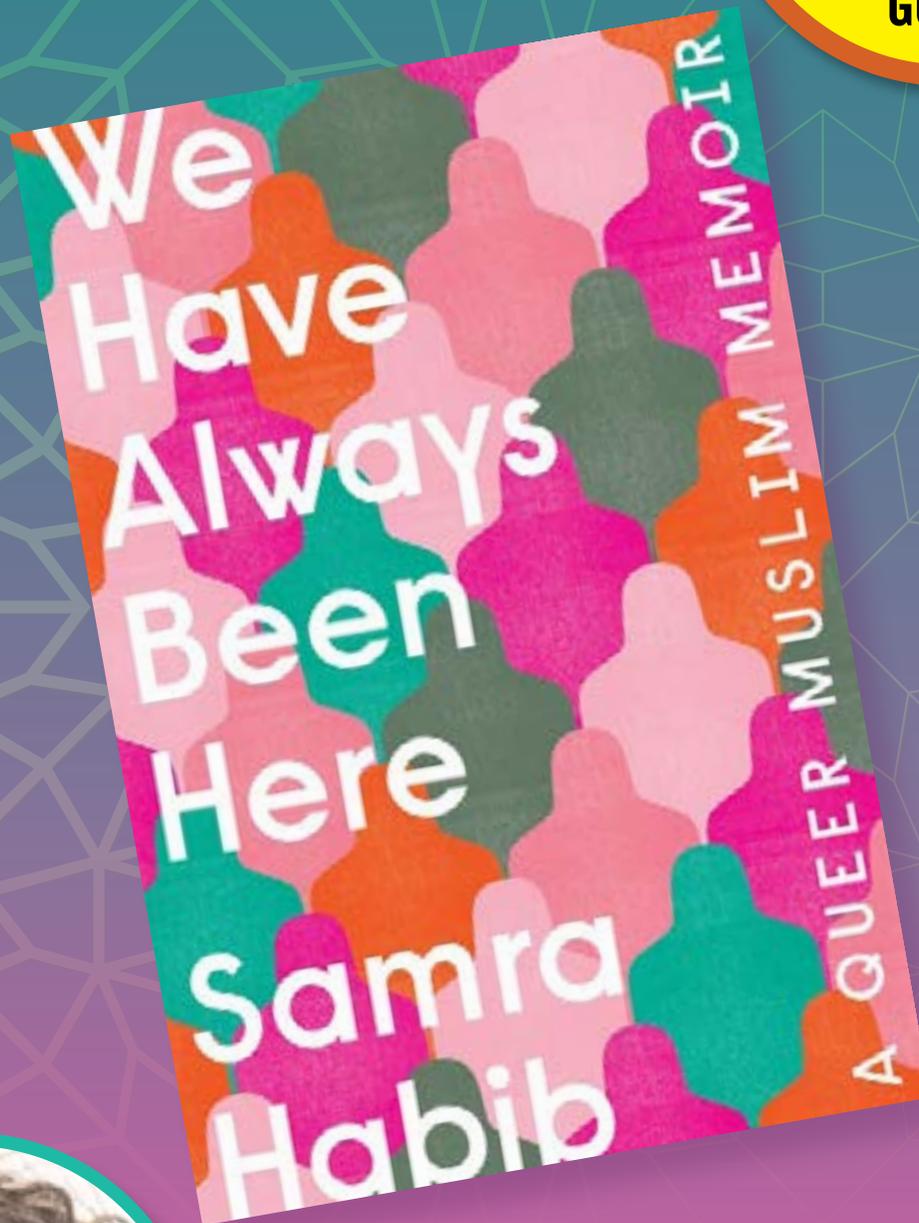


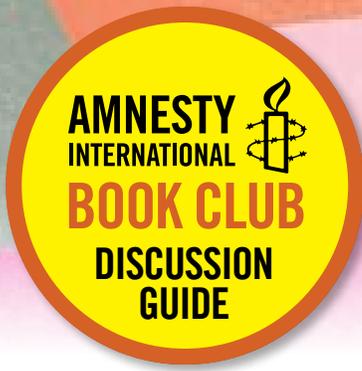
JULY/AUGUST 2021
DISCUSSION GUIDE

AMNESTY
INTERNATIONAL 
BOOK CLUB
DISCUSSION
GUIDE



WE HAVE ALWAYS BEEN HERE

BY SAMRA HABIB



WELCOME

AMNESTY BOOK CLUB MEMBERS

How do you find yourself when the world tells you that you don't exist?

Samra Habib has spent most of her life searching for the safety to be herself. As an Ahmadi Muslim growing up in Pakistan, she faced regular threats from Islamic extremists who believed the small, dynamic sect to be blasphemous. From her parents, she internalized the lesson that revealing her identity could put her in grave danger.

