a panel discussion on ethnicity and writing. I wasn't on the panel, I was in the audience. Katherine Govier, Gail Scott, Lee Maracle were on that panel, and I don't know who else. And I remember sitting in the audience wondering what nerve that Katherine and Gail were up there, not me. I mean, after all, they were Anglo—sulk, sulk, right? To be fair, Gail herself wondered out loud what the hell she was doing there—“Maybe because I come from Quebec, that's what I'm here for.” And Katherine Govier comes from some Huguenot background four hundred years ago. Anyway, the important part of that event was in the question-and-answer period afterwards where all the questions were directed at Lee Maracle and they had to do with appropriation of voice. I did not get up and ask anything and that was the new experience. I was unbelievably silent in a discussion about ethnicity and writing which had been my beat up until then. I looked at my silence not out of any sense of grievance but out of a kind of astonishment. Something had happened and it was no longer about me and I was suddenly part of the problem. I was not part of the solution, I was part of the problem, and boy, did I have to figure that one out and I just stopped writing about all of this for years until I was forced back into it as Chair of the Writers' Union.<sup>18</sup>

SG Where are you now with this?

MK With the people whom I interviewed in my new book. I discovered that in revisiting these questions with some writers of colour, that they also have moved on, and we find ourselves in roughly comparable places which is the postmodern, glossed as an acknowledgment of difference and the collapse of the multicultural meta-narrative—this idea that there was some large project that we were all subsumed within called the cultural struggle. That, plus a new appreciation of what one of them called linkages, that it wasn't about the ghettoization of difference, but the linking up of difference into some reconstruction of a larger project. That overlaps with others now such as the—I don't want to put words in their mouths but for me it would be, actually it's a revisiting of the one I identified with in the '70s and '80s as a multicultural activist, and that is—the larger struggle against the globalization of culture, it's the

same one for me. But now with a new sophistication—things have happened since the first time it was cast and one of the things that happened was the Writing Thru Race conference.<sup>19</sup>

SG Yes, and one of the components of that that resonated very strongly with me is that question: it's all very well to be lumped together under white privilege, but who counts as European is something that pops up again and again in your writing and I cheer because that's precisely where I think a huge amount of work has to be done.

MK I think those moments of hurt about being Ukrainian, how my Ukrainian is perceived by my left-wing colleagues were about their failure to understand that there are very different experiences within that European otherness, or the European dominance. As soon as I studied East European and Balkan history, I realized that there was a whole other set of constructions that were taking place between some Europeans and other Europeans and that fear of the Asiatic Other and so on that this discourse around whiteness did not appreciate at all whatsoever. And I suppose maybe that's where my brand-new project is coming from now that I've got this Canadian stuff out of my system, passed it on to the next generation, is to go back again now and look at that—to understand the Slav now, not in relationship to its Canadian experience, but the Slav as it first emerged in European history and comes up against a dominant civilization called the Byzantine or the late Roman, I suppose, and how that gets subsumed within Ottoman Europe and all of that. I'm interested in the moment where the Slav conflicted so violently with the Byzantine in the Balkans when the Slavs arrived in the sixth century.

I was raised in the Orthodox church and I found that a very interesting identity and how it's played out in those Slavic countries that share that church with the Greeks, and yet there's a Slavophobia amongst Greeks, you know? So there's maybe some sort of foundational Slavic moment that I'm going back to, as the source moment for what emerged as a Ukrainian Canadian identity in Canada.

SG Well, it's playing itself out again of course in the war in the former Yugoslavia, there are quite a number of moments actually. When I was reading through *Bloodlines* I was littering it with those yellow markers where you kept asking that question at various important moments: where does Europe begin and where does it end? And suddenly you find yourself positioned with the "Asiatic hordes."

