

impact, that piece should be Joan Grant-Cummings' "Antidote to the Global Capitalist Agenda."

The book ends with Paula Gunn Allen's stirring poem, "Some Like Indians Endure." The penultimate piece is by the Federation des femmes du Québec's "2000 Good Reasons to March," a call for participation in the World March of Women 2000, and a list of demands.

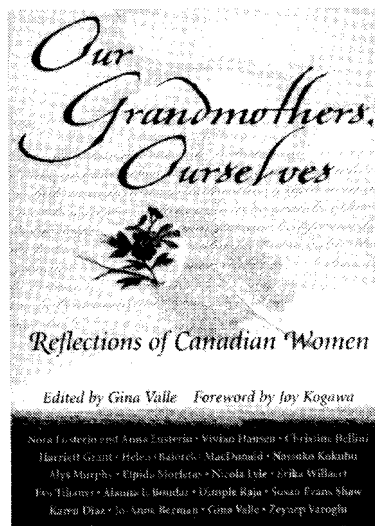
This piece encapsulates the strength of the entire collection: as much as we need good theory, analysis, and careful research, ultimately we need action. The March is one specific example (and an exciting one because of its global organization). The book is filled with other examples.

"If you're not happy here, then leave." That was the gist of Jean Chretien's advice to those who aren't happy with Canada's taxation policies. If he said that to Canadian women who are not happy with "x" (and "x" could be anything: uneven access to abortion; income and employment inequalities; violence against women; globalization; etc.), where would we go? Given that there is no feminist utopia, we need to continue our struggles, both locally and globally. *Reclaiming the Future: Women's Strategies for the 21st Century* shows us not only why we need to be political, but what kinds of actions we can take. While it provides pessimistic analyses of women's situations at the end of the millennium, it is, in the end, a profoundly optimistic book.

OUR GRANDMOTHERS, OURSELVES: REFLECTIONS OF CANADIAN WOMEN

Gina Valle, Ed. Vancouver: Raincoast Books, 1999.

BY DORETTE HUGGINS



What kind of parents are you looking for? the Talk Show Host asked five-year-old identical twin boys slated for adoption. Lonnie (or was it Ronnie?) shot back: "A mummy, a daddy and a grandmother." Whether they be maternal or paternal, grandmothers are a breed apart, who play a key role in the shaping of the lives of their children's children. No one would agree more with the underlying sentiment expressed by these two young brothers than each of the twenty Canadian women who contributed to Gina Valle's remarkable collection, *Our Grandmothers, Ourselves: Reflections of Canadian Women*.

At the very outset, Gina Valle points out that the contributors are Canadian women raised in immigrant homes. The reader should thus

not be surprised to find that an anthology of reflections of Canadian women would then exclude and never once allude to the women who cradled our native land: our Aboriginal grandmothers. This is somewhat regrettable because perhaps we would have embraced a deeper appreciation and respect for the women who unlike their immigrant counterparts have become foreigners in their own land.

Instead of providing such a contrast, the selections in the book all follow the same trajectory, with one common denominator: isolation and the loss of independence. Whether it be the touching recollections by Nora and Anna Lusterio of the passage of their Filipino Nanay, or the memories of Christine Bellini's Italian Nonna living with Alzheimer's; whether it be Harriet Grant vowing to live by the creed of her Jamaican Yea Yea, or a doleful letter from Helen (Bajorek) MacDonald to her Polish Babcia; almost all of the tributes in the collection trace, with varying degrees of frankness, the lives of women who left the familiar or were sent for by their sons and or daughters to live out the rest of their lives in an unforgiving, foreign place of total dependency.

What comes out in many of these tributes is the stark truth: our grandmothers, the grandmothers of immigrant Canadian women, were treated like foreigners even within their own families, particularly so when the children of their children, out of a sense of shame, rejected outright all that they represented: funny accents, odd attire and peculiar religious or cultural rites of a far-away land. While not all of the tributes evoke this sense of shame, all except two reflect their granddaughters' struggles to assimilate in the world of their English speaking peers. They were courageous women, these grandmothers and the thousands like them whose lives were irremediably marred by the embalming of their past by the layers of daily pressures from within. Loss of

independence, loss of freedom, loss of hearth and home. Yet they loved. Yet they loved unconditionally.