When her family came to Canada as refugees, Samra encountered a whole new host of challenges: bullies, racism, the threat of poverty, and an arranged marriage. Backed into a corner, her need for a safe space—in which to grow and nurture her creative, feminist spirit—became dire. The men in her life wanted to police her, the women in her life had only shown her the example of pious obedience, and her body was a problem to be solved.

So begins an exploration of faith, art, love, and queer sexuality, a journey that takes her to the far reaches of the globe to uncover a truth that was within her all along. A triumphant memoir of forgiveness and family, both chosen and not, *We Have Always Been Here* is a rallying cry for anyone who has ever felt out of place and a testament to the power of fearlessly inhabiting one's truest self.

Thank you for being part of the great Amnesty International Book Club community. We hope you are staying safe during this difficult time. We appreciate your interest, and welcome your questions, suggestions, and or comments. Send us an email at bookclub@amnesty.ca.

About Amnesty International

Amnesty International is a global movement of more than ten million supporters, members and activists in over 150 countries and territories who campaign to end grave abuses of human rights.

Our vision is for all people to enjoy all the rights enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and other international human rights standards.

We are independent of any government, political ideology, economic interest or religion, and are funded mainly by our membership.

Until everyone can enjoy all of their rights, we will continue our efforts. We will not stop until everyone can live in dignity; until every person's voice can be heard; until no one is tortured or executed.

Our members are the cornerstone of these efforts. They take up human rights issues through letter-writing, online and off line campaigning, demonstrations, vigils and direct lobbying of those with power and influence.

Locally, nationally and globally, we join together to mobilize public pressure and show international solidarity.

Together, we make a difference.

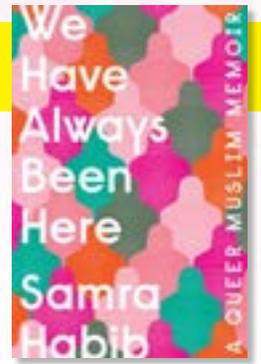
For more information about Amnesty International visit www.amnesty.ca or write to us at: Amnesty International, 312 Laurier Ave. E., Ottawa, ON K1N 1H9.

JULY/AUGUST 2021: *We Have Always Been Here*

ABOUT THIS MONTH'S AUTHOR, **Samra Habib**



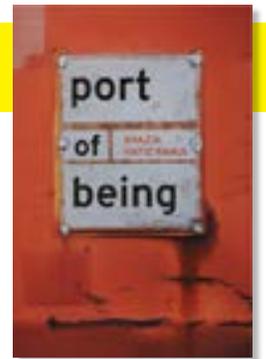
SAMRA HABIB is a writer, photographer, and activist. As a journalist she's covered topics ranging from fashion trends and Muslim dating apps to the rise of Islamophobia in the US. Her writing has appeared in *The New York Times*, *The Guardian*, and *The Advocate*, and her photo project, "Just Me and Allah," has been featured in *Nylon*, *i-D*, *Vanity Fair Italia*, *Vice*, and *The Washington Post*. She works with LGBTQ organizations internationally, raising awareness of issues that impact queer Muslims around the world. *We Have Always Been Here* is her first book.



ABOUT THIS MONTH'S GUEST READER, **Shazia Hafiz Ramji**



SHAZIA HAFIZ RAMJI grew up in Kenya, England, and the UAE, and moved with her family to Vancouver, BC, at the age of fifteen. Her first book of poems, *Port of Being*, was written in the aftermath of being stalked by a thief who stole her laptop and phone. It received the Robert Kroetsch Award for Innovative Poetry in 2017, was named by the CBC as a best Canadian book of poetry in 2018, and was shortlisted in 2019 for several awards including the City of Vancouver Book Award and the British Columbia and Yukon Book Prizes.



Themes of surveillance, addiction, war, and family continue to inform her novel in progress, which explores her South Asian, Iranian, and Irish heritage in the span of a hundred years. Shazia was a featured author at the Singapore Writers Festival, the Vancouver Writers Festival, and has presented her work internationally in Dublin, Chicago, Montreal, and elsewhere.

She was a finalist in the poetry category for the 2021 National Magazine Awards and her fiction has been recognized by the Banff Centre for the Arts and the Deer Lake Artist Residencies, where she completed further drafts of her novel. Her recent fiction can be found in the short film, *Colour Study*, available on CBC Gem. She is the recipient of a Research and Creation grant from the Canada Council for the Arts and was named as a "writer to watch" by the CBC. She lives in Vancouver, Calgary, and Toronto, where she works as an editor, critic, and instructor of creative writing and postcolonial literature. In her spare time, she researches military history and makes ambient music.

Follow Shazia on Twitter [@Shazia_R](https://twitter.com/Shazia_R) to keep up to date on her work.