MK That's right, and you could be positioned there by the Poles, by the Greeks, by the Croats, by the Czechs. I realized that I felt solidarity with

- all of us who are on the other side of that line. But then I get impatient with the people on the Orthodox side of the line who are themselves phobic about the Asian.
- SG Precisely, and so, I think in a very recent article in *BorderCrossings*<sup>20</sup> when you talk about revisiting the Serbians, you talk about your impatience with the kind of politics that is happening there.
- MK *BorderCrossings* was an important forum for me. When I told them I was getting onto this topic of Byzantine history, they said I don't think that's for us anymore, but thanks anyway.
- SG At least in my perception, you intrinsically raise these questions that colonial history follows us into the new world, that it has its own kind of inflections in the New World as well. So those histories pursue us.
- MK I think that's what's at the heart of the war criminals affair—the tales that are told about the homeland in the new world, about pogroms and so on. The stories of the Cossack Uprising which were told as tales of liberation among Ukrainian Canadians and as horror stories among Poles and Jews. But, for example, my cousin here—same grandparents on the maternal side—has no Ukrainian identification whatsoever. She grew up outside the organized Ukrainian community. So, I think that this story I've been telling is one that begins with the early decision of my parents to stay within the institutions of the Ukrainian community, and what happens after me—that's the other thing I realize—I think that somewhere along the way, the story ends with the third generation. The fourth one is already intermarrying, has lost the language, doesn't know the history, maybe has some nostalgic or curious interest, but no longer has . . . when my grandmother died, the last of the Europeans died. So anybody who is fourth-generation has no direct European connection.
- SG Again, that's played out in different ways in different places and one of the arguments that I've made in the Australian context is that “European” becomes merged with English. There is very much that sense of the English as being the sole proprietors of European modernity. So Europe gets a very local kind of inflection which is not made clear.
- MK That's true, I've never thought about the English as Europeans, to tell you the truth.
- SG Exactly.
- MK Except for that moment I tell in one of my *BorderCrossings* columns where on one of my trips out of Eastern Europe—I always used to go through London to see friends and decompress and buy newspapers I

could read—it was 1988 when I went to the British Library to see the Mozart exhibit. They had head phones stationed at various places around the exhibit. You could put on the headphones and listen to *The Marriage of Figaro* at the same time as looking at manuscripts and so on. I was doing that at this one particular moment. I stood up and looked around me and saw the light beams floating in from the high gothic windows on to these leather-bound volumes of jurisprudence and god knows what else—and I burst into tears, listening to Mozart, looking at these books, because I finally realized what it meant when these dissidents in Eastern Europe who used to make me so impatient, would talk about wanting to rejoin Europe as though Europe was elsewhere, it's always elsewhere, right? Especially the Czechs, that polemic that Kundera set up that the Soviets had kidnapped Czech culture out of Europe. I thought, "Where do you think Moscow is, anyway?" But, at that moment I understood what they meant, that they had been kidnapped out of it, the rule of law, the notion of a mature civil society. *That* Europe was the one that they longed for and the one that I had seen—well, it was 1991, I had just had an awful trip in the Ukraine, and being outside of Europe meant this kind of slovenly, shabby, everyday existence in which your well-being was of absolutely no concern to the authorities and you were treated with contempt by your elites, and you had no recourse, you shuffled around, you shuffled, this sort of shuffling citizenry, and that was the one that was expelled from "Europe." So, it's very complicated for me. Again, I suppose when I am among the Euros, the ones that claim the privilege—European identity—I want to remind them of the complexity of it if you're a Slav, right? But when I'm among the Slavs, there is a sort of yearning for that modernity. Or that very important moment about tractors—it's also in my *BorderCrossings* columns—where I went to an exhibit at the Guggenheim. Aah! It was so important. The Guggenheim mounted a fabulous exhibit, "The Great Utopia: The Russian and Soviet Avant-Garde, 1915-1932," in 1992. I was peering in the glass case at a textile, a fabric, that had been designed by one of the artists who'd been mobilized for the industrial effort. As I was peering at it, I realized the design was rows upon rows of little tractors, and it made me weep.

