

COUNTRY OF RED AZALEAS

DOMNICA RADULESCU

Hachette Book Group

REVIEW BY ANJANA BALAKRISHNAN

Country of Red Azaleas is a novel about Lara and Marija, childhood friends born in the former country of Yugoslavia. Lara is Serbian and Marija Bosnian, and growing up, the girls are inseparable. Living in Belgrade and spending their summers in Sarajevo with Marija's grandparents, it never crosses their minds that their countrymen will one day be on opposing sides of a war. Closer than sisters, the two share everything, including a lover in college.

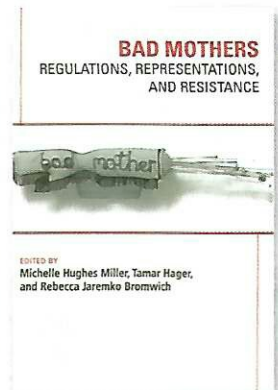
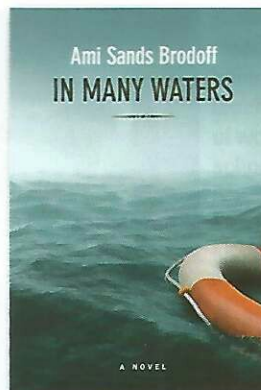
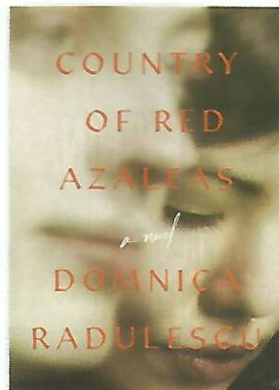
When the Bosnian war begins in 1992, their nationalities are pitted against each other. Lara marries and moves to the United States, while Marija decides to go back to Sarajevo to become a journalist. In the years that follow their lives diverge. But with Lara in her cozy Washington life and Marija in the fearful Bosnia at war, the women end up in their own circles of hell. The plot meanders towards the question: Who will they be when they find each other again?

Narrated in the voice of Lara, the story reveals the resilient love between the two women. It delves into expectations they have for themselves, and the ones others have for them. The story travels through the trauma of two devastating wars, one among nations and the other between a couple. The comforting message of the novel seems to be that people survive.

In one heartbreaking thread, Marija explains why she dislikes movies about the Bosnian war. She says such films should be made to remember the past so as not to repeat the same mistakes in the future. But, as a survivor of war, she says these films only romanticize the war, in which Serbian soldiers practiced systematic genocide and raped an estimated 20,000 to 50,000 Bosnian women in "rape camps."

Lara, with her American husband, American citizenship, a promising career and a darling child, is the golden immigrant standard for the American dream. She seems to have everything, but her life, too, falls apart. Author Domnica Radulescu reminds us, "Everybody's pain is their own.... Nobody's pains are traded for someone else's pains."

Country of Red Azaleas is a story of survival. Even with its unassuming



narrative style, where surprising developments and shocking incidents are treated with the same ambivalence, this novel leaves the reader with an urge to become a stronger person.

IN MANY WATERS

AMI SANDS BRODOFF

Inanna Publications

REVIEW BY MAYA KHANKHOJE

In Many Waters, as the title might suggest, is set in different parts of the world that are adjacent to large bodies of water. Water, as a metaphor and as a geographical feature, plays a very important role in the lives of the book's protagonists. This book is billed as a novel but it can also be read as an exploration of how mass migrations affect the lives of individuals—a very topical subject in our troubled times. It is also a history told by people who flesh out an arid account of rulers, wars and geopolitical changes that are meted out by scholars to unwary schoolchildren.

Cal and Zoe are an American brother-and-sister team who, orphaned in their youth, set out to discover the mysterious circumstances of their parents' demise. In this quest, they uncover their family history as they learn about the history of the small Jewish community settled in Malta, a tiny island state in the Mediterranean Sea. Their journey takes them from Malta to Marrakesh, Morocco, and from there to Montreal, which is located on an island in the St. Lawrence River. Did I forget to mention Puerto Escondido on the Pacific coast of Mexico? That is where their parents met their untimely deaths.

The cast of characters in this book is fascinating: a photographer, a travel journalist,

a painter, a jewelry designer, an old nanny, a young au pair, a writer, a patriarch, an amateur rabbi, a free-spirited spinster and many more. Books with multiple characters in various geographical settings, and those with a plot taking place in different historical periods, tend to be difficult to follow. But this is certainly not the case with *In Many Waters*. The author does an outstanding job of keeping readers' interest at all times through her use of authentic dialogue, a very visual sense of place and shrewd psychological insights that make her characters come alive at all times.

Ami Sands Brodoff has written an engaging book about how life prevails even in stormy waters.

BAD MOTHERS
Regulations, Representations, and Resistance

EDITED BY MICHELLE HUGHES MILLER, TAMAR HAGER AND REBECCA JAREMKO BROMWICH

Demeter Press

REVIEW BY KAREN DARRICADES

Bad Mothers is a collection of writings and artwork that offers multiple perspectives and critiques of the "bad mother" label. Motherhood is an identity that brings with it social control, systemic regulations and surveillance over every aspect of a mother's life. If a mother does not breast-feed, breast-feeds too long, consumes drugs during her pregnancy, does not adhere to prenatal care normalized by the medical establishment, gives up her child for adoption and is not self-sacrificing in the name of her child, she is a bad mother.

This anthology covers a lot of ground, offering academic perspectives, cultural