

100 Years of The International Confederation of Midwives: Empowering Midwives and Empowering Women

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The four highly-accomplished midwife authors claim that this volume is a ‘labour of love’ (p. 29) and, to achieve what may be such a Herculean labour, they have drawn most effectively and authoritatively on a number of midwifery archives. The authors have succeeded in producing, not a history of midwifery, but a ‘narrative history of the International Confederation of Midwives’ [ICM] (pp. 30-1). This scholarly volume follows in the footsteps of Cowell and Wainwright’s celebration of the centenary of the Royal College of Midwives (1981). *Behind the Blue Door*, however, was co-authored by a midwife and a journalist, making for relatively undemanding reading. The present volume was created by midwifery consultants and academics, and they have produced a commendably exhaustive volume which will serve as an admirable reference book for a range of readers, including future generations of midwives. The daunting task of narrating the history of the ICM is addressed in a serious and meticulous manner; humour is injected, though, through anecdotes of actual events, which demonstrate the reality of the massive undertaking which comprises the ICM. Although the book endeavours to maintain a truly international orientation, befitting to the title ICM, the roll call of authors and the choice of contributors reflect a definite ‘first world’ bias.

At the same time as illustrating its strengths, the many organisational shortcomings of the ICM are made all too clear. The naivety of the early managerial personnel is particularly well-demonstrated in the poor financial advice on which they found themselves having to rely, before realising how misplaced their reliance was. The frequent and long-standing alliances with medical practitioners, at an organisational level, is a recurring theme. I find myself asking the question ‘Might there have been more benefit to those involved in healthy childbearing if mothers and other service-users had been chosen to be, at the least, consulted, or even partners, in the organisation of the ICM?’.

An issue which appears to pass unnoticed, perhaps like the elephant in the room, is the heterogeneity of midwives, midwifery and midwifery practice. Such a culturally-determined phenomenon as childbearing must differ hugely, depending largely on its location and the beliefs and understandings of those who are at the sharp end. I suggest that a ‘first world’ midwife might have difficulty recognising the practice of a midwife in a resource-poor setting, such as that I encountered in China (Mander et al 2010). However, in this book these differences pass quite unmentioned, if not unrecognised. They must bear comparison, though, with the issues faced by other international organisations, such as the International Federation

of Gynaecology and Obstetrics [FIGO], the International Council of Nurses [ICN], or even the EU.

The question which this book leaves in my mind, though, is ‘Who benefits?’. I have learned that some midwives practising in resource-poor settings feel admiration and gratitude to the ICM (Cheung 2023). The extent to which these benefits accrue, particularly to the users of midwifery care, remains to be seen.

Rosemary Mander, Professor Emeritus

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