I realized the same thing in two different ways: realized what the tractor meant when it showed up as an iconic image in Soviet Ukrainian periodicals such as I saw in my maternal grandparents' house (they subscribed to Soviet Ukrainian periodicals) and of course there would be the beaming farm worker on the tractor, and we'd make all those jokes

about falling in love with your tractor, ho, ho, right? Now I suddenly understood what that tractor meant. It meant modernity, being hauled into the modern world out of the bog of the village—that's exactly what it meant when they got the first tractor on my grandparents' homestead in Alberta. I asked my father about that—it meant you were modern, that tractor. I sort of wept out of shame that I had at one point belittled this, or made fun of it, or didn't understand what it meant to want to be part of this industrialized, mechanized world that I was so busy critiquing and denouncing as a left-wing person in North America, and remembering also—it's in *Bloodlines*—that film, the famous Dovzhenko film, *Zemlya, Earth*, with the arrival of the first tractor onto the collective farm.<sup>21</sup>

After that literary event in Calgary where I did not get up and say anything right through the *Writing Thru Race* controversy—my recollection is that basically I had nothing to say about myself as an ethnic because I felt that discussion had been overtaken or superseded by the race issue. But I, at the same time, felt very uncomfortable about rushing to join this new camp of white writers who were making their *mea culpas*, *mea maxima culpas*—rushing off to have unlearning, racism workshops. I never presented myself at those events, those political corrections, and I wondered why I didn't. I had my answer when I re-read that part of *All of Baba's Children*, a chapter called "Racism," which I re-read in the light of what had happened at the Writers' Union, or what was happening at the Writers' Union when I chaired it, and that was of course the hysteria in reaction to the Union's decision to sponsor a conference on racism and literature that excluded whites, or white writers. I was at the organizing meeting of the conference committee here in Vancouver where that decision was taken by the committee and I had to endorse it or refuse endorsement. It was a very interesting moment because I could see that around the table of committee members there was by no means a consensus. I think it was Makeda Silvera who persuaded me to go with the exclusive conference because she said in effect that "We have 362 days a year or something to meet each other as white and non-white writers; we want a couple of days just to air stuff within our own racial communities, and anyway, if you show up, then we have to worry about how you're feeling instead of getting on with our own agenda," and boy, that really rang a bell, in terms of the women's movement and how we needed *not* to have men around, especially sympathetic men.

MF Because then you'll hurt their feelings.



MK That's right.

SG And they tended to take over.

MK Exactly. Anyway, I decided that, tactically, it would be a good idea to support this exclusive conference because I could see their point, but, I suppose I could also see what would happen if I refused. Those who would refuse such a conference risked splitting the Writers' Union and there would then be a caucus that would take itself out. That had happened in other arts groups, and I did not want to be the Chair of the Union when that happened. So, having then endorsed the conference, I wrote a Chair's report in one of the newsletters that followed to explain why the Writers' Union should sponsor this conference, and it went over surprisingly well. Letters continued to come in. There were some members who had already resigned because of the June Callwood fiasco.<sup>22</sup> Some resigned because they didn't want to be part of a union that sponsored an event they couldn't go to. But, on the whole, there was pretty impressive cohesion until the Toronto newspapers got hold of this—and they just went nuts. The editorial writers at the *Globe* and the *Toronto Star*, the cartoonists, uhghh! I had to somehow reply to all this. I waited for it all to come in (I can't reply to each one of these) and then I went and re-read my chapter on racism in *All of Baba's Children* and remembered then that there had been a moment when I had not been white and my people had not been white, very literally, I mean, explicitly so, when Anglos in Alberta had taken exception to us there. I re-read the incident that occurred in my great-uncle's life when he, as a new immigrant, a new Canadian, had decided that he wanted to run for some kind of office and become part of Canadian institutional life and put his name forward as an official weed inspector for the district of Vegreville which is in the block settlement area of Ukrainians, and the editorialist of the *Vegreville Observer* wrote that this was a scandalous event that—to think that some “Russian yokel” would have authority over Englishmen, and then finished by saying, “No white man will stand for this.” I realized that Ukrainians were not white—but I am, right? So, the burden of my response to all of this in an essay in the *Globe and Mail*—was I think that's where I entered my postmodern space, understood how these things happen, how these things work. Uncle Peter was black but I wasn't—what had happened? This notion that we keep reconstructing the idea of the other, new elements get absorbed into it, and the old story gets told anew, some new version of it. Nothing is fixed forever, and we should all just take a deep breath and wait for this latest wave of immigration in turn to become

