

## BOOK REVIEWS

Adelberg, Ellen and Claudia Currie (Editors): *Too Few To Count: Canadian Women In Conflict With The Law*. Vancouver: Press Gang Publishers, 1987, ISBN0-88974-009-7, 253 pp., \$16.95.

This volume brings together a variety of descriptive and analytical articles concerned with the sub-culture of women prison inmates. The articles range from descriptive, historical and anecdotal to analytical and theoretical. Each of these serves the whole and its readers well, and the result is remarkable compilation of feminist views of women in the criminal justice system.

For those who work closely in this system, the title of the book rings particularly true. Few data have been collected over the years which relate directly to women offenders. As well, women in prison have lost out to the more significant number of male offenders in terms of obtaining programs, treatment, transfers, parole, and other avenues to survival.

The treatment of Native women offenders is just enough to whet the appetite. There is room for another book to deal with this issue exclusively, although the present text makes a beginning.

A couple of general points about the book are worth making before dealing more specifically with the content of this collection. First, there is a heavy/emphasis throughout upon the federal Prison for Women (P4W) in Kingston and its inmates. This is a useful microcosm for study, and data are available here to assist the researcher. However, it must be recognized that these women are a very special group of serious offenders and do not necessarily represent the majority of women offenders who are housed in provincial institutions across the country.

Second, this volume presents a feminist overview of women in conflict with the law. A number of the authors point out that the circumstances which lead to a person coming into conflict with the law are often the same for both men and women: socio-economic background, social conditioning in childhood, education, race and so on. The value of this book is that it points out so dramatically the way in which the accident of being female adds an extra dimension to each of these factors. Issues of structural inequality, sexist conditioning, and hierarchical power politics are addressed in turn, and demonstrate the extraordinary desperation of these women, both before and during incarceration.

Finally, a theme throughout this volume which deserves to be highlighted is that public education is of the essence. Significant change to the system and to conditions of incarceration has only been accomplished when public pressure and community concerns have been brought to bear upon the bureaucracy. Since the system is designed to resist change from within, significant change can only be achieved in conjunction with efforts from without.

Carol LaPrairie presents a theoretical model on Native women and crime in Canada. This very brief chapter is disappointing not only for its length but also for the fact that it presents little by way of a theoretical framework, and less by way of support for some of the conclusions. Her theory that the recent history of abandonment of traditional hunting roles for men has led to a shifting of roles between men and women and thus to conflict between men and women is largely unsupported. She goes on to say that women taking on more power and independence and becoming the primary breadwinners under a welfare system has led to aggression by men against women. This in turn has led to criminal activity by Indian women. This "direct causal relationship" (p. 108) to which she refers is supported only by a press clipping which avers that all female offenders in one program had been sexually abused.

Statistics on this subject indicate that most women offenders, whether Indian or not, have been abused at some time. Such an assertion does little to support a negative effect of this upon Native women which differs in any way from the position of non-Natives.

It is in the Conclusions section of LaPrairie's article that we begin to see room for a theory which takes into account "the broader economic, socio-cultural and legal factors" (p. 110) which contribute to Native women coming into conflict with the law. The author leaves us with the challenge of tackling "issues of structural inequality" (p. 110) in Canada which might also assist in answering these questions. It is to be hoped that a subsequent article will go on to develop these concepts.

Holly Johnson's chapter goes further towards setting out the disparities for Native women in conflict with the law. She points out that Natives are vastly overrepresented in prison populations, and Table 5 showing the overrepresentation of Native women is shocking. For example, in Saskatchewan and Manitoba in 1981, although only six per cent of the general population was Native, the percentage of Native women in prison was 77% and 71% respectively. In Yukon and Newfoundland, Native women comprised 100% of the female prison population.

In 1969 (the most recent figures available) 70% of the arrests of women in Winnipeg were Natives. A cross-country survey in 1982 showed that Native women were much more likely to be charged with violent offences and fine defaults than non-Natives. Native women are less likely to obtain full parole, and more likely to have their parole revoked. And because most (70%) of the federal Native inmates come from the Pacific and Prairie provinces, the impact upon them of being incarcerated at the P4W in Kingston, Ontario, is disproportionately felt, as the distances are huge and the separation from family and friends thus more complete.

