

BOOK REVIEWS



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MIGRANT WOMEN SPEAK

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Interviews presented by

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The most poignant discussion of emigrants that I have read is that of John Berger and Jean Mohr, entitled *'A seventh Man — the story of a migrant worker in Europe'*. Through a series of what the authors themselves describe as 'images and words', a wretched story of the emotions of the migrant worker is revealed. Photographs tell the story of the migrant worker who leaves his village and family ties to enter the demoralizing assembly lines of work in Germany.

"Migrant Women Speak" is a similarly poignant book. A publication of the World Council of Churches Committee of Migrant Workers, this — unlike "A Seventh Man" — discusses the experience of the migrant women in Europe. By drawing on interviews of the women themselves, and in their own words, the women express their anguish, hardship and aspirations. In collating the discussion, the interviewers have interspersed summaries such as the following:

"It is clear from the interviews that the problems which affect the women most are

— loneliness, isolation, — a feeling of rejection

- the problem of the children
- loss of cultural identity (especially among the young people)
- the problem of work, lack of training — husband's opposition to their receiving any training
- the problems of married life." (p.21)

"On the whole, their problems remain the same. The constant struggle to earn enough to satisfy the family's basic needs consumes all the energies and vital force of these women and their husbands; all their other problems are relegated to second place." (p.76)

"In this situation, the women suffer more than the men because they are much more isolated than their husbands and children, and have practically no contact with the society round about them." (p.76)

Discussions towards the end of the book centre around "A Women Migrants' Manifesto" where the political demands are presented in terms of employment problems, for example

"We demand:

- the guarantee of every woman's right to work; it is unjust to use women as the 'buffer' reserve of the economy." (p.101)

Overall, the concluding comments are summarized thus:

"As we have seen, the experience of this situation is even more distressing for the woman than for the man. Not only is she more exposed to the different forms of discrimination and other difficulties in the receiving country, but as a woman, she is also subjected to discrimination within her own family." (p.120)

Like the Berger and Mohr book, "Migrant Women" assumes an

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analysis of the societal context of immigration as a situation requiring "a comprehensive social and economic analysis of the whole phenomenon of migration." (p.2) The point is made that social workers for instance simply attempt to provide assistance to those "new poor" without undertaking such an analysis.

Because these books contain an emotional appeal within a structural context, they provide excellent, succinct, and aesthetically moving introductions to the complex perspectives relating to the immigration experience.

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* Berger, J. and Mohr, J. **A Seventh Man** The story of a migrant worker in Europe. Penguin Books 1975.



SCREAM QUIETLY OR THE NEIGHBOURS WILL HEAR — Erin Pizzey, (Penguin Books, Gt. Bt., 1974. Reprinted, with a postscript, in Pelican Books 1979) 149 pp. Price \$2.75.

In Scream Quietly or the Neighbours Will Hear. Erin Pizzey documents the beginnings of the women's refuge movement in England.

Chiswick Women's Aid was started in 1971 by a group of women who wished to develop a community centre. Their aim was to try and end the isolation of women at home all day with children. The house was not intended to provide accommodation and there was only one bed for emergencies. Twelve months later the community centre was a temporary home for thirty-four women and children. Erin Pizzey comments about this period, "I wonder, if we'd known what was to happen, whether we might not have put down our paint brushes and run."

The circumstances of those needing accommodation are graphically described, often through the eyes of the children, in passages such as, "I came to Women's Aid a few months ago. I came here because there is nowhere else to go. I came here because my dad keeps beating up my mum. He dragged her up the stairs by her hair. He also squashed me against the wall behind my mum. He keeps on punching her."

Women's Aid made the transition from a community centre to a women's refuge due to the inability or unwillingness of welfare agencies to assist women who were seen as voluntarily leaving their husbands. As one social worker commented "It is not the policy of the social services to interfere with the sanctity of marriage."

This book serves as a severe indictment of welfare workers with attitudes such as that above and also of the many agencies from the

police through to Marriage Guidance who have failed to assist women trapped in violent relationships. A whole chapter is devoted to the failings of the social services. The police, Social Security, hospitals, doctors, the Family Service Unit and the probation service are all mentioned. The legal and judicial systems are also shown to be guilty of either not understanding marital violence or of implicitly condoning it.

Children and their reactions to violence are a particular concern of Chiswick Women's Aid. Ms. Pizzey believes that children who have witnessed violence between their parents or have experienced it from either or both parents, are the next generation of batterers. As she says, "It's the children who suffer and the pattern repeats through each generation."

Although Erin Pizzey clearly describes the horrifying situations of many women she has been in contact with and the inflexibility of the organisations these women seek assistance from, she appears to be in some confusion as to what causes the problem. While showing an awareness of the structural reasons for women remaining in intolerable situations such as lack of finance, housing, etc., she ignores the societal basis of marital violence. The men responsible for the violence towards their partners are seen as suffering from long-term personality disorders or psychoses, which are individual problems.

This approach ignores the ideological basis of marriage and its position within capitalist society. It does not explain why the women have so much trouble finding help. It also plays into the hands of those who claim that some women "ask