Canadianized, as it happened to the Ukrainian Canadians and would happen again to others. This was also in response to the Neil Bissoondath school of anti-multicultural hysteria in which I am flagrantly and badly misrepresented, when he quotes me in his book as saying that I am a multiculturalist because I like the idea of being exotic, which is exactly the opposite of the case I made to him. This is not about being exotic, it's about de-exoticizing the Ukrainian self and taking the Ukrainian self out of the church basement and into Canadian normality. So, the recovery of the idea of Ukrainians who had been themselves subjects and victims of a racist discourse was really important for me to understand for what my stance could be towards the newest alienated racialized other. It was a question of waiting for the non-white other to have a new experience of itself. And lo and behold, when I went to do my interviews for the next project, the artists and intellectuals I talked to all reiterated this vision of a multicultural society in which difference had not disappeared, but which found its linkages and its overlappings with other identity discourses and in any case, was not reductive. They were really hostile to the idea that they were only racial, that their identity was *only* racial. They believed they had all kinds of selves, and that they wanted to stitch (Cameron Bailey's term)<sup>23</sup> themselves into the larger story. I thought I heard being said—both an acknowledgement of the collapse of the metanarrative around Canadian identity, but at the same time a kind of hopefulness that all this difference and all this alterity is somehow going to produce a new metanarrative, right? When people talk about wanting to stitch themselves back into the big story, or they want to be part of Canadian self-understanding, it seems to me that in there is implicitly a desire for a big story about ourselves again.

SG Well, the big story, or the point of reference now is globalization, there's no question about that. People position themselves in relation to that.

MK And why global capitalism should be the only one that has the metanarrative is beyond me—I think we should have one too.

SG Absolutely.

MK That's what that wonderful essay that I cite in my book about what happened to the fish is about. Marilyn Porter,<sup>24</sup> who's a sociologist at Memorial University and a socialist, asked the question: is Canada a postmodern country? She wrote an essay in the *Journal of Canadian Studies* and answers it yes, we are because this, this and this, and she's done all of her homework and she acknowledges the importance of the post-colonial critique of the nationalist narrative, or the socialist para-

digm. But she says, having done all that work, these necessary correctives, intellectually and politically, what about the fish? Here she is a sociologist in Newfoundland, she sees what's happening to the collapse of the communities because of the collapse of the cod fishing, she goes: "Now I know the fish have disappeared from the discourse, but they have actually disappeared." And it's the actually disappeared fish that she wants us to think about again. And I think that's something of what I was hearing in the following generation.

SG That's the other big story which is around environmentalism and that is rightly galvanizing youth today.

MK But not just environmentalism. Having made these necessary correctives to the Anglo, multicultural, liberal nationalist big story, made all the corrections to that, we still need to find a new way of being in solidarity with each other. And that's what I think I heard from the people I was interviewing, and not just from the non-white Canadians, but that whole generation of young Canadians that I was talking to. Over and over again this desire for a new way of being in solidarity with each other.

