

**Dossa, Parin, *Afghanistan Remembers: Gendered Narrations of Violence and Culinary Practices*, Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2014, 178 pages.**

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Conducting engaged anthropology is the standpoint for this work by Parin Dossa. Dossa's stance builds on Judith Butler's (2009) work on the precariousness of *all* human lives, and in imagining our interconnectivity and interdependency, we may hope for a future in which violence is minimised and social justice prevails. A strength of this monograph is Dossa's examination of quotidian violence that is unseen and/or ignored, that is not necessarily articulated but, rather, is embodied, and that emerges through daily practices, including culinary practices. Dossa looks closely at gendered experiences of violence and how women, in particular, through their everyday household tasks and food work as mothers, also conduct memory work. Women's memory work involves a process whereby recalling stories of past suffering and violence also affects the listeners' present, and, in the process of (re)telling, collective memory is formulated. This memory work of the women with whom Dossa spoke is mirrored in her own work. In the production of this text – through witnessing and sharing women's stories – Dossa is contributing to the efforts to acknowledge suffering endured and to not be forgotten. These narrations also share forms of violence that are often suppressed. Thus, Dossa's work is explicitly political; by recording and disseminating stories of suffering and violence, she makes it difficult for politicians and others to forget this history, or to ignore the consequences of past actions (and inactions).

This book is based on years of ethnographic research conducted by Dossa in Afghanistan and Canada (as she denotes, "*there/here*"). In Chapter 1, Dossa explicates her approach by sharing material from her field notes as well as stories, thus demonstrating "bottom-up memory work" and how she drew on various forms of data to reveal inner spaces of violence (that is, the everyday, difficult-to-articulate forms of violence). This chapter would be particularly valuable for students learning how scholars make sense of people's stories and experiences during the research process – in this case, analysing texts of what is said and the silences therein. Critical in this chapter is the discussion on the realities of conducting this kind of research and on the potential retraumatisation (in conjunction with healing) that can occur as women share their stories.

The hearth symbolises the strength and power of women; with the fire of the hearth, the home is warmed and food is cooked. Note that in many circumstances the hearth and home are physically inferior (that is, a building ransacked by bombs, an insecure structure in an insecure location), yet, through women's food work at the hearth, they conduct important social work of remembering and rebuilding social relations (for example, fulfilling cultural norms of hospitality centred on serving/receiving food and drink). Sharing stories is another way family and communal bonds are created and strengthened. These become the two main forms of data that Dossa uses to examine gendered inner spaces and quotidian experiences of violence.

The focus of Chapters 2 and 3 is on the narratives of participants. The narratives are a particular form: collective narratives

referred to as "*testimonios*." These speak to a common experience of violence shared by a group where the past and present are interconnected. It is clear the women are not passive victims but, rather, are actively working to deal with the atrocities they have faced while carrying on with the day-to-day work of living (for example, rather than hapless victims of war, these women feed their families, work to procure food and provide their families with money to educate the children, and continue the work of creating and maintaining social networks). The following two chapters (Chapters 4 and 5) focus on how food practices reveal memory work. Beginning with the hearth, Dossa also explores other key food sites – the food cart and the vegetable patch – in terms of everyday food performances and memory work. Chapter 4 is focused on testimonies from *there* (Afghanistan). Chapter 5 shifts the locus to diasporic communities in Canada, where food performances on the street, in the home, and at the food bank are analysed. Through women's food talk, connections between here/there are drawn; an initial honeymoon period of settlement when foods consumed reflect those of pre-war Afghanistan changes over time as realities of financial and time constraints are manifest. Furthermore, children's food behaviours shift so that they do not wish to consume Afghani food in public (school), which speaks to challenges of acceptance in Canadian contexts. Particularly heartbreaking is the dehumanisation experienced at the food bank; one cannot help but hope that this engaged scholarship leads to a change in attitudes and processes at facilities and programs helping newcomers.

In the concluding chapter, the evidence from the women's stories and food performances is brought together to illustrate how Afghani identities are constructed and how gendered experiences of violence are embodied across generations. Note the parallels here with investigations of embodied memories among other communities (for example, memories of slavery and colonisation). Connections between here/there go beyond Afghani diasporic communities. Dossa's analysis problematises how violence is portrayed in Western discourse. Instead of violence being located in Afghanistan, in a space physically distant from Western worlds and unrelated to Canadian everyday lives, Dossa draws explicit connections between the violence *there* and the political decisions *here*. Dossa also asks us to consider the future in Afghanistan as the withdrawal of foreign troops is accompanied by increased local militarisation.

This work is an excellent example of engaged scholarship and feminist anthropology. The agency of the women is evident throughout, as women accomplish the work of remembering, sustaining, and recreating social kin networks through food and stories – work that is too often invisible. Their resiliency in their day-to-day activities is unmistakable in Dossa's writing. The writing is very accessible yet grounded in the appropriate theoretical works that would make it an excellent text to use not only in anthropological classes but also in other social science classrooms such as women's/gender studies, food studies, sociology, human geography, and the like. Courses on gender and migration would particularly benefit from incorporating this text into the required readings. I think many students will connect with this text, particularly those whose family histories echo the migration experiences of the Afghani participants. Politicians and others who shape foreign policy and resettlement programs would also find this book of interest.