Shazia Hafiz Ramji's Reflection on *We Have Always Been Here*



We Have Always Been Here:
A Queer Muslim Memoir by
Samra Habib is a true story
about one woman's search to
be truly seen for who she is.

Beginning in Pakistan, Samra tells us about growing up in a working-class neighbourhood in Lahore, where she was raised primarily by the women in her family, whose rituals of beauty, care, and socializing brought a sense of joy and freedom to the young Samra.

After being sexually abused at the age of four, Samra begins to practice hiding and masking her feelings, a practice that extended to her entire family, who were forced to hide their Ahmadi faith after being repeatedly persecuted by members of fundamentalist Islamic sects.

When Samra's family arrives as refugees in Canada, the bullying and loneliness Samra experiences at school is worsened by the presence of her cousin, who had accompanied them from Pakistan as the groom-to-be in an arranged marriage to Samra, unbeknownst to her. This leads Samra to attempt suicide.

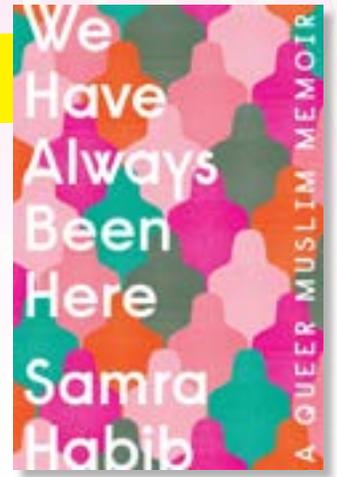
Though she runs away from home and is temporarily estranged from family, Samra later begins taking portraits of queer Muslims across the world as she searches for others like her. She also regains her faith by attending

a mosque exclusively for queer Muslims, building a stronger sense of herself through her chosen family, who accept her as a queer Muslim.

When I first saw the cover of *We Have Always Been Here*, I was drawn in by the pops of colour that implied (to me) a throng of Muslim women in burqas; it simultaneously conveyed individuality and the anonymity of being in a crowd. My reading experience was informed by this impression as my favourite parts were about Samra's struggle to separate herself from her family while also cherishing them. As an immigrant, loner, and "goth" in my youth, I could relate to Samra's experiences in Canada, to her being a Tokyo-loving "punk," and embracing queer identity that is "so much more than who you sleep with."

This book is unique in its representation of queer Muslim identity because of its nuance that feels true to life. Samra's perspective is one that can create and shape brighter futures, not only for queer Muslim women, but for anyone who has felt like they haven't belonged.

SHAZIA HAFIZ RAMJI'S DISCUSSION QUESTIONS



1. Who is the “we” in the title of Samra’s book, *We Have Always Been Here*?
2. When Samra calls the youth hotline after suicidal ideation due to her arranged marriage to her cousin, she says: “It was as if the counsellor at the other end had never encountered my specific situation – a teenage Muslim girl trapped in an unhappy arranged marriage – and when she suggested I tell my parents how I felt, I hung up on her.” Why do you think she hung up on the counsellor despite being in such desperate circumstances?
3. Many refugees and immigrants in Canada find community with other people from their country of origin, but some diaspora communities may perpetuate the same harms that queer refugees sought to escape by coming to Canada. What organizations in your community are working with LGBTQ2S+ refugees and immigrants, and how can you support their work?
4. Beauty, style, and self-care are forms of joy and freedom for Samra – even when she returns to her mother’s beauty salon after running away from home, they are able to bond over beauty: “She might not have approved of me going to journalism school, but we could agree on one thing: magenta would be the perfect colour for me.” How does beauty function in your life compared to Samra’s?
5. Samra writes: “Getting to know men was not something the women in my family were encouraged to do. They were to be avoided at all times, like attack dogs without muzzles.” Who are the men that Samra comes to know and how do they influence Samra?
6. Samra says that being queer is “so much more than who you sleep with.” What does being “queer” mean for Samra and for you?
7. Who are the members of Samra’s “chosen family” and how does each of them change her life?
8. Samra’s family belongs to a minority sect of Muslims known as the Ahmadis. Because of their persecution by fundamentalist Islamic sects in Pakistan, Samra’s family sought refuge in Canada. She says, “Hiding our religion from non-Ahmadis had become part of our daily lives,” How does her refugee experience compare to depictions of refugees in the news?
9. How does Samra’s relationship to her faith change throughout the memoir?
10. Pride is first and foremost a protest. What actions can you take during Pride to protect ongoing harms against LGBTQ2S+ people and promote LGBTQ2S+ rights?

BACKGROUND



HUMAN RIGHTS ARE MY PRIDE

Pride is first and foremost a protest – a protest against homophobic and transphobic laws, policies, and social norms which violate the rights and undermine the safety of LGBTI people. The modern Pride movement was founded over 50 years ago in response to police storming the Stonewall Inn in New York, arresting anyone they suspected of being gay. Pride was created by and for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, and two-spirit people (LGBTQ2S) to celebrate queer liberation and to protest ongoing discrimination and violence.