#### NOTES

- 1 In the late 1920s, Stalin launched collectivization programs in the USSR. Between 7 and 10 million Ukrainians died in 1932-33 during the resulting famine. In 1941, following the German invasion of the Soviet Union, Stalin announced a "scorched earth" policy for Ukraine resulting in the relocation of all livestock, farm machinery, and industrial factories, and the destruction of valuable property (bridges, warehouses, and even architectural monuments), and the evacuation eastward of Ukrainian government officials, skilled technicians, scientists, and intellectuals.
- 2 "Gonzo journalism" is Hunter S. Thompson's unique approach to writing, a rambling and rolling style that draws in the audience, making readers feel that they are experiencing the action.
- 3 The meeting is mentioned in Susan Brownmiller's *In Our Time: Memoir of a Revolution* (New York: Random House, 1999), 174-75.
- 4 Kostash was enrolled at the University of Alberta between 1962 and 1965.
- 5 In 1969, the federal government of Pierre Trudeau (with Jean Chrétien as Minister of Indian Affairs) released its "White Paper on Indian Policy."
- 6 Maria Smallface Marule is a member of the Blood Nation of the Blackfoot Confederacy and is internationally known as an educator and advocate of human rights for indigenous peoples. She has taught Native American Studies at the University of Lethbridge, and in the fields of political and economic development with CUSO, the National Indian Brotherhood, and the World Council of Indigenous Peoples.
- 7 George Melnyk, "The Indian as Ethnic," *Yarmarok: Ukrainian Writing in Canada Since the Second World War*, ed. Jars Balan and Yuri Klynovy (Edmonton: Canadian Institute of Ukrainian Studies, University of Alberta; 1987), 142-6.

- 8 Dybikowski, Ann, et al. ed. *In the Feminine: Women and Words/Les Femmes et Les Mots* [Proceedings of the 1983 Conference]. (Edmonton: Longspoon, 1985), West Coast Editorial Collective. *Women and Words: The Anthology/Les femmes et les mots: une anthologie* (Madeira Park, BC: Harbour, 1984).
- 9 Kostash was on a panel with the following: Lillian Allen, Kristjana Gunnars, Mary di Michele, Suniti Namjoshi and Coreene Courcjhene. The “Aboriginal writer from Winnipeg” Kostash mentions is likely to have been Coreene who was representing Pemmican Press.
- 10 Jars Balan wrote Kostash’s entry (as part of the entry on Ukrainian Canadian writing) in the first edition of *The Oxford Companion to Canadian Literature* (Toronto: Oxford U P, 1983).
- 11 Beginning in the 1960s, Ukrainian mathematician Leonid Plyushch (1939- ) was vocal in his opposition to Soviet abuse of human rights. Despite surveillance, harassment and questioning by KGB officials, he wrote protest letters, contributed reports to journals, and attended the trials of arrested friends and fellow dissidents. In 1972, he was arrested. Other dissidents arrested at this time were sentenced to labour camps and internal exile, but Plyushch was diagnosed as schizophrenic and committed to a psychiatric hospital. For two and a half years, he was given drugs that rendered him immobile and severely depressed. Interventions were attempted by the American Red Cross, the American Medical Association, Amnesty International, and various other organizations. In 1976, Plyushch was released and he and his family emigrated to France. Plyushch has published *History’s Carnival: A Dissident’s Autobiography*, edited and translated by Marco Carynyk (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1979).
- 12 Vasyl Stus is the figure upon whom Kostash based the figure of the “doomed bridegroom” in her book *The Doomed Bridegroom: A Memoir* (Edmonton: NeWest P, 1998, reviewed on page 167 of this issue of *Canadian Literature*). Stus (1938-1985 ) was a Ukrainian poet and intellectual; like Plyushch, he was outspoken in his objections to Soviet persecution of Ukrainian intellectuals. In 1972 Stus was arrested and charged for “slandering the state,” then convicted and sentenced to five years of labour and three years of internal exile in the Urals. Despite his imprisonment and exile, as well as his deteriorating health, Stus continued his fight against the Soviet regime: he continued to write, and his documents were smuggled to the West. Following his release in 1979, Stus continued his political work and, in 1980, he was arrested again (sentenced to ten years of forced labour and five years of internal exile). In 1983, Stus’ prison notebooks circulated in the West and, in 1985, he was a candidate for the 1986 Nobel Prize in Literature. Stus died in a labour camp in 1985 at the age of 47.
- 13 Volkov, Solomon, ed. *Testimony. The Memoirs of Dmitri Shostakovich* (New York: Harper and Row, 1979).
- 14 Greer, Germaine. “Women and Power in Cuba.” *Granta* 16 (1985): 205-29.
- 15 The Institute for the USA and Canada Studies of the Russian Academy of Sciences was established over thirty years ago in Moscow as a scientific research institution for advanced studies of the economy, policy, and ideology of the United States of America and Canada.
- 16 In 1985, the Mulroney government announced the Commission of Inquiry on War Criminals, to be headed by Quebec Superior Court Justice Jules Deschênes. The objective of the Deschênes Commission was to determine whether there were Nazi war criminals in Canada and to recommend policy that would effectively hold them accountable for their crimes. Jewish organizations in Canada saw the commission as delaying deci-

