In their 1975 non-fiction work, *A Seventh Man*, John Berger and Jean Mohr employ a Marxist perspective to critique the capitalist system that has driven the wide-scale exploitation of male migrant labour in Europe from underdeveloped country-sides to metropolitan states and cities. Through three main sections chronicling departure, work, and return, Berger & Mohr walk readers through each intimate decision that the migrant worker makes in pursuit of better economic opportunity and ultimately, a better life. To support this illustration, the authors employ a powerful mix of creative media including skillful poetry and striking one-liners, statistics and facts about migrant labour in Europe, an overall exposition of capitalism and migrant work, photographs, and perhaps most effective, an anonymous narrative of the archetypal male migrant worker which acts as a thread throughout their book for readers to follow and independently visualize. Perhaps most fascinating about this text is that although it was written in the 1970s, the level of detail offered paints a picture that could well be observed in today’s contemporary migration network—one which exploits migrant labour from low-income economies by locking racialized bodies into precarious working arrangements, leaving migrants with a difficult choice to make between enduring their substandard conditions to continue earning income for their families, or abandoning their arduous journey all together – which is often not a viable option due to debt bondage and precarious migrant status, among other barriers.

Berger & Mohr give readers substantial insight into the often dehumanizing experience of migrant labour to highlight the inevitable oppression and lack of freedom that migrant workers encounter in the face of the neoliberal capitalist system. They note that from the perspective of the employers, migrant workers were “immortal because they are not born, they do not age or get tired,
and they do not die […] they have a single function—to work” (64). To critique this perspective, they offer a historical analysis into how capitalism structurally and systematically divided the world into “developed and underdeveloped”, and argue that the flow of migrant workers from underdeveloped countries or rural country-side to urban industrial centres is deliberately constructed by the bourgeoisie who exploit that labour to create more capital for themselves. This is the wider argument in their book, but Berger & Mohr humanize this experience by constructing insight into the migrant worker’s most intimate moments, including that a migrant worker’s decision to migrate is rarely his alone, since he feels pressure at all times from his family, and from his community more broadly to set a successful example for others.

When discussing the significance of temporary migration, Berger & Mohr emphasize how temporary working arrangements that bring migrant workers into an industrialized or metropolitan city for up to a year at a time creates a kind of migrant labour industry whereby migrant workers are exploited through precarious working status which challenges them with long shifts, dangerous working conditions, and low pay. Every few pages, and sometimes for a few in a row, black and white images of mostly male migrant workers depict several aspects of their day-to-day lives, including these conditions. The photographs are compelling because at times they complement Berger & Mohr’s abstract equations or statistical and theoretical analysis, or they assign visuals to anecdotes. At other times, they tell stories of their own, as the authors believe photographs “say things which are beyond the reach of words” (7). That these photos were marked with place and year but are always anonymous allows readers to envision the archetypal migrant worker in each of the faces photographed, which humanizes the book and the migrant experience overall. This is purposeful on the part of the authors, who offer that by excluding specific attributions, the
photographs become more universal, as they depict “a form of transport and an expression of absence” (13).

This book seeks to reveal the realities behind the systematically oppressive capitalist regime which binds migrant workers to temporary contracts with very little rights or recourse, which is reinforced in both historical and contemporary migration studies¹. Berger & Mohr emphasize that migrant workers are necessary to fill labour shortages created by indigenous workers who refuse to do the “hardest, most disagreeable, and less well-paid jobs” (86 & 119). And if present migrant workers do refuse those tasks, there is a continuous pool of migrant labour for the bourgeoisie to exploit, which is a central idea to the idea that migrant workers are part of a continuous reserve labour supply of racialized bodies that industrialized centres can import and exploit for capital. Although purposeful, one weakness of this book is the heavy focus on male migrant workers, to the exclusion of any or very limited mention of two million female migrant workers who made similar journeys but would have had notably different experiences. Berger & Mohr do however offer that “to write of their experiences adequately would be a book in itself, which we hope will be done” (7). Nevertheless, the remarkable insights offered in this book are refreshingly blunt and honest, and can be used to critically examine the contemporary migration scheme today.

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¹ Sassen (1988) also reinforced the use of foreign workers as being “necessary […] to reproduce capital’s dominance over labour” (31).