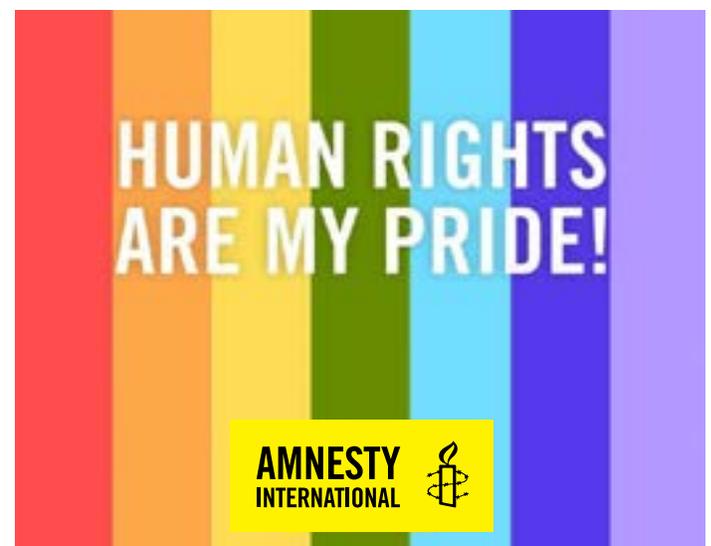
This year, for the second straight year, the COVID-19 pandemic has moved the protest online. Pride may be virtual this year, but it is still a protest, and given increased risks to LGBTI people during the pandemic, unfortunately, there is much to protest.

Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, LGBTI people have experienced inadequate allocation of resources; faced discrimination in access to health care, employment and housing; and been targeted by criminalization laws, harassment, intimidation, arbitrary arrests, and killings by state and non-state actors. This crisis, and the individual

government responses to it, are adding to discrimination LGBTI people face. The need for virtual communities of care and solidarity, and global activism in support of LGBTI rights has never been greater.

A pandemic is not an excuse to violate human rights. Check out our Pride 2021 Activism Guide article to see all the ways you can take action in support of LGBTI rights!

LINK: <https://www.amnesty.ca/blog/pride-2021-keeping-protest-online>



TAKE ACTION



Maura is one of many transgender people seeking asylum in the US, who are stuck waiting indefinitely in detention centres where they are at risk of ill-treatment

US: FREE MAURA FROM IMMIGRATION DETENTION NOW!

Maura, a 42-year-old transgender woman from Nicaragua, has spent half her life living in the United States. She sought safety in the US after experiencing relentless transphobic violence in Mexico after leaving Nicaragua at a young age. In the US, she attended high school, and then found work in the hospitality industry and built a community that accepts her.

But instead of offering Maura protection, US authorities detained her, and she has spent more than two years at the Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) Otay Mesa Detention Center in California. In detention she has experienced abuse, a lack of adequate medical care, and possible exposure to COVID-19.

Maura is one of many transgender people seeking asylum in the US, who are stuck waiting indefinitely in detention centres where they are at risk of ill-treatment because of their gender identity, medical needs, or trauma they have endured. Maura is seeking

humanitarian protection to be able to stay in the US because she fears for her life if returned to Nicaragua as a transgender woman. She faces significant risk if returned to a country she has not known for decades. Nicaragua is not safe for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and intersex (LGBTI) individuals, particularly transgender women.

**TAKE ACTION TODAY AND LET
THE DIRECTOR OF THE SAN
DIEGO ICE FIELD OFFICE TO**

#FREEMAURA IMMEDIATELY!

LINK: <https://www.amnesty.ca/get-involved/take-action-now/us-free-maura-immigration-detention-now>

COMING UP IN SEPTEMBER/OCTOBER 2021

Crow Winter

By Karen McBride

Nanabush. A name that has a certain weight on the tongue—a taste. Like lit sage in a windowless room or aluminum foil on a metal filling.

Trickster. Storyteller. Shape-shifter. An ancient troublemaker with the power to do great things, only he doesn't want to put in the work.

Since coming home to Spirit Bear Point First Nation, Hazel Ellis has been dreaming of an old crow. He tells her he's here to help her, save her. From what, exactly? Sure, her dad's been dead for almost two years and she hasn't quite reconciled that grief, but is that worth the time of an Algonquin demigod?

Soon Hazel learns that there's more at play than just her own sadness and doubt. The quarry that's been lying unsullied for over a century on her father's property is stirring the old magic that crosses the boundaries between this world and the next. With the aid of Nanabush, Hazel must unravel a web of deceit that, if left untouched, could destroy her family and her home on both sides of the Medicine Wheel.

In the meantime, if you have any questions or comments, please contact us at: Bookclub@amnesty.ca



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