

**“At Home in the World”: Muslim American Women and Re-interpretations  
of Home in Nafisa Haji’s *The Writing on My Forehead***

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**Abstract**

This paper attempts to explore how Muslim American women re-interpret home and forge their world views in Pakistani American writer Nafisa Haji’s *The Writing on My Forehead* (2010). An interweaving of pre-independence history in colonial India, partition violence, and post-9/11 interethnic conflicts, Haji’s novel depicts a multi-layered, coming of age story of a young Muslim American woman, Saira Qader, born and live in a suburb of Los Angeles. Taking cues from Rosemary Marangoly Georges’ postcolonial relocation of home as well as Susan Koshy’s theory of minority cosmopolitanism, the present study argues that *The Writing on My Forehead* exemplifies Haji’s attempt to amplify the idea of home by suggesting its transnational, global connectivity with world histories. My reading of the text consists of three parts. The first section of the essay hinges upon Saira’s reflection of Muslim American women’s education. I suggest that home in young Saira’s eyes is a sheltered, gendered space since her mother always illuminates her daughters with moral fables and the importance of wearing the *hijab*. In the second part I examine Saira’s journey to Karachi to re-discover her cultural heritage. Of special concern is how neglected family secrets give her a different view of home. To be specific, these secrets are intricately entangled with South Asian (post)colonial history, as evidenced by her grandfather’s secret involvement with Gandhi’s non-violent action. The third section then investigates Saira’s self-empowerment as a war journalist in the world. Special concern is with Saira’s bearing witness to other’s sufferings, especially in the aftermath of 9/11 attacks. Being at home in the world, Saira’s diasporic journeys across different locals testify to her transgression of the domestic realm as well as the ethno-religious stereotype of Muslim women. Haji’s text, in the final analysis, signals not simply the spiritual growth of diasporic Muslim American women but also their new interpretation of home, a tense and tender site rife with historical connectivity and cosmopolitan imagination.

**Keywords:** Nafisa Haji; *The Writing on My Forehead*; Muslim American women; re-interpretations of home; minority cosmopolitanism