

provocatively "that it is no longer useful to see the case as primarily about a conflict between gender and class interests". It is time to move forward.

## FLEEING THE HOUSE OF HORRORS: WOMEN WHO HAVE LEFT ABUSIVE PARTNERS

Aysan Sev'er  
Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2002

### REVIEWED BY CHERYL GOSSELIN

Aysan Sev'er's *Fleeing the House of Horrors* provides a comprehensive analysis of the enduring devastation and social costs of gender violence to the victims of such abuse and all of Canadian society. The work's subtitle —*Women Who have Left Abusive Partners*—captures the essence of the study and the author has compiled the available evidence and literature to ground her work in the current research and theory in men's violence against women. Sev'er does a good job in presenting her aims and is careful not to overstep these goals in her work. The reader can especially appreciate the author's pronouncement of her locatedness in her research and the boundaries of a researcher that she is careful not to cross.

Aysan Sev'er is up-to-date with the Canadian research on women-abuse. Her overview of the contemporary literature presents a balanced analysis of the feminist, non-feminist and the more mainstream social-psychological theories of abuse. As a Canadian scholar and volunteer worker at a local Women's Centre, I was particularly pleased

with the Canadian content and the emphasis on familiarizing the reader with a multi-level analytical framework to situate the study of violence against women. The author's exploration of the statistical profiles of the types of male abusers and incidences of abuse are clear, concise, and are a welcome addition to the literature for anyone looking for a comprehensive understanding, analysis, and writing about this type of violence.

*Fleeing the House of Horrors* is of value to scholars and front-lineworkers alike. The work can be used in university Women's Studies and Criminology courses to give students background in the subject. The book can also be adopted by Social Science methods courses to illustrate some of the problematics of the interview process, especially with abused women and the sensitive issue of researcher power over the interviewee. The book could also be a guide for those who work directly with helping battered women wanting to leave abusive partners. It would be most beneficial to shelter workers, doctors, nurses, hospital administrators and law enforcement officials.

The presentation of the work is professionally done. The author has published before on the topic and is very knowledgeable in this area. She speaks to me on several levels and this is what I find most remarkable about the work. As an academic, Sev'er is thorough in the area of theory. She does a superb job in articulating the social and structural basis of gender violence as well as the links between culture and the patriarchal systems that work in unison to maintain such behavior. As someone who has also worked with abused women, she speaks to me in a sensitive and compassionate voice. Sev'er really cares about the women in her study and shows them as social agents, not victims. But she is also concerned to present the subject as objectively as possible so those who work with abused women can validate the study.

*Fleeing the House of Horrors* makes a significant contribution to the research on gender violence experienced by women. Sev'er also elucidates the topic of women who resort to violence in abusive partnerships, an area that is under-developed in feminist research to date. In the current climate of an anti-feminist backlash against women abuse and the application of data from flawed studies to present the myth that 'women do it too', this work definitely aids in countering these disturbing trends. Finally, someone is not afraid to explore, in a realistic way, the subject of women who use violence and other negative coping mechanisms as survival strategies. Sev'er's analysis is heart wrenching yet honest, brutal yet vital to our understanding of women who choose violence. Her typology of women who do and do not use violence in abusive relationships is an important tool for scholars and front-line workers to apply in their own work. It helps in identifying those women who are most likely at risk for utilizing violence and for creating the necessary steps and procedures within the health care system and law enforcement to stop it before it happens.

This work is long overdue and thankfully is now available for those interested in the topic and who care enough to do something about the scourge of gender violence in our society.

### ERRATA:

On page 167 of CWS/cf's Winter 2004 issue, "Women and the Black Diaspora," the book:

*I Know Who I Am: A Caribbean Woman's Identity in Canada*

by Yvonne Bobb-Smith was published in Toronto by Women's Press in 2003.