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## Review of *Motherlands: How States Push Mothers Out of Employment* by Leah Ruppanner

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## Book Reviews

Leah Ruppanner, *Motherlands: How States Push Mothers Out of Employment*. Temple University Press (2020). 173 pages, \$24.95 (softcover).

Ruppanner has produced a significant social policy review, taking a comprehensive look into how the policies of states push mothers back into the labor market or pull them out of it. The existing literature generally identifies three typologies of welfare states—liberal, conservative, and socio-democratic—and groups all of the United States together as one welfare state. Ruppanner suggests this approach ignores the more nuanced reality that each state abides by different policies, in effect creating fifty (51 including D.C.) possible welfare states. According to features of emphasis, Ruppanner organizes these models into four main categorical types: (a) gender empowerment regimes; (b) childcare regimes; (c) policy void regimes; and (d) ideal regimes (that is, regimes that combine emphases of gender empowerment and childcare). The first category contains progressive states like California, while the second category contains more traditional or conservative states like Nebraska. The third category contains those states that emphasize neither gender empowerment nor affordable, accessible childcare options, such as Montana, Florida, Indiana, and Pennsylvania, while the fourth category contains states with both emphases, such as Wisconsin, Maine, Hawaii, and Washington, D.C.

Ruppanner's findings in this book are reflective of the historical, structural, and cultural contexts surrounding motherhood and sociopolitical policy in the United States. Historically, femininity has been associated with nurturing, caretaking, and homemaking characteristics. Thus, maternal employment can be overlooked by traditional policymakers—who are inclined to assume that women want to or should stay home after having a baby—thereby limiting the attention policymakers put into enacting policies favoring working mothers. Structural forces

such as attitudes toward race also impact state policies. While white mothers might be expected to stay at home, non-white mothers face subtle pushes back into the workforce soon after giving birth. For example, policies that support paid or unpaid maternity leave often are written in such a way that they are harder to access for mothers of color than for white mothers.

Ruppanner poses two crucial questions: (1) What causes the lack of maternal employment in the United States, and (2) what policies can be put in place to aid the return of mothers to the labor market postpartum? Perhaps the main policies impacting maternal employment revolve around access to affordable, high quality, and reliable childcare. Contrary to the expectations of many, Red states tend to have this type of childcare in place, and thus we see a higher rate of maternal employment in these states. According to Ruppanner, feminist theory posits that states that have more women in their legislatures and better gender empowerment would be more conducive to postpartum maternal employment. While having more gender empowerment and representation in government is helpful to women, it does not aid maternal employment in the same way that having more comprehensive childcare does. Because childcare is a female dominated field, it is traditionally underpaid. Therefore, workers in the field of childcare are in short supply in places with a high cost of living. This is one significant factor that makes high quality, comprehensive childcare difficult to find in such Blue states as California and New York.

An assumption in this book is that maternal reentry into the labor market is the goal. At first, I questioned this goal, as it is extremely rooted in the capitalist view that everyone needs to work forty hours a week in order to be a valuable member of society. However, Ruppanner discusses the ways in which exiting the workplace can be detrimental to mothers, especially if the economy crashes or if they have marital problems. The more financially independent women are, the more choices they have if any such occurrences take place. Furthermore, when states lose about fifty percent of working women due to pregnancy, as is the case with states like California, Oregon, and New York, not only do the state economies take a hit, but the states also lose valuable human capital. It is states with highly educated women that tend to push mothers out of the labor market because these are the states that lack comprehensive childcare

options. This push out of the workforce further aggravates the income gap between working men and women.