Shelley Gavigan as well makes reference to the particular problem of Native women offenders. She points out that the high unemployment rate and low educational level of Native women are significant. This supports her position that factors of class, race and social position are critical to any treatment of Native women in conflict with the law.

The remainder of the book deals with other specific issues related to women in conflict with the law. Holly Johnson's article presents a daunting amount of data in readable fashion, and she is able to draw conclusions which set the stage for subsequent analysis. She asserts that the consequences of criminal behaviour affect women more than men; for example, she points out that there are few viable programs for women who are serving short sentences in provincial institutions. One might add that some of the available programs which are designed to avoid incarceration are not viable for many women; for example, the option to pay off a fine by doing community service work is of no use to women who are unable to participate because of a lack of day care facilities.

Shelley Gavigan provides the reader with a thorough review of criminological literature as it relates to women offenders. She points out the sexist biases of early criminologists, and spends some time refuting Freda Adler's proposition that the rise of feminism will lead to more crime by women. Gavigan adopts a middle road of interpretation, indicating that we ought to guard against reacting to the sexist assumptions in criminology by adopting a theoretical framework which treats only questions of gender and nothing more. She says that issues of gender cannot be considered in isolation from issues of class, race and social position.

Adelberg and Currie set out case histories of seven P4W inmates. This chapter serves the purpose of introducing uninitiated readers to the world of incarceration. The authors conclude by suggesting that there are ways to ensure that women do not offend - these include financial and social support for single mothers, full and safe control of reproduction, and proper non-sexist education of children.

Gloria Geller presents a study of young women offenders which is frightening in its implications. It is her well-documented position that double standards of sexual behaviour combined with differing societal expectations of boys and girls have led to disproportionate incarceration of girls for non-criminal "status" offences (viz. sexual immorality, truancy, incorrigibility and running). Early data show that many more girls than boys go to training school for these offences. Sexually active girls have been judged to be delinquent while such activity by boys has been ignored. Ms. Getler's opinion is that the sexist approach to dealing with girl offenders will not disappear with new legislation (i.e. The Young Offenders Act), since this approach is the result of society's duplicitous stance on sexual morality issues, and its discriminatory response to this in relation to young women.

Sheatagh (Dunn) Cooper reviews the history of Canada's only federal Prison for Women. She asserts that the prison and its programs have been shaped by neglect and paternalism in the treatment of women offenders. Study after study has recommended the decentralization of the prison so that women could serve their time closer to home - this has not happened. In 1981, the Canadian Human Rights Commission found that women offenders were being discriminated against on the basis of sex, and that their treatment in all areas was inferior to that of the men. Nothing by way of significant change has been effected as a result of this.

Elliot and Morris discuss the traditional, sexist treatment received by women in P4W. For example, although only fifteen per cent of these women are regarded to be dangerous, they are all housed in maximum security conditions. (What violence there is in P4W is mostly self-inflicted and not directed outwards.) Speaking of the ultimate goal of eliminating incarceratory systems altogether, they write that we must change "a social structure based on profits and power, to one that speaks to human development and shared dignity" (p. 159).

Berzins and Hayes describe their personal experiences in trying to change the system. They speak of the frustrations of trying to obtain funding for 200 women federal inmates when there are 10,000 men competing for those funds. Berzins says she faced the same discrimination in her work that inmates face in the institution - the image of being an irrational, emotional woman. Hayes feels the women's movement offers valuable models by way of peer counselling and assertiveness training which may serve to help offenders break their dependency on abusive and/or criminal men. This is especially important in view of the fact that many women doing federal time are there because of the outcome of their association with such men.

Finally, Karlene Faith writes of the disservice provided by the media, principally television and film, which portray women offenders as aggressive, masculinized and lesbian. She demystified the character of women offenders and concludes that "women in prison are an ordinary range of women who have been exceptionally desperate, foolish or unlucky" (p. 193). Faith also maintains that for women there is an extra dimension of discrimination at work: "Their lawbreaking is a futile response to the continuum of private and/or social abuse to which females are commonly subjected" (p. 193).

