

BOOK REVIEW/COMPTE RENDU

Kristin Bumiller, *In an Abusive State: How Neoliberalism Appropriated the Feminist Movement against Sexual Violence*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2008, 232 pp. \$US 22.95 paper (978-0-8223-4239-7), \$US 79.95 hardcover (978-0-8223-4220-5)

Some of the most valuable social movement scholarship critically evaluates the success of movement strategies, looking at intended and unintended consequences, the formation of new political ideas, alliances, and norms, and internal understandings of efficacy. Kristen Bumiller's *In an Abusive State* is a significant and thought-provoking addition to this body of scholarship. Combining analytic approaches from political science and feminist studies, Bumiller addresses some of the unintended and unforeseen consequences of US feminism's investment in state redress.

Bumiller elegantly shows what happens to feminist concerns and ideals when the US state takes them up and aligns them with its existing logics and proclivities. Looking critically at two systems — criminal justice and social welfare — Bumiller shows how each became sites not of empowerment for victims of domestic violence, but of state sponsored surveillance, scrutiny, and control. Rape victims, she shows, find themselves micromanaged in the hospitals, where the use of rape kits render them specimens rather than people experiencing trauma. Then they are subject to state-funded welfare offices that scrutinize their decisions and practices, and dictate where and how they can live. In some instances, they move on to the criminal justice system, which uses them to demonstrate its power and voyeuristically dissects their victimization, often for the purposes of criminalizing racialized men. In other words, the state has used the Violence Against Women (VAW) movement to elaborate its institutions and ideologies with disastrous effects.

According to Bumiller, these elaborations have hurt existing grassroots organizations in the VAW movement, most notably battered women's shelters and rape crisis centres, as government monies are redirected to state-sponsored programs rather than autonomous and movement-based ones. In addition, they reflect the ways in which the US women's movement has not been sufficiently attentive to the concerns of other progressive social movements, such as the prison aboli-

tion and anti-criminalization movement. Bumiller argues that the move to criminalize violence against women allows the state to intensify its incarceration efforts against immigrant men, lower and working class men, and men of colour, often convicting those who have not committed crimes in the process.

Bumiller's most empirical chapter on "expressive justice" is an exploration of two high profile rape trials. Her analyses help explain the discomfiting news media coverage of sexual violence that condemns but also appears to encourage imaginative elaboration and exploration of the most lurid details. For Bumiller, the rape trial functions as a forum for the state to perform control and sovereignty, wherein through voyeuristic accounts it proves its assumptions about the depravity of racialized men. In her analysis of the discourse present in these trials, she shows how prosecutorial teams portray young men of colour as roving bands of animals, and reduce rape victims to fingernail clippings, evacuating the humanity of both in the production of spectacle.

While these are among Bumiller's most passionate analyses, they are also among her least convincing. In Bumiller's reconstruction of court proceedings, prosecutors are salacious pornographers, the accused awkward innocents. Her project relies on providing new prisms through which to analyze taken-for-granted assumptions, but the analyses marshalled for the cause can be equally one-dimensional. Bumiller's critiques of practitioners such as social workers and lawyers can be wince-worthy — who better to caricature these actors than an academic never similarly accountable to public expectations of care and justice? Interviews with some of these practitioners might have complicated and deepened Bumiller's account.

The chapter on "administrative justice" is ultimately more convincing. In it, Bumiller shows how evidence collection has become the chief business of a host of interrelated professions such as social work and medicine. The following chapter on victim insurgency indicates the ways that leaving batterers often forces women into an intimate relationship with the state and countless dismissive, chiding, and judgmental state agents. Official welfare regulation, housing policies, courts, and counselors take a tremendous toll on victims of domestic violence in ways Bumiller thinks social scientists in this subfield have not adequately acknowledged. More often, she sees sociological research in this area as complicit with rather than critical of state ideologies and practices.

Extending her analyses to international contexts, Bumiller also shows how even a human rights approach of the kind that inspired the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) expands the policing function of the modern state

in potentially injurious ways. Bumiller's invocation and application of Hannah Arendt's theories of state violence in this chapter are very savvy and give Arendt new relevance.

Overall, Bumiller's book is more critique than solution. She argues for local, community-based projects that contend with violence against women in a way that substantively takes up issues of poverty, social disadvantage, and family dynamics. Organizations should, for example, contend with the question of how women and their former batterers manage living in the same community after separation. In addition, Bumiller recommends that the VAW movement become integrated with other social movements to better anticipate how justice for some is accomplished on the backs of others. Unfortunately, Bumiller does not turn a critical eye to the solutions she offers. For example, she supports the use of "intimate abuse circles," or community-based alternatives to criminalization, without acknowledging that community power and deliberation is no panacea and can also be wildly problematic for women victims.

Bumiller ultimately contends that the VAW movement is not well positioned for self-criticism, especially as it is always under siege, and argues that as a consequence, feminist researchers and policy analysts have largely remained silent about the negative implications of working closely with the state. Her book is a welcome corrective to this problem, and certainly opens the door for such reflection among scholars, activists, and practitioners.

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