A stylistic element used throughout this book is hypothetical women named Ava and Michelle. Ruppanner uses these hypothetical women to explain the different constraints that working women face in different types of states. Both of these women are white, cisgender, heterosexual, working mothers of lower to middling income. Ava lives in Nebraska and Michelle lives in California. Despite how similar these two women are socioeconomically, their lives differ in many ways because of where they live and the policies that those states put in place. Living in Nebraska, Ava does not struggle to find childcare, but she often wonders how her life could be different if she lived in a state with better opportunities for women in the workplace. Ava's living costs are low and her purchasing power is high. She does not worry about the cost of childcare as it is relatively low and partially subsidized by her state's government. In contrast, living in California, Michelle has a fruitful career but her happiness with her career is overshadowed by the harsh reality of the expensive and unreliable childcare options available to her. Even though she lives in a gender empowerment regime, her husband is rarely the person who is expected to stay home from work because their child is sick or because their childcare fell through. Living in California, her cost of living is high and her purchasing power is low. She often wonders if the cost of childcare is even worth her staying in the labor market.

As Ruppanner herself notes, her book is limited by the lack of an intersectional approach. While she does write a bit about mothers of color, her main focus is on white, heterosexual, lower to middling income, working women who birth their own biological babies. This approach keeps the comparisons sharp, but she looks forward to more intersectional research to follow. Another limitation of this book is that although Ruppanner highlights state statistics with clarity, there are surely major differences within states that remain obscured. For example, the data representing my own state, Illinois, are heavily impacted by the Chicago area. However, we likely could find various "welfare states" within Illinois alone: Chicagoland, central Illinois, and southern Illinois are all quite different from each other regarding maternal employment policies.

Most interesting to readers of this journal, Ruppner suggests eight specific policy areas that will aid in maternal return to employment:

- (1) Reduce childcare costs and increase the availability of childcare. This policy area is especially important in states that have higher costs of living.
- (2) Make enrollment in the Head Start program more accessible. According to Ruppner, current Head Start policies result in middle class families being overlooked, largely because of funding shortages.
- (3) Elongate school days to better fit the forty hour work week.
- (4) Provide well-paid parental leave for both parents.
- (5) Increase support for female dominated professions. Male dominated professions, such as mining and farming, already are subsidized. Female dominated professions, such as teaching and childcare, are rarely subsidized and therefore remain lower-paid work.
- (6) Regulate work schedules to make work weeks shorter and more flexible for working parents.
- (7) Open historically male dominated fields to women.
- (8) Mitigate the structural barriers that men face when they take paid and unpaid parental leave.

These policies are enacted unevenly across the country; Ruppner calls on state legislators to enact the policies their particular states lack.

Ruppner maintains that both childcare regimes and gender empowerment regimes can learn from one another. Since different states perform well in different categories, Ruppner calls on policymakers in each state to look at other states for different approaches to equalizing the playing field for working mothers. There are policies that childcare regimes have in place which support working mothers that gender empowerment regimes can learn from and there are policies that gender

empowerment regimes have in place that could aid women who live in childcare regimes.

Ruppaner's presentation valuably emphasizes how attitudes about women and motherhood shape legislation. Red state legislators who hold more traditional views on gender roles expect women to have a higher birth rate and therefore put more emphasis on comprehensive childcare options. Prior to reading this book, much like many others, I simply assumed that Red states would be the states pushing mothers out of employment. The data in this book prove the contrary.

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Sarah Esther Lageson, *Digital Punishment: Stigma, and the Harms of Data-Driven Criminal Justice*. Oxford University Press (2020). 256 pages, \$34.95 (hardcover).

It is no secret that criminal justice involvement has massive impacts on life outcomes. Having a criminal record can thwart one's employment opportunities, financial wellbeing, housing, and involvement in prosocial behaviors, such as voting. Crime always has been able to garner a captive audience, and we now see the growth of documenting criminal records into the digital ecosystem. Dr. Sarah Esther Lageson discusses the growth in digitalizing criminal records from multiple perspectives in this new book, providing a nuanced account of the actors who benefit from and those who are harmed by "digilantism" while reflecting on our country's cultural views regarding punishment, atonement, crime, and transparency.

The act of posting mugshots on social media is now a routine practice for law enforcement and local jails as they document and publicize their successes. Some may see such actions as inconsequential; however, these mugshots posted by police, courts, jails, and prisons are considered public record, and can be obtained and used easily and cheaply by private websites and individual actors. Such websites have utilized this information so that a simple Google search of a person's name instantly