

***Personalizing the State: An Anthropology of Law, Politics, and Welfare in Austerity Britain*, by Insa Koch, Assistant Professor of Law and Anthropology, London School of Economics. (Oxford University Press, £70)**

Insa Koch set out to examine the effects of antisocial behaviour on a disadvantaged council estate in England, UK. By adopting a responsive ethnographic approach, Koch soon realised that a different kind of antisocial behaviour was occurring: the antisocial behaviour of a punitive state towards estate residents (2018: 3). In an important contribution to criminology, Koch reveals how punitive state action through housing and welfare authorities, coupled with persistent inaction of authorities to create decent environments for council estate residents, presents challenging conditions for the most marginalised to navigate. But rather than being passive in this process, Koch examines how the communities she worked with were able to develop creative ways to “personalise the state” – she discovered that residents found strategies to employ the state in localised ways when needed, while attempting to keep the intrusive state at bay so that a crucial space for the love and care of family and kin could be maintained.

Koch demonstrates that vital insight can be gained from re-observing criminological theory through the perspective and experiences of those who live the theory on a daily, and often brutalising, basis. Koch’s area of focus is criminological scholarship on the “punitive *and* populist turn” in liberal democratic societies, which is said to have resulted in a “punitive paradox”: that is, the more liberal and democratic a society becomes, the more punitive and populist the population seems to also become, which jeopardises the liberal foundations that allow these punitive and populist appeals in the first place (Koch, 2018: 3–7). While pre-existing scholarship has made sense of this apparent turn through cultural explanations (Garland, 2001; Simon, 2007; Young, 1999), neoliberal accounts (Ramsay, 2012; Reiner, 2010; Wacquant, 2009), and by focusing on institutional-economic considerations (Lacey, 2008). Koch offers a new perspective which evolves from the experiences of a community. In this way, among other contributions, Koch develops “emic political theory” – which she describes as theory that stems directly from the views of those researched (2018: 231).

By working from field participant experiences outwards, Koch is able to challenge the dichotomic portrayal of state policies pre- and post-1980. Instead of a sharp break from the so-called welfare approach to crime, to a punitive turn from the Thatcher and Reagan eras onwards, Koch illustrates a continual process of punitivism in the provision of local state services (see chapters 1, 2, and 3). For example, Koch adopts a historical approach to show how women have always been an excluded category in relation to council housing in England: first, women were excluded from physical access to council housing in the early days when council housing was a sign of state inclusion and preserved for working *men*; then, when women became included as potential recipients of council housing, following the right to buy, council housing became a provision for marginalised categories of citizens who were treated as having failed by not becoming home owners. Therefore, rather than facilitating welfare and support, for marginalised women, relationships with housing authorities in England have been continually strained.

Over the course of seven chapters, Koch explores several other areas of citizen-state interactions, which include localised meanings of moral persons (chapter 2); encounters with

the benefits system, housing authorities, and the police (chapters 3, 4, 5); localised forms of active citizenship (chapter 6); and reflections on Brexit and austerity politics (chapter 7). With regards to Brexit, Koch offers a more nuanced picture of the leave vote, which includes the desperation felt by some of her research participants for change, especially following years of austerity politics (in line with McKenzie, 2016).

The overall picture painted by Koch's rich analysis is one of local community action and logic, which is increasingly growing out of the state's reach. For instance, while the state imposes an unattainable version of good citizenship onto disadvantaged individuals (e.g. valuing home owners, and undervaluing mothers who have been derogatorily described as "single mothers"), marginalised groups give greater weight to their own versions of moral personhood, which prioritise an ethics of care rather than an ethics of economic advancement (chapter 2). Moreover, as the police take on antagonistic and aggressive roles that works against, rather than with, council estate residents, residents find their own ways to respond to local problems, sometimes through organised political action and other times through vigilante methods (chapter 6). And, despite the state's logic of individualisation – imposed, e.g., by cutting benefits when women live with their older children or partners – communal values are nevertheless prioritised by families and kin who improvise ways to hide their relationships from the view of the state (chapters 3 and 4). Koch accordingly unearths a new paradox: the more the state expands power into the lives of marginalised populations in an attempt to assert control, the more marginalised groups find ways to avoid the reach of the state.

In conclusion, Koch notes that improving state-citizen relationships will not happen with one solution and in an instance: multiple responses and more citizen-engaged research is required. Koch offers three ways to begin to improve. First, Koch calls for recognition of the legacy of state control in the lives of marginalised citizens as a starting point for rethinking policy choices, which need to address structural disadvantage and redress classed, gendered, and racialised forms of state control. Second, rather than punishing localised meanings and responses to state control, Koch contends that the state needs to recognise, respect, and work with local communities, and appreciate how daily relations are important aspects of citizenship-making. Finally, Koch emphasises the need for the state's moral duties to connect to its statecraft, which the liberal state is currently failing to achieve.

While the content of the book is superb, there are two potential areas where Koch's analysis could be extended. The study offers a deep and holistic account of women's experiences, but limited consideration is given to the relationship between men and the state. Men appear at points in the study as violent aggressors, who mirror the state as unwelcomed intrusions in women's lives (Koch, 2018: 97–103). Yet we could understand the violent actions of men as also responding to the same intrusive state forces and structural strain that the women experience (cf. Winlow and Hall, 2006). Notably, men's experiences have been afforded a wealth of consideration elsewhere and throughout much of criminology; a comparable example to Koch's study being Goffman's *On the Run* (2015). Therefore, Koch's decision to focus on women's experiences in *Personalizing the State* is justified and, indeed, has resulted in important findings coming to light: by focusing on the experiences of woman, Koch has shown how women bear the brunt of punitive welfare policies, applied in apparently gender-neutral ways but which do not allow for substantive inequalities to be taken into account.

The second area where an extension of Koch's analysis would be of value is in relation to race. Koch makes several references to race (for example 2018: 44), but does not delve deeper into how race intersects with class, gender, and state relations. Mindful of racial discrimination that is consistently found in British institutions such as the educational system (Bhopal, 2016, 2018), criminal justice system (Chakraborti and Phillips, 2013; Parmar, 2015; Phillips and Bowling, 2017; Phillips and Webster, 2013), and other areas of life (Eddo-Lodge, 2018; Taylor, 2012), it seems that race is a significant factor to consider when examining citizen-state relations. Because of the relative absence of race in British criminology (Parmar, 2017), more ethnographic consideration of race would be valuable. Therefore, extending Koch's concluding call for further research to take into account the experiences of marginalised groups in the development of criminological theory, future projects might do well to foreground race. Other experiences related to sexuality, disability, health, and religion, among other factors, may be relevant too.

There are of course very practical limits to where ethnography can go. It may have been unfeasible for Koch to treat race with the same sensitivity and rigour with which she addresses gender and class; intersectionality theorists have long reflected on the difficulty of affording adequate consideration to all aspects of identity (Davis, 2008; Henne and Troshynski, 2013). Notably, Koch has succeeded in reviving a much-needed class focus, which has been near silent in criminology for the past few decades despite the overrepresentation of individuals from socioeconomically disadvantaged backgrounds in the criminal justice system (exceptions here Winlow et al., 2015; Winlow and Hall, 2006; Winlow, 2001 among others). In doing so, Koch offers a valuable framework for future research.

Having turned the last page of the book, I am left feeling that *Personalizing the State* is a crucial piece of work, which warrants wide readership. Despite Koch's introductory guidance that a reader can dip into chapters of interest, it is a book well worth reading in full. *Personalizing the State* is an exemplary piece of ethnographic criminology, and it has set a high standard for criminological work moving forwards.

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