

Book Review: Parole in Canada: Gender and Diversity in the Federal System by Sarah Turnbull

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In Parole in Canada: Gender and Diversity in the Federal System, Sarah Turnbull examines how the ideal of 'diversity' has been interpreted and used to alter policy, practices and processes surrounding parole in Canada, with a particular focus on the Parole Board of Canada (PBC). Katelan Dunn welcomes this highly accessible text for shedding light on the ways that understandings of race, class and gender still shape notions of justice, underscoring the need for substantive, structural penal change.

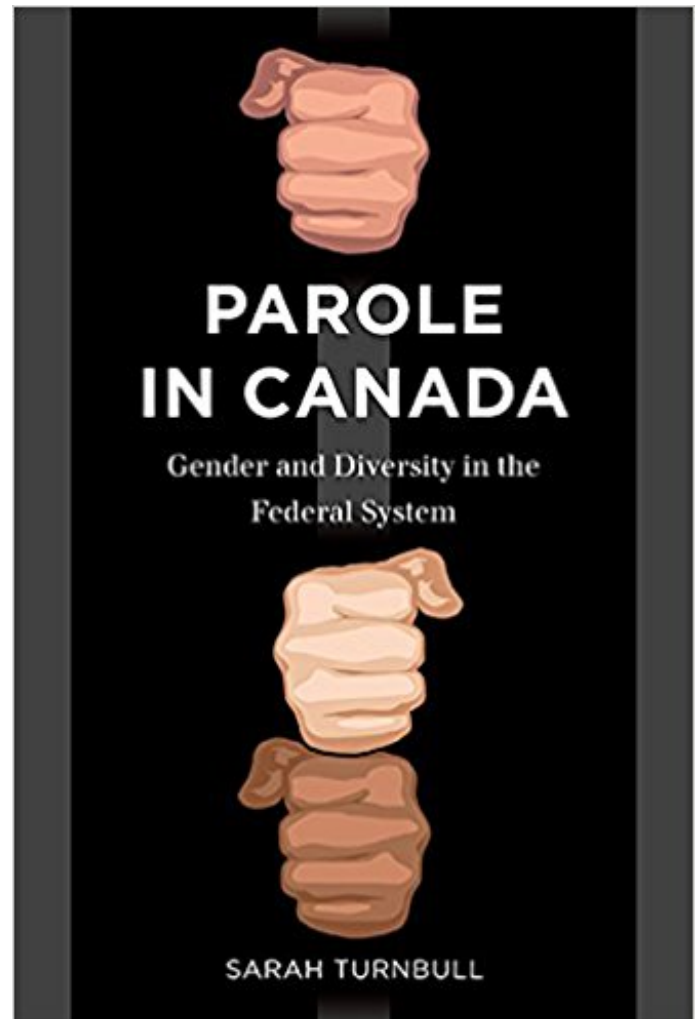
Parole in Canada: Gender and Diversity in the Federal System. Sarah Turnbull. University of British Columbia Press. 2016.

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Sarah Turnbull's book is an important and timely qualitative addition to the field of law and justice. *Parole in Canada: Gender and Diversity in the Federal System* raises a number of questions surrounding penality in contemporary Canada and how the increasing racial, cultural and ethnic diversity of both society and penal populations have impacted ideas surrounding fairness and appropriateness regarding established penal programmes and practices. Such questions include: what are the organisational responses and approaches to Aboriginals, female and ethnocultural offenders? And how are diversity and difference accommodated at the Parole Board of Canada (PBC)?

There is overwhelming evidence and agreement in the literature concerning the gendered, racialised and classed character of incarceration in Canada, most notably with regards to the overrepresentation of Indigenous individuals. This is coupled with the reality that most Western countries' penal systems have shifted accordingly to account for a 'turn towards diversity'. Yet, fewer studies have considered how specific diversity initiatives impact existing processes and structures. This is of particular interest to Turnbull who, using the federal parole system as a case study, explores how Aboriginality, gender and the ideal of diversity are conceptualised, operationalised and used to alter parole policy and practice. Specifically, she seeks to understand how these identities and diversities, which are labelled as needing 'accommodation' or having 'special needs', are characterised, responded to and incorporated into the existing processes and structures that govern parole at the national level.

The book itself is organised into six chapters that focus on organisational approaches and responses to diversity; training and risk assessment; intersectionality; cultural ghettos; and operationalising offender differences. Each



chapter dovetails nicely into the others and provides a well-rounded analysis of the institutional responses to diversity since the 1970s, the PBC's approach to gender and diversity and the policies and practices at the PBC. Utilising a multi-method approach involving interview data, secondary research and documents obtained through public channels and the PBC, Turnbull offers a more nuanced and critical reflection on the ideals of diversity within penal policies and practices.

