

Resisting Disappearance: Military Occupation and Women's Activism in Kashmir by Ather Zia, University of Washington Press, 2019, 280pp, £106.44 (hardback), ISBN: 978-0295744988.

As law teachers we would like to diversify our pedagogical methods and literature while bringing interdisciplinarity to our teaching. Law and Anthropology in this context are two disciplines that provide for an academically effective marriage. It is in this respect that Ather's book can be considered as invaluable for teaching many aspects of law interdisciplinary. Recently, I had the rare pleasure of reviewing this book at the LSA 2020 Denver (held virtually due to Covid19 pandemic) in the presence of the author herself. This review is based on the comments made at that presentation.

'Resisting Disappearance' provides a rich and close observation of the APDP movement, (The Association for Parents of Disappeared Persons) in Kashmir. In doing so, Ather very skilfully theorises the role of the APDP women in Kashmir whose sons/husbands/brothers had been disappeared (made to disappear) through the excessive Indian militarisation in the region, to demonstrate how those women foster activism while working within the social and political constraints.

In that regard, the author relies on Foucault's 'counter-memory'. Foucault defined counter-memory as "*an individual's resistance against the official versions of historical continuity*: the important thing becomes who remembers, what is the context of memory, and what does it oppose". Through her ethnographic work, Ather exposes the reader to the multiple ways through which the APDP activists resist the forced amnesia of the repressive regime, through their unique social and cultural based practices of memorising and memorialising the disappeared which can be seen as a form of resistance to forced disappearance of many Kashmiri men.

Ather, very effectively, relies on many analytics in this process of highlighting the Kashmiri women not necessarily as victims but as activists against the Indian military hegemony. A couple of such pertinent analytics are reflected on below.

In chapter 1, Ather uses the analytic of Zooneh's (one of the 'research partners', a term chosen for interview participants) open door. Zooneh is 80 years old. Her son was disappeared since 2001. Similar to many others in her position, Zooneh keeps her door open in continuous anticipation of the return of the disappeared, her son. This is portrayed as unceasing work of mourning which can be seen as a form of resistance, a 'deliberate effort to reclaim some power to get justice' by Zooneh. Thus, politics of mourning giving rise to politics of resistance. The door, Ather argues, "serves as an icon of loss, mourning, agency, and resistance." A manifestation of what the author refers to as 'Affective Law'. Ather uses the term 'affective' to refer to the "deeply emotional and haunting mourning for the disappeared" whereas the word 'law' to "characterize a system of unwritten social and political practices that derive legitimacy from the fidelity with which the women perform them to sustain the memory of the disappeared and to continue their search for them." Thus, keeping the door open is used as one example of this. The comparisons made between Zooneh's open door and Kafka's door in 'Before the Law', where on occasion the villager would be allowed a peek inside the law was quite pertinent.

The second analytic this review focuses on can be found in chapter three where the importance of being seen as an *Asal Zanan*, a good Muslim woman, in their struggle, is seen as crucial for their activism. This can vary from being dressed in a certain manner to the way they make eye contact with journalists/cameras, in the process of making the disappeared visible while keeping one's self invisible due to their gender being secondary in a patriarchal tradition: A performative accomplishment (Judith Butler) that sustains their activism against the oppressive regime and simultaneously enables them to 'undo the damage public visibility can inflict on [their] female status in society'. The author positions this hidden visibility as a mark of Foucauldian biopolitics, where

individuals attempt to break from the grip of disciplinary powers by reinventing their bodies to create a pathway of action for whatever the goal might be. Ather excellently shows how within these patriarchal communities the “APDP women establish their activist identity in such a way that it reveals a fine-grained and nuanced agency, which may appear not only in stereotypical confrontational forms but as nuanced culturally.” In doing so she successfully prevents the reader from overlooking the APDP activism as passive, poor crying women instead persuades us to see them as active resisters of forced disappearances.

Resisting Disappearance takes the reader on a cathartic journey of Kashmiri people’s everyday life while centring around the diverse activist women whose men were seen as a ‘killable body’ first for being Muslim and being Kashmiri due to the Indian military occupation. Chapter 2 provides the relevant historical account of this occupation. Having highlighted the importance of APDP women’s performative accomplishment as *asal zanan* in chapter 3, the gendered nature of the protests by these women who are seen as ‘protectors and protestors’ is examined in chapter 4 showing how the resistance work is woven into the fabric of their everyday life.

The inevitable militarised humanitarian work in many parts of the world can be seen from a new perspective based on the way the author portrays similar activity taking place in Kashmir. In Chapter 5 Ather argues that the humanitarian work such as Good Will project (2011) although initiated by the Indian government in the guise of an altruistic act in fact is an effort to build popular support for the government and marginalise armed resistance. In doing so, she claims that humanist forms of counterinsurgency normalises brutality where Kashmiris’ desire for freedom from India is seen as unnecessary.

Foucauldian counter memory becomes relevant again in chapter 6 where the APDP women archive the disappeared body through ‘The file’, where documents relating to the disappeared (made to disappear) person is accumulated over the years. More often there are no FIRs (First information report that one files in Police when a criminal act seemed to have happened) relating to the disappeared in Kashmir as the Military refuses to record them as a denial of such disappearances taken place. Therefore, no FIR may be found in ‘The File’ to satisfy the claim that one has disappeared. Nevertheless, the unfettered resistance activism by these Kashmiri women in maintaining these files, carrying them everywhere they go and guarding them carefully, the author argues, helps one to understand ‘how a file is a site of affect and politics of mourning’.

Chapter 7, very aptly titled, Convergence of Grief and Joy explains the intriguing nature of the form memory or memorialising can take in Kashmir. Ather extensively explains the manner in which a wedding, a cite of happiness and celebration, is used as a site of memorialising missing men, a shared experience within the community, by singing songs and dancing. Thus, a wedding becomes a convergence of grief and joy.

As an ethnographic work, Resisting Disappearance can be utilised to enrich our teaching particularly in the areas of human rights law, feminist studies and for research methods. Additionally, this wonderful exposition of Kashmiri women’s resistance can provide vital insights when teaching Law and Society, Law in South Asia, Law as violence (beyond the historic Nuremburg laws) and therefore provides us an opportunity to decolonise our law curriculum.

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