

Marina felt herself fragmenting and her limbs recoiling from her desecrated flesh. She gathered what remained of her strength and sunk her teeth into his palm. Oblivious to the blood seeping from his hands, he continued to pound into her. Her pain was so intense that she expected her body would release its soul. Yet the reserve of energy which had surfaced each time she had slit her wrists or overdosed on pills refused to let her die.

While her writing generally illuminates wholly realistic issues of migration and familial bonds and conflicts, it also contains fantastical elements, as in the passage above, which tend to take away from the realism of the story.

The reader therefore has to search for a character with whom he or she can totally identify. Perhaps it is easy to identify with Aurelia and Papito as fairly run-of-the-mill immigrant parents, but they are peripheral compared to the three daughters who occupy the forefront of the narrative. Marina and Rebecca are so wretched and destructive that they defy belief and almost become caricatures, and Iliana, who carries the bulk of the narrative, is simply not likeable, for her naiveté and detachment from her family make the reader wonder about her actual place in the family and, indeed, in the novel itself.

Despite this inability to readily identify with its characters, though, or to be fully convinced by its action, *Geographies of Home* remains an entertaining and lyrical novel, for Pérez investigates immigrant issues with a knowing eye and a poetic pen. Her skill in imaginative description, her gift for shocking detail, and her genuine insight into the specific experiences of women ensure that we look forward to her next novel.

MUSLIM WOMEN: CRAFTING A NORTH AMERICAN IDENTITY

Shahnaz Khan. Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2000.

BY OKORI UNEKE

Muslim Women: Crafting a North American Identity is an exploration of the multiple determinations of Muslim female identity in the Canadian social environment. The book, based on case studies conducted in Toronto of fourteen women originally from India, Pakistan, Iran, Uganda, Somalia, Egypt, Turkey, and Malta, reveals the apparent love-hate relationship of these women toward Muslim identity. On the one hand, some of the women describe themselves as Muslim and desire to be Muslim. On the other, some of the women distance themselves from being coded as "Muslim woman" and also long with nostalgia "for a stable and comfortable identity." Thus the book examines the dialectics of this contradictory relationship to Muslim identity, as well as the dilemma arising from the polarizing influences of this identity as these women attempt to negotiate what the author calls a "hybridized third space."

As "hybridized" subjects, these women respond ambivalently to the structured contradictions of Muslim female identity. While some women articulate the Muslim identity and the polarizing influences this identity has on their lives, they seem to be "mired in the structural contradictions of the category Muslim woman." Individual women trapped in the contradictory polarities of this category attempt to negotiate their ambivalence by manipulating their resistance to it. And how they resolve

the contradictions in their personal lives suggests diverse ways of dealing with Muslim identity or, perhaps, responding to being coded as such in North America. As the author, a Muslim feminist academic, puts it, "Their negotiations challenge the regulatory notions of culture and religion as fixed and static: notions discursively constructed within the duality of Islam and Orientalism." Further, she argues that the women's attempt at negotiating a third space challenges prevailing assumptions about the "veiled and oppressed" Muslim woman. Crafting a "hybridized" third space underscores the dynamic nature of Islamic female identity. The narratives, for their part, shed some light on the issues confronting "Muslim woman" in contemporary western metropolitan societies, and on how Islamic female identity is situated and dealt with in Canada and, by extension, elsewhere in western societies.

The book contains five chapters and a concluding section. Chapter One, titled "Negotiating the Third Space," underpins the theoretical issues in the study and also doubles as a review of relevant literature. Conceptual terms such as Orientalism, Islamism, and Feminism are discussed in the context of the study. "Negotiating the Third Space in the Diasporic Context" and "Muslims in North America and in Canada" are also discussed under these sub-headings. Chapter Two, "The Subjects of Study," briefly introduces the fourteen women participants in the study. In terms of Islamic affiliation, a majority of the women were Sunni; only two were Shia, and one Ahmedi. Chapter Three, captioned "Resolving the Contradictions through Disavowal," discusses the narratives of three of the case study subjects, Safieh, Zubaida, and Nikhat. In their narratives, these women do not identify themselves as Muslim but they are still perceived as belonging to Muslim communities, are viewed through preconceived notions about Muslim women, and/

or find themselves reacting to being coded as Muslim women. The thrust of this chapter is that in spite of the fact that these women disavow Islam, they do not, in their various experiences, necessarily encounter less sexism or discrimination. In fact, the disavowal of themselves as Muslim places them in double jeopardy: they frequently face ostracism from their families and communities, in addition to the exclusion they encounter from the dominant culture. The outcome for them, the author argues, is emotional ambivalence, despair, and disorientation.

