

## Book Reviews/Comptes rendus

Parin Dossa, *Politics and Poetics of Migration: Narratives of Iranian Women*. Toronto: Canadian Scholars' Press Inc., 2004, 189 pp.

In her most recent book, Parin Dossa, Associate Professor of Anthropology at Simon Fraser University, offers an eloquent and creative analysis of complex issues of migration, exclusion, oppression and gender analysis through the storytelling of Iranian women living on Vancouver's North Shore. Dossa takes a humanistic approach to weave together in a highly effective manner the critical themes of intersectionality, oppression and exclusion. Written with finesse, the complex realities and challenges faced by these women migrants are powerfully communicated and highly accessible to the academic and non-academic reader alike.

International issues provide a framework for the stories of the women encountered by Dossa. She offers a critical analysis of systemic inequalities and inequities from a global and a national perspective, raising the intervention of foreign powers in Iran as an element of the oppression sustained under successive regimes, both secular and religious. By situating the experiences of these women within the broader context of international relations, Canadian immigration and social policies, Dossa shifts the blame for integration difficulties from the individual towards structural and systemic barriers, making an important contribution to academia, policy makers and community organizations.

These stories evoke the frustration that some immigrants feel in the face of policies that, aimed at easing the immigration and integration of people to Canada, perversely make the integration process yet more difficult. By means of example, the migrant women in Dossa's book were shocked at the difficulty they encountered in having foreign credentials and experience recognized in Canada. They found that the information they had consulted in the Canadian embassies had seriously downplayed or oversimplified the significant difficulties that migrants face in terms of obtaining language skills and employment.

The book provides a critical analysis of current interpretation of settlement policies from a mainstream perspective. Dossa highlights the important characterization of precarious immigration status and the closely related experience of dependency. Structural exclusion is related to what Dossa refers to as "social suffering," the pain of those who have been socially "discounted [...] and displaced by the dominant political discourse."

In an original but not necessarily uncontested approach, Dossa relates discrimination within Canadian society to the Canadian Charter of Rights that privileges two linguistic-ethnic communities (British and French), thereby formalizing an “Other” identity and implicitly justifying a certain level of social exclusion.

Displacement, health and wellbeing or “peace of mind” - three interconnected issues - are a major consideration within the book. Having begun with an interest in depression, Dossa shifts the mainstream conceptualization of it as understood within the bio-medical perspective to better reflect the realities and the lives of the women whose stories she was gathering. Rather than suffering from depression, these women felt that their wellbeing was compromised by their new, Canadian context. Women felt that in their country of origin they were able to negotiate their wellbeing within certain parameters through different levels of participation in civil society while enjoying the benefits of an active life. The difficulties encountered by these women in the host society lead the author to question the ability and competency of health and social practitioners in the comprehension and the understanding of the needs of these women and their categorization in the so-called “othering.” In this same vein Dossa brings a critical scrutiny of the ways in which health determinants are apprehended and implemented in the daily practice.

The failures of the mainstream service delivery structure to interpret and deal with diversity impedes these migrant women from using their customary coping strategies in order to participate in Canadian society. This leads to experiences of loss, isolation and overall lack of “wellbeing”, interpreted as depression by mainstream Canadian health professionals.

While occasionally repetitive the book is a very valuable contribution to social sciences. The author perceptively recognizes how the structural factors that provoke migratory flows create conditions of tension within societies that are being constantly redefined.

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