This collection thus touches on a number of related issues which deeply affect the lives of women who come into conflict with the law in Canada. It is apparent that such women have suffered and continue to suffer discrimination as women. Even worse is the position of Native women who suffer the added discrimination of their race. In the sub-culture of women offenders, these comprise a significant and desperate group for whom there are few defenders. This book goes some distance to highlighting the many problems of women offenders in Canada, and to exploring potential solutions.

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Lalor, George: *The Foot of the River*. Winnipeg: Pemmican Publications, 1986, vii + 126 pp. Bibliography illustrated by R~al B~ard. \$9.95 (paper), ISBN 0-919143-43-1.

This attractively illustrated little volume contains the first two of a projected series of five books recounting the history of the area surrounding the estuary of the Winnipeg River. Lalor explains in the Foreward [sic] that his work, while thoroughly researched, is not history. What he describes as "objective narrative" is interspersed with "dramatic scenes...employing all the elements of fiction" (p. v).

Book One traces the history of the region from the retreat of the glaciers and the first tentative journeys of exploration, to settlement by the Cree in response to population pressure and inadequate resources to the East. Lalor describes the lifestyle of the Cree, their cycle of harvest and hunt, their periodic famines. Cultural history is conveyed by legend and

fear-tinged respect for the Ojibway and cautious alliance with the Assiniboine. This portion of the book has the quality of oral history; the use of fictitious characters and imaginary situations provides substance to what is a somewhat sketchy account of thousands of years of history.

Book Two contains much greater factual detail as it tells of the first contact between the Cree and the Europeans, the good early years as the French and English competed for trade, the increasing dependency on the Europeans, the devastating effects of the alcohol and disease imported by them and the ultimate sense of abandonment as the French left their chain of forts and withdrew to Quebec in the 1750's. Interspersed with historical accounts of advances, treaties, construction, betrayals and retreats are further fictional scenes portraying the human impact of these events.

It is this marriage of history and fiction that creates problems for the reader, for *The Foot of the River* does not fulfil the criteria for either. The fictional characters do not become the "living, breathing people" that Lalor promises us, because they rarely rise above the stereotypical. The first character we meet, mercifully briefly, is Man-Who-Searches, easily recognizable as the Noble Savage: "With slender hand he brushed aside the strands of coarse black hair that lay across his countenance and tossed aside this robe of beaver skins to feel the chilly breath of autumn on his abdomen and the sinewy muscles of his limbs" (p. 11). Lalor's portrayal of the voyageurs similarly fails to transcend the cliché: "they were a happy lot. Wherever they went, they sang" (p. 84). Women characters exist only to marry and bear children; men are stoic and inarticulate. The characters move briefly and woodenly across the stage and disappear.

If the failure to develop lifelike, multidimensional characters undermines the work as fiction, it is compromised as history by the lack of documentation. No sources are given; the bibliography does not indicate the date or place of publication of the works listed; the maps are inadequate to provide a geographical setting for the events. The only indication that we have shifted from fiction to fact is the change in style from the flowery to the prosaic.

In spite of its failings, *The Foot of the River* makes a genuine contribution to regional history with its attempt to recount events from the Native as well as the colonial perspective. Certainly, Lalor is excessively kind to the French colonists. The Cree women, abandoned between cultures with their Métis children, philosophize that "they should not love a white man deeply; ... his God in Canada does not allow him to form

permanent attachment to a place, to a woman, nor even to his flesh and blood, his children;... when the voice from Canada calls, he goes without a backward glance" (p. 114). Nevertheless, *The Foot of the River* presents a sympathetic portrayal of a culture and a non-accusatory account of the shock to that culture caused by contact with the Europeans.

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Zeilig, Ken and Victoria Zeilig: *Ste. Madeleine, Community Without a Town: Métis Elders in Interview*. Winnipeg: Pemmican Publications Inc., 1987, xii + 205 pp., Maps. Photos., \$10.00 (paper), ISBN 0-919143-45-8.

This is the story of Ste. Madeleine, a community which now exists only in the minds of its ex-inhabitants and their descendants. Ste. Madeleine had its roots in the Catholic mission of St. Lazare but became an auxiliary mission in 1885. At the turn of the century it was settled by Métis homesteaders, many coming from the Red River area. Numbers increased as defeated Métis returned from Saskatchewan after 1885.