The main question that Turnbull seeks to answer is how diversity is interpreted and used to alter parole policy and practice. Critically examining the current approaches to managing offender differences by the PBC, and drawing on the work of anti-racist feminist scholars, Turnbull finds that the diversity framework used by penal institutions reinforces rather than challenges forms of inequality. Turnbull asserts the difficulty that such institutions have in expressing abstract ideals of diversity and equality in Chapter Two, where she analyses the following questions: can difference be accommodated in the pursuit of equitable, fair and appropriate penalty? And can gender and Aboriginality be defined within policies and practices, including decision-making, training and policy development?



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Turnbull's research examines the difficulty in operationalising abstract ideals, particularly the challenge in defining the term 'diversity' as it can be:

easily mobilized and can be defined and used in many ways [...] the term is attractive because it can make people 'feel good' [...] Conversely, terms such as 'equality' or 'anti-racism' are more challenging as they point to structural elements (50).

The term therefore emerges as, and remains, a fluid concept where it is understood as constituting both non-whiteness and non-maleness. In this vein, Aboriginal, female and ethnocultural offenders (particular ethnic groups in Canada and their distinct and unique cultures) are selectively incorporated within a dominant framework that is based on the norm or assumptive white male offender. Here, Turnbull highlights two things: firstly, how racism, sexism and colonialism remain unrecognised and unaddressed; and secondly, the way in which difference remains alongside pre-existing structures, practices, policy and power relations in corrections, conditional release decision-

making and policy, rather than being used as a means to alter these to create substantive change.

I especially appreciated Turnbull's recognition of the importance of intersectionality when it came to her discussions around gender and Aboriginality in Chapters One and Six. Her research indicates that homogenous categories of gender and Aboriginality direct policy reform to focus exclusively on issues of gender difference for the former, and the overrepresentation of the latter, as opposed to the role that systemic discrimination and intersectionality play. Turnbull highlights the ways in which categories of difference are compartmentalised and treated differently as gender *or* race *or* Aboriginality. Through the selective inclusion of difference, Turnbull suggests that this framework avoids considering intersectionality, which adds an additional level of uniqueness to the lived experiences of Aboriginal women or women with disabilities, who may have different needs in relation to rehabilitation and reintegration.

While the examination of diversity issues tends to focus more on corrections as opposed to parole and conditional release, Turnbull addresses this gap by examining how the approaches and diversity initiatives currently undertaken by penal systems to address the historical and systemic discrimination against diverse populations are well-intentioned attempts to recognise and respond to offender differences, but are ultimately outdated and further contribute to marginalisation and Othering within the system.

Ultimately, Turnbull envisions inclusion as that which goes beyond 'minor tweaks' to the system. What she claims to be at stake here is the recognition that the rehabilitation and reintegration of offenders are based on institutions taking into account cultural differences, while simultaneously understanding the challenges and circumstances of offenders in a manner that encourages more contextualised, remedial sentencing decisions. This should occur, Turnbull suggests, alongside the development of policies and processes that consider, accommodate and are sensitive to offender uniqueness and the systemic factors that are at play in situating the offender in the courts in the first place.

Parole in Canada is not an exhaustive account of how the ideal of diversity has impacted legislative changes since the 1970s, but it doesn't need to be. Important developments that involve diversity issues in responding to offender differences within the Canadian justice system are keenly and astutely addressed throughout the book, particularly when it comes to highlighting substantive legislative changes and decisions that respond to specific differences. These include the [1992 Corrections and Conditional Release Act \(CCRA\)](#), which marked the first time issues of gender, ethnicity and Aboriginal status were recognised in corrections and parole legislation; the Supreme Court of Canada's decision in [R v. Gladue](#), which supports decision-making that remains cognisant of, and takes into account, Aboriginal difference and attempts to ameliorate racial injustice; and the Criminal Code that introduced sentencing provisions intended to address the overrepresentation of Aboriginal offenders. In doing so, Turnbull illustrates how penal policies and processes can work towards remedying racial, gender, ethnic and cultural injustices that shape the punishment of offenders, but also create fair, appropriate and gender-, racial- and ethnocultural-responsive models of justice.

Ultimately, Turnbull masterfully explains the intersections between the Canadian federal parole system and race, gender, Aboriginal status and identity without oversimplifying this complex issue. *Parole in Canada* is a highly accessible text that should find its way into every law, social justice and multiculturalism course.

Katelan Dunn is an Instructor in the Department of Liberal Studies at Conestoga College in Kitchener, Ontario, Canada. Her research interests and publications centre around social inequality and stratification, gender, social policy, cultural sociology and social justice. She is currently a member of the City of Burlington's Inclusivity Advisory Committee and has been published in Canadian, American and European sociological journals.

Note: This review gives the views of the author, and not the position of the LSE Review of Books blog, or of the London School of Economics.

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