

**Review of Jill Stockwell's *Reframing the Transitional Justice Paradigm: Women's Affective Memories in Argentina*, Springer 2014.**

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During the military dictatorship of Argentina (1976-1983), an estimated 30,000 people were forcibly 'disappeared' – kidnapped by security forces and tortured and secretly executed in clandestine detention centres. Hundreds of children were also taken from their abducted mothers and placed in the care of families with strong military ties. In this thoughtful, nuanced and beautifully written book, Jill Stockwell explores the continuing reverberations of this period of Argentina's history: the ways in which memories of the regime endure despite the passage of time, and how women play a critical role in their transmission. Stockwell engages with the memories of violence of two very different groups of Argentine women: those whose family members were kidnapped, disappeared or murdered by the military government, and those whose family members were kidnapped and murdered by leftist armed guerrilla groups. She examines how both groups of women continue to engage in the 'inexhaustible labours of mourning and remembering' (3) and remain deeply hostile towards one another.

Stockwell is concerned with the question of why divisions and animosity between the two groups of women remain entrenched and are 'growing only deeper', and memorial cultures in Argentina 'remain beholden to the entrenched political and ideological divisions of old' (4). These divisions persist despite the fact that Argentina has been a pioneer of transitional justice, establishing a truth commission in 1983 and initiating a series of judicial reforms and procedures since 2004 (4). Stockwell describes her gradual realization of the virtual impossibility of finding 'redemptive narratives' that might allow each group of women to recognize the deep pain experienced by the other (6-7). Her book is an attempt to grapple with what she refers to as the condition of 'stuckness' that is so profoundly entrenched in Argentine memorial culture (7) and which means that that 'moving on' and the development of a unifying narrative of the past may not be possible.

Stockwell's in-depth interviews lead her to conclude that a key reason why 'stuckness' persists is that emotion and affect play a powerful role in the shaping of shared memory (7). In

comparison to many studies of social memory, she therefore goes beyond an analysis of the politics of memory in the public sphere to explore the emotions associated with individual memories and what she refers to as the 'affective trails and residues of the personal memories of trauma' of the women she interviews (9).

Stockwell draws on DeBlo's (1995) concept of 'deep memory' in order to make sense of the ways in which the two groups of women continue to live with a trauma that causes them to 'repeatedly relive, both physiologically and physically, the violent events they experienced' (75). The concept of deep memory seeks to capture the ways in which 'memories record the physical imprint of a traumatic event within the individual.' (82) It is different from 'common memory', because it 'preserves sensations' – it is the memory of the senses. And because it is felt in the body, and can be triggered by associations with particular sensations and objects, it does not fade over time and 'remains alive in the present' (86).

Stockwell powerfully illustrates the phenomenon of deep memory by showing how the women's experiences of violence have radically reshaped their sense of self, and how their traumatic memories can manifest unpredictably in the present, undermining their attempts to lead a 'normal' life or transcend their pain. The women whom Stockwell interviews unexpectedly experience feelings of deep pain. Silvia, for example, whose father was kidnapped and disappeared during the military dictatorship, describes being overwhelmed with sadness upon accidentally coming across a photograph of her parent's wedding. Mercedes, whose husband was killed by the armed guerrilla movement describes a pain in her heart that 'comes and goes in rhythm with times of public commemoration for her husband' (92). Laura feels fear and paranoia every time she passes by a police station because her father would regularly tell her to cross the road to avoid it.

For those whose family members were killed by armed guerrilla fighters, the difficulties of moving beyond 'stuckness' are compounded by the sense in which they feel there is a lack of receptivity for their experiences in the public sphere, which makes them feel as though they are not 'regarded as a citizen with equal rights within Argentine society' (115). For those whose family members were 'disappeared' by the military, 'moving on' continues to be complicated by

the fact that the identity of many of those who tortured their loved ones remains unknown, and because the 'disappeared' remain in 'limbo between life and death' (136). That they are deprived of their family member's final remains, and are unable to conduct a proper burial, further contributes to an experience of 'ambiguous loss' that defies closure and disrupts mourning. Stockwell also demonstrates the ways in which the transmission of traumatic memories flows across generations, and the ways in which young people who believe they may belong to the *generacion robaba* (stolen generation) who were kidnapped by the military, struggle to integrate this knowledge into their sense of identity.

The existence of deep memory also helps to explain why the women continue to evince a 'significant absence of empathy for the grief of others' which, in turn, 'destroys the possibility for communication between adversarial memory cultures' (116). Stockwell even suggests that the practices of 'social sharing' and public memorialization in which many of the women are engaged may be further contributing to a culture of animosity and resentment.

By providing a nuanced reading of the politics of memory in Argentina, and of the ways in which affect continually flows between the private and the public realm and across generations, *Reframing the Transitional Justice Paradigm* serves as a reminder of the difficulties of 'settling the past.' Through a powerful use of the women's narratives, Stockwell shows that tidy, linear narratives of history are undermined by the disruptive power of affective memory. She highlights, too, just how impoverished narratives of transition, reconciliation, 'coming to terms' and healing are for capturing the complexities of everyday life in the aftermath of violence. There can be no straightforward rupture with the past for the women Stockwell interviews, who feel compelled to keep the memories of their loved ones alive lest they be erased from history. Stockwell thus leaves us with an important question, which is, what would it be like to 'let go of the idea that history needed to be settled' (155)? The insights gleaned from this rich account of memorial culture in Argentina suggest that scholars of transitional justice and social memory would do well to ponder this question.