Khoja-Moolji, S. (2023).

Rebuilding Community: Displaced Women and the Making of a Shia Ismaili Muslim Sociality.

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Khooja-Moolji's book is a profound exploration of the intricate tapestry of care, resilience, and community-building woven by Ismaili Muslim women amidst the upheaval of wars and forced migration. Through meticulous research and intimate narratives, the author unveils the extraordinary depth of ordinary ethics translated into different forms of care (*Khidimat*) which defines what it means to be part of the Ismaili community. (5) This, the author argues, sustains Ismaili sociality beyond moments of crisis.

The author's approach is both empathetic and analytical, offering readers a nuanced understanding of the intersecting forces that shape the lives of displaced women. Through meticulous ethnographic research and first-hand accounts, we gain insights into the everyday struggles and triumphs of Ismaili women as they navigate the complexities of displacement, identity, and belonging.

Khoja-Moolji tries to express the central role of women in building and nurturing communities. However, their contribution often remains unacknowledged and can go unnoticed in its everyday manifestations. This ethnographic exploration includes the description of seemingly banal women's activities like cleaning *jamatkhanas* (the site of congregational worship and gathering for Shia Ismaili Muslims.), cooking during religious festivals, assisting an elder with a bedpan at a refugee camp, and washing ritual objects and other forms of help that are vital to maintaining the fabric of communal life and spiritual practice, yet are often overlooked or underestimated in their significance.

Khoja-Moolji's research through the stories shared by her interlocutors – especially her mother Farida– unveils the profound rationale behind the imam's call for nurturing care among Ismailis. This example illustrates Ismaili's women's shared ethos of unity and collective strength, reminiscent of the symbolism of a *panj* or fist. (38) In this analogy, the imam symbolizes a guiding force encouraging followers to emulate the cohesion and resilience found in the structure of a clenched fist. While each finger may appear frail in isolation, together they form a formidable entity capable of great power and impact.

At the heart of *Rebuilding Community* lies a deep interrogation of the concept of care—both as a personal ethic and as a collective endeavor. The author navigates the lived experiences of Ismaili women who found themselves

uprooted from their homes in East Pakistan and East Africa as said by Rehmet "*Hamain ukhar diya gaya tha*! (We were uprooted!)." (14) They were forced to navigate unfamiliar terrains in search of safety and belonging. Through their stories, we witness the transformative power of care as a fundamental human impulse, guiding these women through moments of profound vulnerability and uncertainty.

Khoja-Moolji is an Ismaili herself and grew up in an Ismaili family. She is deeply acquainted with the religious sensitivities of her conversation partners, which she termed "faithful witnessing." (46) Thus, she appropriately starts the book by sharing an experience with her "mum," who serves as a key interlocutor, another of the Ismaili women struggling to see that Ismaili migrants have access to necessities as they arrive in the US. This personal approach serves as a hermeneutic tool, enriching the researcher's connection with what they observe, particularly the patterns within their conversation partners' religious convictions. Khoja-Moolji's epistemological aim to depict her conversation partners' experiences from an insider's perspective building upon the scholarship of figures such as Kirin Narayan and Amy Moran-Thomas, who advocate transcending the dichotomy of "native" and "non-native" ethnographers.

Moreover, this book offers a critical interrogation of gender dynamics within Ismaili communities, highlighting the ways in which women's labor often remains invisible or undervalued. Through poignant anecdotes and incisive analysis, the author sheds light on the structural inequalities and patriarchal norms that shape women's experiences of displacement and belonging. Yet, even in the face of adversity, Ismaili women emerge as resilient agents of change, challenging traditional gender roles and reshaping the contours of community life.

Khoja-Moolji also explores the role of storytelling in community building. She illustrates how narratives shape our understanding of identity, belonging, ethics and collective memory within communities. Through anecdotes and case studies, Khoja-Moolji demonstrates how storytelling can serve as a powerful tool for fostering empathy, resilience, and solidarity among community members, offering, in the author's words, "an articulation of ethics, grounded in the memories and experiences of my interlocutors" She also examines the significance of physical and virtual spaces in shaping community identity and cohesion. (35) She interrogates how shared spaces, such as religious institutions, cultural centers, and online forums, serve as vital hubs for social interaction and collective engagement.

Throughout the book, Khoja-Moolji's navigates the complex interplay between faith, identity, and community, offering readers a deeper understanding of the ways in which religious beliefs shape social relations and ethical practices. Drawing on insights from religious studies scholars such as Tariq Ramadan, Reza Aslan, the author illuminates the ways in which Ismaili sociality is grounded in a shared orientation to the Divine, fostering bonds of solidarity and compassion that transcend ethnic, linguistic, and cultural differences.

Indeed, one of the book's arguments is that ethics serve as a bridge between faith and the world—an assertion that resonates deeply with the teachings of the Ismaili Imam. By grounding her analysis in the lived experiences of displaced women, the author offers readers a nuanced understanding of the ways in which ethics are practiced and negotiated in everyday life, shaping the contours of community and belonging in profound ways.

By extension, Khoja-Moolji reflects on the importance of resilience and adaptability in the face of adversity. She examines how communities can weather challenges such as natural disasters, economic downturns, and social upheaval through collective action and mutual support. Drawing upon lessons from history and contemporary activism, Khoja-Moolji offers insights into building resilient communities that can withstand crises and thrive in the face of uncertainty.

Altogether, this book offers valuable insights, fosters empathy and understanding for its core characters and interlocutors, celebrates resilience, and inspires readers to work towards a better future advocating for a more compassionate and just world.