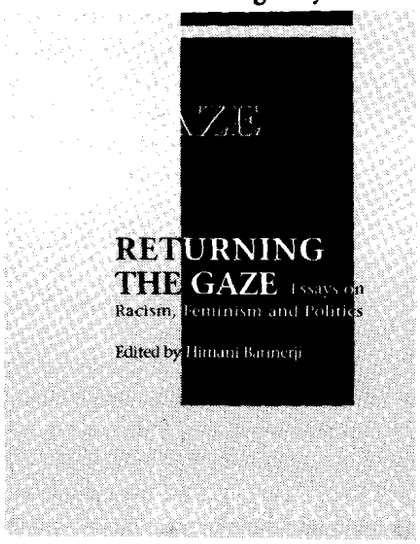
all-obliterating essentialism but obviously remains a limited achievement. In *Returning the Gaze* thirteen scholars, all women of colour, analyze how "subjectivity and agency link with the institutions and structures within which they arise and subsist." Some unusual formats are employed such as the dialogue between Anita Sheth and Amita Handa or Aruna Shrivastava's "afterwords," further amplifying a paper she had already written.

The book begins with essays in which the focus is on personal experiences and perceptions. May Yee writes of growing up in Canada and realizing only on her first visit to China at the age of twenty-five how bound she had been by racism, displacement and a painful search for identity, knowing for the first time what it felt to be "at home in one's skin." Anita Sheth and Amita Handa analyze their first responses to each other, each having seen the other as less Indian, more Westernized than herself, the one because she had grown up in India, the other because her family had continued, though settled outside India, to observe Hindu practices.




Of the essays that deal with praxis, Sherene Razack's is concerned with the use of story-telling in critical pedagogy and law to reveal an experience of the world not admitted into dominant knowledge paradigms. Through her work with groups of activists she has come to realize the need to examine critically what we share and don't share and to accept that we come from different subject positions and must therefore question our point of departure at every turn. Linda Carty and Dionne Brand underline the dangers of women's organizations becoming too closely involved with the state, whether they are set up by the state or are grassroots organizations which have accepted state funding. These writers argue that since the state itself does not operate within the interest of the working class, the capacity of any state-sponsored organization to do so is limited.

Two essays take a critical look at books which have been regarded as seminal works in the feminist movement. Cecilia Green notes the important insights provided by Angela Davis's *Women, Race and Class* and proceeds to note some issues she would have liked to see discussed at greater length, among them sexism among Black men and Davis's assumption that the Communist movement is non-problematic both as regards racism and sexism. Arun Mukherjee on the other hand exposes the racism evident in Charlotte Perkins Gilman's *Herland* and the failure of the white female reader to notice it. Readers concentrating on the Utopian elements in the book fail to note the references to "slaves" and "savages" in the narrative past and the narrative present. The establishment of Herland dates from a slave rebellion in which all the males and the older women among the slave-holding class are killed by the slaves in self-defense. Gilman omits to mention what happens to the slave women; apparently some at least survive to fulfill a kind of "black mammy" role. There are also references to the savages that inhabit the forests outside the bounds of Herland and the male narrator is among those whom his Herlander lover sees as engaged in the noble task of civilizing the world. No wonder Mukherjee says that Gilman has "constructed me and my kind as the dreaded other" and that this text, held to be life-giving for women, is life-denying for some.

Essays by Himani Bannerji and Aruna Shrivastava examine popular images of South Asian women and South Asian women writers, Makeda Silvera and Dionne Brand provide studies of Black working women in Toronto while Lee Maracle and Roxanna Ng trace the links between sexism, racism, capitalism and Canadian nationalism. While some of the arguments and analyses that the book contains may be controversial, it offers challenges and new perspectives which may require feminists to rethink their positions.

## MUMSAHIB

Anne Montagnes. Fredericton, New Brunswick: Goose Lane Editions, 1992.

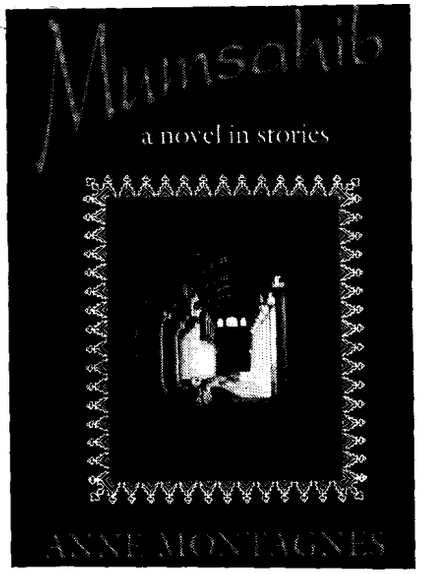
### *by Gabrielle Collu*

The title *Mumsahib* immediately brings to mind images of colonial India; an India where a small group of Anglo-Indians (British living in India during the colonial period) lived comfortably as the masters and administrators of a land not theirs. Memsahib (mumsahib, I suspect, is a word play on memsahib and mother) is the term used to designate the wives, mothers, daughters of the British colonizers in India, and the word suggests a particular type of white woman who had lived in India long enough to have become jaded, bored, and particularly disagreeable to Indians. One only has to think of Rudyard Kipling's and Sara Jeannette Duncan's satires of memsahibs to get the picture.

This said, I came to this book expecting something very different than what is found in Kipling or Duncan, partly because of the political changes that have occurred in the past hundred years—India no longer being a British colony—but also because of the changes in theories of representation, particularly with the advent of postmodern and postcolonial theories. Postmodernism and post-colonialism have questioned and criticized, in their very different ways, dominant modes of representation for their privileging of certain ideologies at the expense of others. Although postmodernism and postcolonialism are in turn being questioned for their

own exclusions, they remain useful terms to contextualize Anne Montagnes's first novel.

With its narrative moves between past and present, India and Canada; its surprising changes of voice between mother, daughter and grandmother; its blurring of generic boundaries between novel and short story cycle; and its self-reflexivity, *Mumsahib* can be compared with such Canadian postmodern novels as Daphne Marlatt's *Ana Historic*. One significant difference, however, is that Marlatt's novel is, at the ideological level, about retrieving or rewriting women's history, and at the narrative level, about the reconciliation of mothers and daughters. Montagnes's novel neither offers such a positive community of women at the level of women's history nor at the level of relationships. In Mum*sahib*, the women continue to define themselves in relation to men. To give just one example, Lucy, the narrator's, return to India is fueled by her need to escape her lover who is married and refuses to leave his wife. Her trip to India has little to do with the search for an identity, roots, or a reconciliation with her mother and her past. It is a flight from one man only to fall rapidly into the arms of another.




"Postcolonial" is a popular word these days in academic circles, as well as in the media, and unfortunately it is frequently depoliticized and used indiscriminately. Further, the term's meaning itself is vague. For example, does postcolonial refer to an abstract concept, a theory, a literature, an historical period, or a geographical location? And, is *Mumsahib* postcolonial because it was written by a Canadian (Canada being an ex-colony), or because it deals with India before and after the empire? In one particular way, however, I believe the term does not apply to Montagnes's text. Postcolonial novels should be different from colonial novels: they should reflect on the past, its injustices, its silencings, and its exclusions, and, ideally, go beyond by calling for political action. In that sense, Montagnes's novel is similar to the "colonial" novels of Kipling or Duncan because she appears to be only interested in the protagonist's and her family's experience of India. Furthermore, the India that is described is only an escape, a metaphor, or an exotic backdrop for Lucy's problems. The only attempt at including the Other's voice, when we are offered a glimpse of the thoughts of a young Indian Lucy has seduced, is unconvincing and sounds suspiciously like Lucy's own voice. The imperial eye, seeing and possessing, is still at work in *Mumsahib*. Moreover, the fact that Lucy's grandmother married a Eurasian (half Indian, half English), and that her daughter, Lucy's mother, is said to look like him, is undercut by Lucy's distancing from these events. She separates herself from the events and looks upon them as other, not related to her. She refers to them as "her mother's foreign birth, her foreign grandfather." Her grandfather, a member of a wealthy and educated class who identified with the British, is exotified, and her mother is presented as cold, distant, and unloving.

Finally, the novel concludes that Lucy has become a "Mumsahib. An older person. An honoured older person. Generative." Rather than coming to terms with herself, her mother, her past, Lucy accepts only the part of herself that is Anglo-Indian. Clearly, the identification is with the British rulers of India, rather than with the oppressed Indians. Despite de-colonization, Montagnes's India remains the site of inequalities and power struggles.

## BLACK WOMEN AND WHITE WOMEN IN THE PROFESSIONS

Natalie J. Sokoloff. New York: Routledge, 1992.

### *by Christina Gabriel*

The civil rights movement and the women's movements are among the most significant political forces that emerged in the U.S. post-war period. In the wake of these struggles very real—albeit limited—reforms emerged in the form of anti-discrimination policies in employment, housing and voting rights. By the 1980s even these moderate gains came under a concerted attack by right wing neo-conservative forces. More and more Americans came to believe that members of disadvantaged groups were receiving "preferential treatment" in respect to jobs and educational opportunities. White men, it was charged, were the "victims" of reverse discrimination.

In *Black and White Women in the Professions*, Sokoloff confronts these charges and through an exhaustive review and analysis of 1960-1980 US Census occupational data she demonstrates the spurious nature of such claims. In short, her findings illustrate that despite the fact that disadvantaged groups were able to access some sectors of the professional/technical occupations, their incorporation into these occupations in no way challenged the existing race/gender hierarchy over which white men preside.

Sokoloff provides a comprehensive statistical overview of the extent of gender and racial segregation within the professional occupations. Throughout this work she uses the metaphor of the half full/half empty glass to explain her findings. On the one hand white women and black people have made gains. But on the other hand increased access is not necessarily a guarantee of advancement. For this reason she states, "I found, they can be simultaneously