offer an enriched program for young people. Overall, *Embodying Equity* is an invaluable resource that belongs on the bookshelf of every equity educator and service provider, as well as those engaged in cutting-edge work on body image.

REMNANTS OF NATION: ON POVERTY NARRATIVES BY WOMEN

Roxanne Rimstead.
Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2001.

BY MICHELLE LOWRY

Within Canada the poor are often portrayed as external "others"as poverty is imagined as something that largely happens elsewhere. The poor are made invisible in the national imagination because, as Roxanne Rimstead argues in *Remnants of Nation: On Poverty Narratives by Women*, their visibility embarrasses the nation and compromises national myths that promise prosperity, classlessness and economic stability through meritocracy. Internal colonized and poor groups—the remnants of nation—are believed to have fallen behind in the 'evolutionary model of history,' and are thus framed as outside the national community, naturally inferior, and unable to partake in progress.

It is within this context that Rimstead approaches the study of poverty and representations of the poor within literary studies. She notes that while race, gender, and sexuality are now more widely addressed in literary studies, poverty, class relations, and poverty narratives still remain un/derstudied. Poverty as a theme in literature, in general, has been made invisible and has not been studied in a sustained or oppositional

way. Rarely has work on the poor been inclusive of their own voices, particularly those of women. Thus, she is interested in creating a methodology that has as its project a recovery (as opposed to a discovery), of the poor and their voices.

In *Remnants of Nation*, Rimstead argues for the study of *poverty narratives* as a category of analysis, a proposal that should be of interest to those working with literary, feminist, and/or cultural theory. She envisions poverty narratives as a constructed field of study comprised of stories by and/or about the poor. In this specific study, Rimstead explores poverty narratives that are cross-class and cross-genre, focusing on a broad range of women's prose (novels, short stories, autobiography, oral histories, essays, reportage, and letters) in Canada, 1919 to the present. This approach crosses the levels of "literary, popular and ordinary" culture, and as Rimstead argues, transgresses the canon and ideas about what has literary value.

This call to study poverty narratives and excavate the voices of the poor is exciting for me as a feminist academic and anti-poverty activist. I find Rimstead's approach to poverty narratives nuanced and engaging. She recognizes the problems in reading these narratives as "true" experiences, and yet struggles with her desire to tell the truth about poor women's lives—a desire that stems from her wish to engage politically with poverty narratives, in solidarity with the poor. Recognizing her own conflicted reasons for reading poverty, Rimstead ultimately calls for an approach that views texts as sources of knowledge about the complex subjectivities of the poor. She proposes that we engage in an oppositional reading of poverty narratives that sees these texts as sites of "struggle, meaning and power," and that readers aim to discover subversive and dominant representations of poverty with them. Further, she wishes to excavate from poverty narratives the dialectic relationship between the poor and non-

poor, ideologies of difference, and the relationship between the poor and the nation.

As feminist theory, literary, and cultural studies continue to move away from poverty and class analysis, Rimstead's goal to once again foreground poverty and the poor as subjects of study is quite radical. One benefit of this move is that it clearly acknowledges the invisibility of the poor in national consciousness, and articulates women's relationship to poverty. The challenge facing those who choose to engage with poverty narratives is to successfully investigate the interconnections between race, gender, and sexuality in the lives of the poor. However, I find myself asking: is it possible to centre the poor while simultaneously exploring the ways in which various systems of oppression operate?

I found that Rimstead successfully re-reads texts such as Maria Campbell's *Halfbreed* and Margaret Laurence's *The Diviners*, as stories of poverty in the lives of raced and gendered women. She uncovers poverty and resistance in these texts, and reminds us that poverty is experienced both discursively and materially. However, Rimstead fails to fully explore the effects of heterosexism and compulsory heterosexuality in the lives of the characters. While her task is to excavate poverty, I also wanted to understand the ways in which poor women experience their sexuality in the texts, and the ways in which their sexuality is ideologically constructed.

Certainly, exploring the intersections of privilege and oppression in the lives of women—fictional or real—is a difficult and ongoing task for feminist scholars. Ultimately, I believe that Rimstead's call to read oppositionally offers academics some useful tools with which to do this work.