Chapter Four, titled "Negotiating the Ambivalence," discusses the narratives of eight of the case study subjects. These women, Ayesha, Iram, Karima, Kausar, Mussarat, Nabia, Rabia, and Zahra, apparently subscribe to Islamic religious and cultural observances but find that they cannot subscribe to ideas of perceived authenticity for Muslim women for a variety of reasons, including, among others, their own rejection of the sexism embedded in Islamic practices, and the exclusionary status to which they are relegated in Canadian society. Implicitly, the contradictions in the category "Muslim woman" produce a structured ambivalence to which these women respond with emotional dissonance. As they try to negotiate the ambivalence, they never totally escape the impact of these contradictions on their lived experiences. The author captures their dilemma aptly: "In terms of being a Muslim woman, they are "in" but not in, and "out" but not quite out. Their narratives suggest opposition as well as nonoppositional positions to their discursive locations."

The last chapter, "Selecting What to Believe," profiles the narratives of three women, Donna, Manal, and Tuzeen. These women not only accept their linkage with Muslim identity but they go further than that: they critique the contradictions, notably the sexism they encounter in Islam. In their attempt to resolve this

contradiction, they make selective judgments of the Islamic tenets, focusing instead on what they believe to be the intent of the message of Islam and rejecting what they consider the sexist interpretations of the Islamic legal code or Shari'a.

Muslim Women draws attention to Muslim women's struggles for agency and identity as "a site for both affirmation and disorientation." Also it draws attention to the fact that the location of Muslim identity is shifting and contradictory. The author convincingly argues for the idea of moving beyond stereotypes of "ascriptive identity based on predetermined religious or ethnic characteristics," as well as the homogenization of Muslim women. She engages the term Muslim as a process through which women who position themselves as Muslim or are positioned as such craft a North American identity in light of their experiences relating to immigration, racialization, devaluation, and labour market disadvantage. The book provides valuable insight for the understanding of the struggles and experiences of immigrant Muslim women in Canada.

WOMEN AND ENVIRONMENTS INTERNATIONAL

Issue 48/49; Summer/Fall 2000.

BY SHERILYN MACGREGOR

The latest issue of *Women and Environments International*, titled "Healthy Communities Through Women's Eyes," provides a much needed response to the recent proliferation of policy documents, plans, books, and organizations that use

the language of "healthy communities" as a short cut for describing the kinds of places that are environmentally sustainable and socially just. Since feminist and gender-related concerns tend to get left out of this discourse, the editors felt it was high time to ask women to comment on what they feel would make their communities healthier places in which to live. The diverse range of visions make it an interesting and readable collection with many ideas for action.

The concepts of "health" and "community" are contested ones, open to many different interpretations. It is therefore not surprising that different contributors envision "healthy communities" in different ways, depending on their social, political, economic, built, and natural environments. For example, while community may mean a specific geographical place to many, it can also mean creative space to artists, such as those described by Suzanne Farkas in her article on women's art projects. One transnational project called "Women Beyond Borders" involves over 500 collaborators whose creative expressions challenge conventionally-held notions of space and place. Other articles in the issue illustrate how community can also describe women's sharing of physical and social challenges such as HIV/AIDS, environmental illness, and unemployment. This shows, in turn, that "health" can mean a variety of things from bodily well-being (as seen in articles about occupational safety projects in India and women's reproductive problems in rural Uganda) to the viability of local economies. An article by Kathryn Gow reports that women in developing countries have revitalized their communities and improved the health of their families with the help of Grameen-styled micro-credit loans.

As explained in an article by leaders of the Ontario Healthy Communities Coalition, participatory processes are a central part of women's