

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:

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/