There are some exceptions in the collection to this very sad picture of women, our mothers' mothers and our paternal grandmothers, who rightly earned their granddaughter's acceptance and unreserved admiration. What sets these women apart, it would appear, lies in the fact that they mastered the other language, English, while nurturing and passing on their mother tongue to their children's progeny. Thus, one understands Erika Willaert's truth when she writes of her Chinese grandmother Po-Po, "I do not place my grandmother on a pedestal. Rather, I feel closer to her because I have experienced her humanness, her vulnerability and a part of her reality. For this, I honour her with a memoir of the impact she has had on my life."

The separation along linguistic lines between the women in this collection is especially pronounced in the images Susan Evans Shaw paints in her tribute to Nana, an immigrant from the "mother country" England who never really experienced the alienation that was the certain lot in life of her immigrant sisters from other countries. The readers of this moving tribute of reflections will not fail to share Shaw's dream, when she writes, "My hope is that this book will not only bring us a greater understanding of the differences that shape us as Canadians, but, more important, also highlight the similarities in human experience. We are joined by what we hold in common. In the end, it is essential to know and understand where that commonality lies."

Gina Valle should be commended for bringing to the fore the courage and compassion of our Canadian immigrant grandmothers, who survived in silence, an uncommon isolation within the intimacies of the homes of their very own flesh and blood.

GEOGRAPHIES OF HOME

Loida Maritza Pèrez. New York: Penguin. 1999.

BY CHRISTINE SINGH

The immigrant experience can be one of disillusionment, joy, or most often, a combination of emotions in between, and Loida Maritza Pèrez describes one such experience in her first novel, *Geographies of Home*. In fact, considering the large fictional family about whom she writes, Pèrez ends up capturing a whole array of immigrant experiences, rather than just one. Many members of this large family are on the outskirts of the novel, seen only occasionally or remembered only fleetingly. But all of the characters who form the substance of the narrative, aside from the patriarch, Papito, and the youngest child, Tico, are women. At the head of the women is Aurelia, a disillusioned matriarch, who finds "no comfort [in] the knowledge that she and Papito had tried their best. There had been too many circumstances they had been unable to control, too much they had been unable to provide." Aurelia and Papito moved from the Dominican Republic to New York City to offer their family a better life, but they did not get entirely what they expected.

Iliana, for example, the most important of the characters, feels that she could help her family by taking a year off from university and moving back home. What she does not realize, though, is that she will have to relinquish her independence and live by her father's antiquated rules. Thus, far from helping, her return causes more problems for her already troubled family. Pèrez investigates issues that commonly affect non-white immigrants, such as their attitude to standards of beauty.

Marina considers her sister Beatriz to be beautiful, with her "[l]ong, black hair curled loosely around her face. Its features, angular and severe, appeared carved into the ebony darkness of her skin." But "[n]o one, [Marina] claimed, would ever consider her attractive. Not with her baboon nose and nigger lips."

Marina, like many immigrants, has internalized white standards of beauty. Pèrez, however, digs deeper into the psychological problems faced by immigrants and comes up with some astonishing results. Marina, for instance, finds that she simply cannot cope. She attempts suicide numerous times, tries burning down her parents' house, and, perhaps most shockingly, rapes her sister, Iliana. It may be that Marina acts out of jealousy or envy of Iliana's independence and success in America. At any rate the scene in which she turns on her sister is one of staggering violence.

Rebecca's life too is riddled with problems, the main one being her abusive husband. Living in a brownstone apartment full of chickens, Rebecca raises her children (or fails to) while being beaten by a husband she cannot leave. Sorrow is evoked when Rebecca's children stay with their grandparents, Aurelia and Papito, and Aurelia finds that the children have hidden food all over the house in case they were to run out. Aurelia is devastated: "Tears formed in her eyes. Tears of sorrow as well as of rage for her willful blindness; for her eldest daughter's lunacy in remaining with her husband; for his cruelty in denying her the few dollars a week she would have needed to feed their children and herself."

Pèrez arouses much interest through shocking stories of abuse and incest which are described in great and intense detail. Her writing keeps the reader engaged partly through this and partly through her lyrical and graceful style, which carries hints of magic realism reminiscent of Isabel Allende and Gabriel Garcia Marquez: