

***Gender, Geography, and Punishment: The Experience of Women in Carceral Russia.* By Judith Pallot and Laura Piacentini with the assistance of Dominique Moran. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012. 290pp. Appendices. References. Index. Figures. Tables. Hard Bound.**

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Recently, Russian prisons have been in the international spotlight for the imprisonment of Pussy Riot members and the establishment of the organization *Zona Prava* to address the violation of prisoners' rights. One of the organization's founders, Nadezhda Tolokonnikova, served time in Mordovia far away from her family in Moscow. Her story is reminiscent of many of the narratives from Judith Pallot's and Laura Piacentini's book *Gender, Geography, and Punishment: The Experience of Women in Carceral Russia*. One of their research sites was Mordovia, a place where Russian women prisoners are sent to serve their sentence—far from their homes, families and any social support. Pallot and Piacentini convincingly argue that the use of geography through displacement in the Russian prison system is a form of punishment, and that this is especially true for women prisoners. Their thesis is that the entire process of incarceration is punishment. The “coercive mobilization” (2012:64) begins at the temporary cells where women await their trials, continues as the women are transported by train and quarantined, and ends at the distant location where the sentence is served. Their book provides rich, contextual information to the outside reader wanting to learn more about the Russian prison geographical landscape and how it influences prisoners' physical, mental, and social wellbeing.

Pallot and Piacentini argue that Russia is exceptional in its use of “geography as punishment” (2012:2). Images of being “exiled to Siberia” come to mind as the authors describe how the journey itself from temporary cells to the colonies where prisoners serve their sentences is a form of punishment, and the loss of agency prisoners experience during this journey. The change of geography does not simply impede communication with relatives, but also has a negative impact on female prisoners' construction of their identities, social relationships in the colonies, women's sense of place, and reactions to correctional efforts. Pallot and Piacentini argue that gender issues are important to look at, given that prisons in Russia are predominately male spaces. Overcrowding is especially a problem in women's prisons, and women are all housed in the same type of facilities regardless of the crime. Furthermore, the authors argue that considering gender is key to investigating the ideology that the goal of prison is to return women to their “inherent good nature” (2012:7) and feminine state of being, and that disciplinary power is gendered.

Chapters 1 and 2 provide an introduction to the authors' main argument of “geography as punishment” (2012:2) as well as detailed information on their methods and approach to

researching women's imprisonment in Russia between 2006 and 2010. It was particularly interesting to read the candid account of doing research in Russia, the relationships that the authors built over time, the logistical and legal problems (for example, having their visas revoked), and overcoming some of these challenges. The authors describe the relationship between their UK institution and the Riazan Academy that was developed during the pilot phase, but then abruptly ended as the authors were "ejected from the field" (2012:22). Despite these setbacks, the authors conducted 119 qualitative interviews with women prisoners and ex-prisoners, a survey of 146 women prisoners and 650 surveys with local residents in the areas where correctional facilities are located. The authors also relied on published quantitative sources to help triangulate their findings, making for a comprehensive argument about how the geographical landscape of the Russian prison system further punishes women prisoners.

After these introductory chapters, Pallot and Piacentini divide their book into two parts. In *Part I: Space and Place in Russia's System of Penalty*, the authors explain the theoretical framework for their study and provide historical reference for the development of today's prison system in Russia. In Chapters 3-5, they describe the historical geography of Russian prisons and the gulag inheritance from the Soviet system. Pallot and Piacentini present evidence that nothing has changed in the Russian prison system between the 20th and 21st centuries in regard to the use of "geography as punishment" (2012:2). They also described how the isolation of the prison colonies into the penal "zones" often means that the border between the prisons and the civilian settlements around them is permeable with implications for both the prisoners and residents in these settlements. While this characterized the Russian context, this section could have benefited from a more nuanced gender analysis.

The bulk of the book makes up *Part II: Women Prisoners' Experiences of Carceral Russia*, in which Pallot and Piacentini describe how the geography influences women's experiences in prison at each stage of incarceration (Chapters 6 and 7), the relationships inside and outside of the prison (Chapters 8, 9 and 10), and women's reactions to and understanding of the authorities' programs to re-educate and re-socialize them (Chapters 11 and 12). This second part of the book made for the most interesting read, mainly because of the exposure to the words, ideas, and perspectives of the women who have experienced life in Russian prison. Pallot and Piacentini present stories from women whom they encountered in their research, and selected multiple illustrative quotes to include in their narrative. They focus their narrative around the process of "coercive mobilization" (2012: 136).

In their book, Pallot and Piacentini provide a detailed account of the history of the geographical landscape of the Russian prison system and the background necessary to make this work accessible to readers who are not experts on Russia, criminal sociology, gender and/or geography. However, the authors had to devote a considerable amount of space in Part I to describe this framework, such that there were details left out in Part II that would have made for a more in-depth description of the three ways in which geography may affect women in Russian prisons. More space could have been dedicated to additional quotes from prison authorities or prison policy makers. Additionally, the authors note in the introductory chapter that 70% of female prisoners have alcoholism or drug addiction, but do not discuss how, if at

all, addiction factors into the women's lives in prison, their relationships both inside and outside the prison system, and as part of the re-socialization process. Pallot's and Piacentini's book may be read by social workers, public health practitioners, human rights activists that are designing or evaluating interventions with incarcerated populations and recently released women in Russia. This book also contributes to the field of criminal sociology by providing a gendered analysis of "geography as punishment" in the Russian prison system.