

Remedios: Stories of Earth and Iron from the History of Puertorriqueas

Aurora Levins Morales

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Remedios is a compelling mixture of collective historical memoir and personal history, of poetical anthropology and oral myth. As the title implies, this complex book by Morales offers us carefully chosen herbal remedies. The writing of the book seems itself a remedy for the author. In the act of chronicling the lives of women across the globe and through time, she has discovered a certain healing of self. The physical and emotional abuse she suffered as a child is the personal synthesis of the multitude of women's stories that appear in this work.

Starting with unknowable peoples in the dawn of humanity the reader is led on a journey into the modern age. What is offered is a new way to see history, an encouragement to imagine the world as "her" story. Some of the most interesting passages seem to beg more documentation and explanation: vast crystal mosques of salt in the heart of Africa and the conflict of Farrakhan, Islam and women's/slaves rights, for example. Once the reader accepts the book's timeline and embraces the rather erratic hopscotching of dates, it is an easier read.

Morales is most effective in reiterating the unfathomable resourcefulness of women, in birthing, raising and feeding their families. With passionate and poetic language the author brings our focus sharply to long forgotten or unknown episodes in our shared history as women, as human beings.

Morales has taught Jewish and women's studies at University of California at Berkeley, University of Minnesota and San Francisco State College. She is also reputed to be a curandera, a healer bearing the knowledge of the curative arts handed down for generations. The vignettes blend imagination with documented anthropology, history and oral folklore. She takes us from vast gatherings of our foremothers in prehistory to the very specific lives of historical women such as Sor Juana, Ethel Rosenberg and Rosa Collazo. There is a bibliography and a brief, if sketchy index of historical persons at the end of the book.

JANE GIBSON (September / October 1998)

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