The Métis settled on homesteads under the terms of the Dominion Lands Act which granted each family 160 acres of land. They built a self-sufficient community with church and school, essentially untouched by modern day problems such as alcohol and violence. Existence was hard, as it was for all settlers of the West, so the men frequently supplemented their meager livelihoods by working for more affluent neighboring farmers. The soil at Ste. Madeleine produced little more than hay for livestock and large, carefully tended gardens. Though whole families might move in search of work, they always returned "home" to Ste. Madeleine.

In 1935 the Prairie Farm Rehabilitation Act was passed to relieve the problems of drought and soil drifting. Large tracts of land were seeded for community pastures and in 1938 Ste. Madeleine was designated as community pasture land. Under the terms of the act, people living in selected areas were entitled to full federal compensation providing they had paid all their back taxes. In Ste. Madeleine only one or two families had been able to pay their taxes in the 30's so they were considered

squatters on their own land. Most were forced to move without compensation. Their houses were burned, their dogs shot, their church was dismantled and all that remains of Ste. Madeleine today is the stone foundation of the school and the cemetery. Old-timers attend to the graves, though they must pass through community pasture to do so, and most of Ste. Madeleine's ex-inhabitants see this as their final resting place.

The authors have compiled the story of St. Madeleine through interviews with five residents of the community; factual information, reminiscences, opinions and nostalgia combine to make a fascinating narrative. Métis history is usually told through the events in the Red River settlement or Batoche, or through the life of Riel. This book also makes a connection but with a difference.

The principal informant is Joe Venne, still living in the area, still entertaining all who care to listen. The Venne family was originally from North Dakota but Joe was born approximately fifteen miles from Ste. Madeleine in 1906. Though the authors are grateful to others who shared their stories, they give particular credit to Joe Venne for his "unusual candor and for his enormous patience and enthusiasm" (Acknowledgements).

Joe Venne was raised for a while by his uncle, Pat Bellehumeur, a brother-in-law to Louis Riel. Included in the documentation is a rare song about Louis Riel, taught to Joe Venne by his uncle and translated from the French into English by Joe.

Two other informants, brothers Louis and Harry Pelletier, now live in Brandon. Harry tells how his grandfather, Edward Pelletier, and a group of Métis met with Riel before the 1885 rebellion. Edward Pelletier fought at Batoche and passed down his version of Riel's meeting with the police after the fall of Batoche. Mrs. Bellehumeur, Riel's mother-in-law, died at Ste. Madeleine.

Agnes Bouchertells of her life at Ste. Madeleine after she moved there as a bride in 1930. Hers was one of the few families that received compensation and continued farming nearby in the Assiniboine Valley. Lena Fleury, the only informant actually born in Ste. Madeleine, still lives in the area and speaks wistfully of a more simple rural existence.

Though all five interviewees speak nostalgically of Ste. Madeleine, there is little blame or recrimination. They realize that there was little future for the community but all deplore the callous way the Métis were treated. They all recall discrimination but also acknowledge the neighborliness of some non-Native people. Especially remembered for his services and his humanitarianism is a Dr. Gilbert from Spy Hill, Saskatchewan. They speak of the joys and sorrows of pioneer life and, quite apart from its historic

importance, this book contains a great wealth of information on pioneer life; customs, travel, food, housing, illness, medicines, social and spiritual life are all described.

Besides the actual transcripts of the interviews, the book includes journal entries of Mr. Alfred Lemay on whose land the church was built and an interview with Lazare Fouillard entitled "An Outsider's Perspective". Lazare's father, Ben Fouillard played a major role in establishing the community pasture. The book concludes with an interview with Thomas Berger on legal and historical perspectives on Métis land claims.

Joe Venne, the most articulate spokesperson, feels that a crime was committed because "...it was their homes...They still feel they were pushed out of there for nothing" (p. 71). He concludes with "[The Métis] have been pushed, from years back, hundreds of years back, in fact" (p. 71)

Joe Venne is still active in the Manitoba Métis Federation and in response to the author's question about how he would like to be remembered he replied,

I think they would think of me as a man who, you know, who helped a lot of people (p. 76).

This book, no doubt, will make a lasting contribution to the history of Joe Venne's people, the Métis. It is a precious legacy left to the descendants of the settlers of Ste. Madeleine. It should be required reading for all who are trying to understand the issues involved in settling outstanding Métis land claims.

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