- sive government action on Nazi war criminals. Ukrainian organizations, on the other hand, felt that the commission was initiated by special interest groups seeking ethnic vengeance against the Ukrainian community. Both Jewish and Ukrainian groups lobbied the commission. The Deschênes Report was released in 1987 and the federal government simultaneously announced its decision to amend the Criminal Code to allow prosecution of acts suspected to be war crimes committed outside Canada that would have violated Canadian law. The futility of the commission became obvious to both sides: the government had made its decision about war crimes before the Deschênes Report was released and publicly debated.
- 17 In 1986, John Demjanjuk (1920- ), a Ukrainian-born resident of the United States since 1951, was extradited to Israel and put on trial on the charge that he was "Ivan the Terrible," a notoriously ruthless prison guard at Treblinka. In 1988, Demjanjuk was found guilty and sentenced to death. But the case was appealed and, in 1990, brought before the Supreme Court in Israel. In 1993, Demjanjuk's conviction was overturned and he was released.
  - 18 Kostash was Chair of The Writers' Union of Canada in 1994-95.
  - 19 The Writing Thru Race conference, organized by the Writers' Union of Canada, was held from June 30 to July 3, 1994, in Vancouver. Editorials and articles appeared in the *Globe and Mail*, the *Vancouver Sun*, and the *Toronto Star* in which the conference was described as "cultural apartheid" and "reverse racism." Roy Miki discusses the conference in his *Broken Entries: Race, Subjectivity, Writing* (Toronto: Mercury, 1998).
  - 20 *BorderCrossings* is a Winnipeg-based international arts magazine; Kostash wrote a column in *BorderCrossings* from 1992 to 1998.
  - 21 Aleksandr Petrovich Dovzhenko (1894-1956) was a Ukrainian motion-picture director who brought international recognition to the Soviet film industry. The child of Ukrainian peasants, Dovzhenko made his directorial debut in 1926 with *Yagodki Lyubvi* ("The Fruits of Love"). Other films directed by Dovzhenko include *Zvenigora* (1928), *Arsenal* (1929), *Zemlya* (1930), *Ivan* (1932), *Aerograd* (1935), *Shchors* (1939), and *Michurin* (1946). *Zemlya*, Dovzhenko's last silent film, depicts the closeness between the Ukrainian peasant and his land and the upheaval in the countryside in the opening year of Soviet industrialization with the organization of collective farms.
  - 22 See Marlene NourbeSe Philip's account in her *Frontiers: Selected Essays and Writings on Racism and Culture, 1984-1992* (Stratford, ON: Mercury, 1992).
  - 23 Cameron Bailey is a writer, curator and art critic who has been involved in many film and video festivals; he was a Director of the Ontario Film Development Corporation from 1990 to 1995 and he is a former Director of Toronto's Black Film and Video Network.
  - 24 Marilyn Porter. "Are Some Countries More Postmodern Than Others? Some Observations from Recent Canadian Experience." *Journal of Canadian Studies* 30.2 (1995): 91-106.

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