

Nicholasa Mohr. *Rituals of Survival: A Woman's Portfolio*. (Houston: An Arte Publico Press Book, 1985) 158 pp., \$7.50 paper.

Rituals of Survival: A Woman's Portfolio is a collection of six short stories written by the New York born Puerto Rican female writer, Nicholasa Mohr. Mohr has written a very effective myth-breaking account about six Puerto Rican women who defy all odds and survive in the asphalt jungle, best known as New York City.

The creation of these short stories is an act of love and a clear manifestation of the profound and sincere understanding that the writer has of those human beings portrayed in their daily struggle for survival. They represent countless Puerto Rican women not only in New York City, but wherever they might be in the large cities of this country.

The characters encountered in *Rituals* cannot be separated from their urban Puerto Rican milieu. As Eneid Route-Gomez has pointed out, "Mohr plunges below the surface of sentiment and uncovers the stuff of lives she calls 'noble' and that society at large tends to call 'wrong.'" The six characters in the book are composites of women that Mohr has known and observed for a long time. All of them have in common a knack for surviving their own circumstances with dignity. They have coped with all kinds of situations through different forms of confrontation or even striking back with silence.

The beauty and simplicity of Mohr's writing and the complex wholeness of the people that she recreates out of so few words make it possible, once the story is concluded for the readers, to have the impression that we have known these people all our lives. As soon as we begin to read the book, we start to identify ourselves with these characters. We share their sorrows, their preoccupations, their aspirations, and their very few moments of happiness. Their struggles become our struggles and their ambitions our hope.

Of the six characters, Carmela, the widow is the one who leaves the most profound and lasting impression. After careful thought and deep soul searching she succeeds in liberating herself from all the ties that society has imposed on her. As a member of a social and economic class considered inferior, as a woman member of a traditionally conservative culture, her struggle to free herself is valiant. She has given the best years of her life and has sacrificed herself to maintain a nice and decent home for her husband and her children. After the death of her husband she decides to pick up the responsibility of her life regardless of what her children have planned for her.

We suffer with the physical deprivation of Amy, the young woman who lost her husband in an auto accident. She is forced to move with her four children into a run-down apartment in the Bronx, where the family does not have enough food to celebrate Thanksgiving. She has to make the best use of her ingeniousness and the emotional security found in the

traditional values of her culture to resolve the most elemental problems in order to survive.

Among others, the story of Lucy, the young woman who is spending the last days of her life in Welfare Island in a hospital for people who suffer from tuberculosis, is a very sad and moving account of her daily routine waiting for her lover, Eddie. After she became ill and could no longer be of use to him, she was abandoned. She knew that her final days were fast approaching and wanted to see him for the last time, but he never came.

We sympathize with the decision of Inez, the young orphan lady, who married an older man in order to leave the house of her domineering aunt who was very cruel to her. Her situation became worse because her husband, a very jealous and insecure man, did not keep the promise that he made to her before the marriage, to allow her to pursue a career as a graphic artist. But Inez was determined to reach her goal in life. After overcoming all kinds of obstacles, she became a prominent graphic artist.

Zoraida is the young mother and wife who is accused by her husband of lascivious behavior while she was sleeping. She was not aware of what was happening while she was asleep. On recommendation of her parents, a spiritualist is brought to the house hoping to find a solution to the problem, but unfortunately, the spiritualist could not find a solution and the situation deteriorated. Zoraida tried desperately to be a good mother and good wife but was aware that there were things that were beyond her control.

Rituals of Survival portrays six women at very important and decisive moments of their lives, when vital decisions that affected their futures were made. We see the mental processes and reactions to everyday life situations. Mohr in a very subtle way opens the door to women's thoughts on depression, deviant behavior, all kinds of inhibitions and other important matters, in many cases subjects that women never talk about. "These are women who don't just survive," Mohr said. "They survive with great nobility. And they manage to make a world for themselves, a world for their children."

—Luis L. Pinto
Bronx Community College of CUNY

Jamshid A. Momeni, ed. *Race, Ethnicity, and Minority Housing in the United States. Contributions in Ethnic Studies: 16.* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1986) xxv, 224 pp., \$35.00.

In virtually every U.S. city, residents are aware of ethnic divisions among the residential sections of the urban area. Demarcation of zones may be clear or nebulous, but it is present despite decades of "melting pot" rhetoric from opinion leaders. In this collection of articles edited by Jamshid A. Momeni of Howard University, contributors examine the