

Book Reviews . . .

attributes to the activities of individuals and groups other than doctors (social workers, community nurses, etc.) who have extended knowledge by drawing on their own experiences. Their interest has also led to the questioning of the ready acceptance of cultural explanations for migrant behaviour and the telescoping of class and cultural explanations of the migrant health situation.

The restructuring which has taken place is still only marginal and has made it easier for hospitals and medical practices to withstand change.

Of the three institutions examined, the Trade Unions have been the least responsive to the migrant presence — despite their increasing dependence on their migrant membership — and have contributed almost nothing to their own knowledge in the area.

Traditional union views about migrants, based upon fear of competition in the labour market, were established long ago.

Only in the early post-war years were migrants courted, when right-wing sections of the union movement sought the support of refugees from Eastern Europe in the Grouper v Communist conflict that resulted in the Labor Party split and the formation of the D.L.P. Once the split occurred, the unions (and the D.L.P.) lost interest in the migrants they had previously cultivated. They were then seen only in terms of numbers.

More recently, industrial action by migrants, the activities of a few militant left-wing definers, the creation of links between some unions and migrant groups and the emergence of activist groups such as the Ethnic Communities Councils are articulating needs and prodding

the unions. In this area, more than any other, it is the migrants themselves who have been the catalysts.

For the first 20 years of post-war immigration, institutions unanimously defined migrants as assimilable. It was asserted "... that they would neither destroy the cultural identity of Australian society nor upset the existing structure of classes and status groups." The author sees the challenge to this assimilation theory, beginning at the end of the 1960s, to be the result of a growing conflict between public knowledge and experience. Those in authority have not been the ones to take initiatives; responses have mainly been associated with specific challenges to institutional authority. The success of the challenges has been influenced by the challengers' degree of access to channels that enable them to contribute to social knowledge.

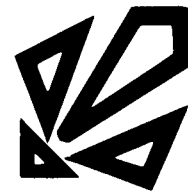
"The new definers — migrants and others — insist on ethnic rights and ethnic dignity and on ethnic pluralism as a positive, creative force, not simply a defensive reaction against insecurity and rejection."

This book is a milestone in the literature of ethnic affairs. Most previous writings have been descriptive, lacking a theoretical framework.

The Migrant Presence provides a solid foundation for directing debate into deeper and richer channels. Professor Martin's analysis is convincing on the whole, although more attention might be paid to the influence of overseas movements (e.g. struggles for independence and equal rights) upon thinking in Australia. There

are a few factual errors (e.g. the N.S.W. Labor Council has in fact taken up the offer of a grant to establish an Ethnic Affairs Unit) but these are mainly the result of the flurry of activity now taking place in certain areas. They do not affect the value of the book.

Berenice Buckley.



THE AMBIVALENCE OF ABORTION — Linda Bird Franke
261 Pages Penguin Books 1979
\$3.95 (Recommended)

In 1976, the New York Times carried a report of a woman's reflections on her recent abortion. At the age of 33, "Jane Doe" had discovered that she was pregnant and she and her husband had decided together that a fourth child would seriously disrupt their family and careers. To her surprise, "Jane" found herself beset by doubts when she arrived at the abortion clinic. She began to panic and, as she wrote, "the rhetoric, the abortion marches I'd walked in, the telegrams sent to . . . counteract the Friends of the Fetus, the Zero Population Growth buttons I'd worn, peeled away, and I was all alone with my microscopic baby". The pain and sadness passed, but she continued to be haunted by the experience, by "a very little ghost that only appears when I'm seeing something beautiful." "Of course, we have room" I cry to the ghost "of course, we do".

Book Reviews . . .

Linda Bird Franke was “Jane Doe”, and the astonishing response to the New York Times article persuaded her to investigate other women to determine whether they had experienced similar confusion about abortion. As the author points out, the response was almost great enough to be “recorded on a seismograph”. Anti-abortion campaigners used the article for their mailing lists and denounced the author as a “murderer”, while pro-choice activists decided the article was a “plant” and might even have been written by a man. Franke was not surprised by these reactions. She observes that they are all right and all wrong, because such decisions are fundamental and it is not as black-and-white an issue as the laws governing abortion are forced to be.

Having unintentionally touched a nerve, Franke took leave of absence from her job and interviewed hundreds of women and men and asked them to recount their experiences in their own words.

The result is a compassionate report, free of moralising, about the reactions of those most closely involved in abortion. The women Franke interviewed represent a cross-section of American society and their experiences are those of women everywhere. Some felt a sense of relief, others were haunted by “little ghosts” and the majority were, as the title suggests, ambivalent. Even for those who were convinced that they had made the right choice, there were feelings of bitterness and resentment that they and their men had allowed the abortion to become necessary in the first place. ‘Ariel Balkind; 36, said “I don’t regret the abortion . . . but one thing is certain. Abortion has an effect on your life. I’ve never stopped blaming my husband. I

always throw it back at him whenever we have a fight now.” The mistake of excluding men from any consideration of abortion is revealed by the moving interviews with many of them in the book. Twenty-year-old ‘Ralph Wisnowski’ seems close to tears as he sits in the waiting room of an abortion clinic. “I really wanted to get married, but she’s still in high school, so I guess it wasn’t fair to her.” Many of the husbands were warmly supportive of their wives’ right to choose, but later revealed personal grief. Others confessed to feeling “shut out” when they wanted to share the problem with their wives or girlfriends. Among its many benefits, this book is an eloquent plea for better services providing birth control, to minimise the need for abortions. Nonetheless, there will be accidents, and the continuing debate about abortion can only be enhanced by this report. It demonstrates that there are ‘no neat

answers to abortion’ and reminds us that the knowledge of pregnancy can never be received with indifference. Franke insists that safe, legal abortions must be available for those who want them, just as there should be adequate support systems for women who wish to continue their pregnancies. The kindness and common sense exhibited by the author should teach us all. As she concludes: “It is not up to men to tell women what to do in these circumstances. Nor is it up to women to tell each other what to do . . . regardless of whether she chooses to continue her pregnancy or to terminate it through abortion, it is her decision alone . . . It falls to all of us to support that decision with grace, safety and understanding — and to live with it, and each other, as best we can.”

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