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Editorial

Shelagh Wilkinson

"The women's movement has barely touched the lives of most immigrant women." The comment comes from an involved social worker who knows what she's talking about — and in putting together this issue I am suddenly aware that she is right.

The woman we need to listen to rarely speaks out. How can she? Patriarchal language restrains most women, but when English is her second language a woman is jeopardized twice. She may send parcels and long letters home to her family, but in Canada she remains shy and language tied. To learn about her experiences, her hopes, her problems, I went to the centres which help immigrant women cope with life in a new country.

But the social workers in these centres are pushed to the limit. They have a large number of clients and too few working hours. They have limited space and sparse resources. They all tell the same story. In fact, as I go to ten different locations around Toronto, I see the situation for myself. The one thing none of these workers has is *time*. And it takes time to write an article. So for this issue, "grass-roots" articles were hard to come by, but I kept on trying.

It's Saturday morning and I'm standing in a bakery on College Street. Everyone is talking, but not in my language. The issue is on my mind — I wish I could join in. A woman takes out some photographs to show around and suddenly I am included. Her name is Maria and she's laughing as she shows the pictures of three children — hers. "Coming to Canada soon," she tells me and smiles. "I don't speak so good — yet. But pictures always speak good." She's right. Her pictures have included me in her world. And that's what Deborah Barndt's pictures do in this issue.

When language ties us up, fails us, we share our lives through images. This issue is for all of us in Canada, women who speak many languages but who share common problems, common joys, a common womanhood.

l'éditorial

Mair Verthuy

"La mosaïque canadienne"

Quelle belle expression! On envisage tout de suite un kaléidoscope de couleurs, une espèce de gentil tourbillon où les pièces — toutes également importantes — se déplacent et se replacent à volonté pour former toujours de nouvelles et séduisantes images. Combien de générations d'enfants ont été enchantées, continuellement fascinées, par ces jouets qui leur permettent, en plaçant morceaux ou billes à leur guise, d'inventer et de réinventer de façon constante un pays qui ressemble à ces jeux, c'est le rêve.

Mais qui peut prétendre qu'il s'agit là du Canada? Nous vivons

dans un pays où celles qui ne font pas partie des deux peuples fondateurs — et les autochtones? — ont à composer, souvent avec la langue d'une des deux majorités, toujours avec un système politique et économique, des lois, des coutumes, préétablis. La culture, coupée de tout ce qui la fait vivre, qu'est-ce que c'est?

C'est surtout un fardeau pour les femmes qui ont à assumer une double identité, l'une coupée de ses racines d'origine, l'autre d'avec ses racines mal accueillies ici; qui sont chargées, par les hommes de leur ethnie comme par la majorité, hommes et femmes, de la nation canadienne de maintenir des traditions qui les isolent mais qui ajoutent du pittoresque au paysage et donnent bonne conscience aux autres; qui, qu'elles soient nées ici ou ailleurs, restent pour l'instant des Canadiennes à trait d'union; qui sont souvent triplement exploitées — en tant que femmes, en tant que travailleuses, en tant qu' "autres."

Le rêve tourne facilement au cauchemar. Le multiculturalisme est sans doute une valeur à poursuivre sous sa forme actuelle, il est permis de se demander s'il sert effectivement l'intérêt des femmes. Toutes les Canadiennes — dans le respect de la différence, certes, mais pas au prix de l'oppression de certaines — doivent se rendre compte des dangers aussi bien que des avantages qu'il présente et travailler ensemble à notre compréhension mutuelle, à l'épanouissement de chacune d'entre nous selon la voie qui lui est propre. La dialogue bien ordonné commence chez soi.

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Are you wondering where to buy or subscribe to *Les cahiers de la femme*? Do you wish to submit articles to us? Contact our regional editors Jeanne Maranda or Maïr Verthuy at

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January 1st, 1983

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Dear Francophone consoeurs:

Living in the Quebec mosaic has afforded us a unique Canadian experience. Personally, my "woman sphere" (motherhood, career, and interpersonal relationships) has been enriched by the complimentary interaction of our two cultures and our "support-service." In today's hard economic climate, our "support-service" (exchange of expertise) has been a cost-cutting factor.

Although "support-service" is not necessarily a Quebec phenomena, a "cultural-support-service" is unique to Quebec women. For example, by virtue of the fact that you, my consoeurs, understand the French businesswomen's approach of "going by their nose" (as you call it), we have been able to do business successfully in France. Alternatively, I have been instrumental in our dealings with our more conservative British contacts.

Eventually the Québécois culture will have another dimension — a distinct vocabulary of its own. It will happen partly because interaction is a priority among our women. And we choose to accommodate interaction by simply bastardizing our languages.

In fact, to my mind, the media has overplayed the so-called language problem. From my experience, Quebec is "softer around the edges" than the media would have the rest of Canada believe. A perfect example was at our colloque at the Sheraton Centre last October fifteenth. Eileen Hendry (founder of the Vancouver Women's Network), with only a dozen French words in her possession, led close to three hundred women (90 per cent of which were French) through networking exercises.

In closing, I leave you with a question, my consoeurs: will the Quebec men find an alternative to the women's "cultural-support-service"?

Yours truly,
Your Anglophone consoeur,
Elaine Steinberg-Kraut