

## BOOK REVIEW/ COMPTE RENDU

**Roberts, Adrienne.** *Gendered States of Punishment and Welfare: Feminist Political Economy, Primitive Accumulation and the Law*. New York: Routledge, 2017. \$145.00, 204 pp., hardcover (978113867422).

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**I**n a time of a rapidly expanding carceral net within a perpetually patriarchal and capitalist society, Roberts' *Gendered States of Punishment and Welfare* provides a valuable contribution to feminist social science disciplines, including criminology, sociology, political science, and legal studies. Deploying a feminist historical materialist analysis of how the law is enforced and welfare policies are enacted for women, Roberts highlights the coercive and disciplinary effects on women as a marginalized sector of the population throughout the era of neoliberal capitalism. The author emphasizes the importance of addressing how capitalist relations of production and social reproduction are inherently gendered. Roberts asserts that this book fills a gap in the literature that has historically focused on poor and racialized minorities but has largely neglected gender relations. She further argues that law has facilitated the social enclosure of women within the domestic sphere; women's contribution to social reproduction is hence subsumed under that of the male breadwinner role, rendered invisible, and is therefore devalued. While her work provides an alternative narrative to the existing literature and contributes to the extant feminist scholarship, the book falls short in detail of the theoretical frameworks that are the basis of her overarching argument, weakening her empirical analysis.

Roberts begins with an overview of the key concepts that she uses throughout the book to familiarize readers with relevant Marxist terms. Her key supporting arguments are found in chapters two through four, where she deploys her analytical method of historical materialist analysis. Roberts argues that we must understand how the gender order was historically situated in order to understand the shift that has taken place. This shift was characterized by a patriarchal gender order that was imposed in the early stages of capitalism and expanded due to inherently gendered laws, enforced patriarchal family governance, and a gendered division of labour. Roberts problematizes the early stages of neoliberalism, which she contends inevitably supported the growth of capitalism, and hence, women's devalued contribution to production and social

reproduction. This period laid the groundwork for the social enclosure and subsequently the invisibility of women and their work in the home, due to inherently punitive laws that reinforced the oppression of women through their domestic roles. She further claims that the legal and welfare institutions of the capitalist state were paternalistic in nature, as they produced and reproduced inequalities for those within the gender order. This created a classed, raced, and gendered hierarchy. In the final chapters of the book, Roberts applies her main argument and discusses how social welfare and penal policies have created the conditions for the increased incarceration of women, as they have begun to engage in labour outside of the market as a means of survival. Women are being drawn into the carceral net due to the neoliberal environment that is essential to the production and reproduction of capitalism.

Roberts poignantly reminds readers that women are the fastest growing prison population in the world. It is for this reason that her work is relevant and valuable in a time where feminist scholars are seeking to disrupt mainstream (or “malestream”) sociological explanations for women’s criminality, and acknowledge that this is a global problem. She points out that staggering female imprisonment is of particular concern in neoliberal capitalist societies (i.e. Canada, the UK, and the United States), where empowerment discourses emphasizing individuality are a dominant governing strategy. In turn, women are criminalized (and imprisoned) for straying from the patriarchal norm. However, not only are women criminalized and placed in penal institutions when they are perceived as deviating from gendered expectations or for their (in)ability to participate in the capitalist labour market, but they are also imprisoned in the institution of the domestic home. A more problematized discussion of the home and the nuclear family as an institution is necessary in Roberts’ work. Are women who are enclosed and invisibilized in their domestic roles imprisoned as well? They take on the role of domestic labourers, enslaved by the patriarchal nuclear family. It is the societal expectations of women’s contribution to social reproduction that institutionalize and imprison them in the home. While the state claims to “empower” women as labourers, it fails to acknowledge the work that women already do as part of their expected role.

Although Roberts’ argument is timely and engaging, it falls somewhat short in theoretical detail. For example, the author frames the book using a Marxist lens, yet she fails to provide detail about Marxism as a theory in and of itself (despite this being essential to the foundation of the book). It should also have been paramount for her to engage with feminist theory in a more conceptualized and detailed way, rather than simply engaging with this standpoint descriptively throughout. Intersec-

tional theory is critical within all recent feminist scholarship, as failing to describe and adequately employ an intersectional analysis fails to acknowledge the varying contexts of women's lives that further perpetuate their oppression. Roberts clearly discusses gender and class-based intersections. However, she rather superficially discusses race, and the final chapters (positioned in a more recent context), would have benefited from a discussion of other facts of oppression such as religion, or sexual orientation. Although she argues that women's contribution to social reproduction becomes subsumed under the patriarchal male role and therefore renders women invisible, by failing to acknowledge these other intersections of women's lives, Roberts, too, renders their oppression invisible.

Indeed, this work diverges from common criminological or sociological explanations of crime and the governance of criminality. As Roberts stated, capitalist relations *are* inherently gendered, which devalues the work of women in the domestic sphere and subsumes their contribution under that of the patriarchal role. Despite its shortcomings in theoretical detail, *Gendered States of Punishment and Welfare* is an accessible, straight-forward, and quick read best-suited for those who have previous knowledge of Marxism as a theory. It is welcomed work in an era where women all over the world continue to fight against oppression.

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