In short, this is a beautifully written, evocative book. The stories of the Afghani women are positioned within/against

Dossa's personal experiences of migration as a refugee, and her writing openly incorporates her voice and how this may have informed her research. Her personal connections with participants and larger academic issues are unequivocal. This is engaged anthropology. Dossa successfully demonstrates how women's memory work connects homes across time and space – homes in a pre-war (or different war) past and homes in Afghani cities or villages, refugee camps, and, finally, in Canada. Thus, women's work in ensuring the survival of their families also ensures communal relationships and identities. As Dossa's title denotes, Afghani identities and memories are propagated through women's memory work; as Afghani women share food and stories, Afghanistan remembers.

## References

Butler, Judith

2009 *Frames of War: When Is Life Grievable?* London: Verso.

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**O'Neil, Kevin L.**, *Secure the Soul: Christian Piety and Gang Prevention in Guatemala*, Oakland: University of California Press, 2015, 288 pages.

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The pages of *Secure the Soul* read like an action novel rich with ethnographic narratives that highlight the interpersonal relationships that the ethnographer skillfully crafts with current and former gang members, pastors, drug addicts, and inmates. As expected in any ethnography of gang life, *Secure the Soul* juxtaposes stories of tortured loitering, the different forms of substance abuse that enables survival, vignettes of interpersonal posturing, the heaviness of death, and harrowing drives across different versions of urban decay with the aftermath of gang gun play. Yet, O'Neil's ethnography is not really an account of gang life in the stereotypical sense. It is classic ethnography – an analysis of how individual life stories evidence the transformative role that religion plays in the development of post-conflict subjects and societies. A complex topic to be sure, but O'Neil's crafting makes *Secure the Soul* readable for those with minimal background in anthropology and also engaging for scholars working on post-conflict reconstruction, violence and gender, security studies, and anyone with a passing theoretical interest in subjectification.

*Secure the Soul* makes a strong case for the merit of Christian Evangelists' outreach to US migrant gangs as they forcibly settle in Guatemalan society and into its incarcerated communities. Piety, in a context in which the state has withdrawn from the provision of welfare, becomes not a viable, but, rather, the only, solution to gang violence. O'Neil frames his argument on the seemingly controversial assertion that religion must not be understood as an antithesis to security. Popular culture and scholarship are replete with stories that constitute religious fundamentalism as a principal threat to governance. Nevertheless, O'Neil's ethnography shows that the practices and rhetoric of constructing individual and national security require the piety of religion (p. 11). In post-war Guatemala – where Christian

Evangelicals were the central players in the development and implementation of counter-insurgency programs in the 1980s, and Catholic liberation theology was similarly pivotal to the insurgency's social consciousness – the nexus between religion and notions of security is incontestable.

Many of the young male protagonists of O'Neil's pages landed in the streets of post-war Guatemala with little experience, economic prospects, or even fluency in Spanish. O'Neil narrates their lives in six neatly separated analytical chapters that are accompanied by a connected ethnographic narrative. In the first two chapters of the volume, O'Neil presents the stark reality of an insecure life as men arrive fresh from US incarceration for immigration or criminal offences and are separated from all of the social support networks they have ever known. Their chances for survival are slim as they are placed alone – save their gang connections – and without any means for making a living in a war-torn economy where unemployment is endemic. Inhabiting such different forms of marginalities and constant threats of the Guatemalan urban “jungle” make Mateo, and the other men who Pastor Morales administers to, highly susceptible to dreams of salvation. The complexity of piety is portrayed as both a calling and an object of continual desire in the middle chapters of the volume as lives are lost and gained in substance abuse recovery programs and daily sermons. Ultimately, piety enables the men represented by O'Neil to aspire to be entitled to a life in the chaos of survival.

In Mateo's life, piety comes to justify and enable his continued existence despite harsh odds. Further, it enables him to develop a sense of self that makes him feel entitled to survival. Mateo, used by O'Neil to anchor his longitudinal study, is an exemplar of how viable personhood is constituted through piety. Piety in this context is not just a performance of adequate sociality in securing legal employment or remaining substance free. Rather, the most important role of piety in O'Neil's account of gang prevention is the way that it enables the acquisition of a viable sense of self in a context of constant violence, economic scarcity, and trauma where the individuals clutch but a foothold in humanity. Focusing on Mateo's deserved survival through the nine years during which this ethnography was researched, we learn how piety works to secure a sense of worthiness. In the world view of the pious men with whom O'Neil works, a life worthy of salvation has value, and persistent survival comes to be understood as evidence of divine intervention that actively selects lives worth sparing. O'Neil's final chapter is entitled “Forsaken,” calling attention to the continual exercise of a pious life amid the constant insecurity and the testing of individual resolve.

Gangs, states, and other institutions of governance are no strangers to the practices of securing the soul, and O'Neil's ethnography has important implications that speak to the forms of “hard security” that are so often of political interest. O'Neil demonstrates that in Guatemala the “soft security” of the soul – understood as enabling viable lives for persons – is necessary for national security. Scholarship in Latin American studies has long explored the role of religion in governance, and O'Neil's work presents a new chapter on how religion continues to feature prominently in the region's nation building.

More importantly, in evidencing the distinction between national and individual forms of security, O'Neil's work suggests that a shift in thinking is necessary for the political science-focused approach to security studies. Though the instilment of