POLITICAL THEORY

Why Don't You Just Talk to Him? The Politics of Domestic Abuse. By Kathleen Arnold. New York: Oxford University Press, 2015. 280p. $49.95.
doi:10.1017/S1537592716002115

— Samantha Majic, *John Jay College–City University of New York*

A recent *New York Times* article reported the story of Nadia Saavedra, whose husband, Alejandro Uribe, abused her for many years. On her 34th birthday, he killed her and himself in front of their two children (Mueller et. el., "A Familiar Pattern in a Spouse's Final Act," April 9, 2016). The article hints that a communication breakdown explains Saavedra's death: The police were not aware of the abuse, and friends and neighbors were puzzled that she did not leave him sooner. Yet Uribe was often unemployed and drank heavily; Saavedra's neighbors, relatives, and a local nonprofit knew that Uribe regularly beat and humiliated her; and a few months prior to her death she filed a temporary order of protection against him. In light of this story (and so many similar ones), Kathleen Arnold's *Why Don't You Just Talk to Him?* is a timely book that considers how women like Saavedra can be targets of a broad range of controlling and abusive tactics yet not find help, short of fleeing.

To address this problem, Arnold considers the relationship among Enlightenment thought, capitalism, and liberal notions of contract, rationality, mutuality, egalitarianism, and violence. Drawing from a wide range of political theory and research about domestic abuse, Arnold demonstrates how the law, service provision, and social science research has conceived domestic abuse as a private matter that occurs "outside" of normal daily life and Enlightenment values of rationality and mutuality. This conception has promoted therapy, communication, and family reunification as solutions, which places the onus on victims to "say something" and deflects attention from the abuser and abuse prevention. In response, Arnold proposes a *realist* understanding of domestic abuse as a regular feature of the American political-economic tradition; as such, it is a *public and political* issue. Countering "gender symmetrical" understandings that assume men and women to be similarly violent and politically and economically equal, Arnold argues that domestic abuse is profoundly gender *asymmetrical*—it is a form of "intimate terrorism" (p. 6), where women are *targets* of an all-encompassing range of practices and behaviors that occur within broader structures of subordination. While this has been the standard view in feminist theory and practice for decades, some men's rights activists and psychological research have challenged gender-asymmetrical accounts of domestic abuse.

To illustrate, Chapter 1 demonstrates how domestic abuse has been depoliticized and individualized in research and policy. Drawing largely from feminist legal theory and social science research, the chapter links domestic abuse to broader dynamics of economic, political, and social inequality, and it presents Arnold's "realist" understanding of the issue. Chapter 2 then considers the broader context of domestic abuse and the limits of liberal rights, family law, welfare policy, and the shelter system. Drawing largely on Anna Marie Smith's work, the chapter indicates how conservative, individualistic values have fostered research and policy that increase abusers' power, promote communicative solutions to abuse, and ignore women's structural subordination.

Chapter 3 then draws on Michel Foucault and Jürgen Habermas, among others, to examine two asylum cases where the U.S. government recognized the women as part of a social group whose domestic abuse was a function of state inaction and patriarchal cultural norms in their home countries. Although these cases falsely positioned the United States as a "haven" for domestic violence victims, they indicate how domestic abuse may be understood as a political and asymmetrical issue. Chapter 4 then uses Hannah Arendt and Frantz Fanon to link violence to Enlightenment reason, and it draws on Sigmund Freud's notion of a "death drive" to characterize abusers as "monsters." Using contract theory, the chapter problematizes the notion that intimate relations are rational and domestic abuse is merely anomalous. The Conclusion argues for a realist and intersectional approach to domestic abuse that mitigates race, class, and gender biases and encourages targets to articulate their experiences and needs.

In light of cases like Saavedra's, Arnold's book provides a timely examination of domestic abuse: This is not a private, random phenomenon, but a regular part of life for many women in a supposedly liberal, enlightened society. Yet this point (and others) was often hard to follow for two key reasons. First, Arnold presumes that readers are quite familiar with the extent of domestic abuse and the related laws and policies in the United States. She refers often to the "network of providers," for example, but explanations of such terms are only sporadically offered in the text or buried in the (extensive) endnotes. A more explicit overview of the extent of domestic abuse and its related policy and service systems would help readers better understand the author's arguments about the limits of symmetrical understandings of and approaches to domestic abuse. Second, and relatedly, Arnold's theorizing was sometimes difficult to grasp. For example, she does not explicitly define "Enlightenment," a central concept, until Chapter 4. And while she marshaled an impressive array of theorists from Niccolo Machiavelli to Catharine MacKinnon for her analysis, their purpose was not always clear. For example, Chapter 3 features a dense discussion of Arendt, Giorgio Agamben, Foucault, and Fanon on statelessness, speech, violence, and colonialism, but this

was only briefly connected to her arguments about domestic abuse at the end.

Even with these limitations, this book helps us understand why "spectacular" domestic abuse cases like Saavedra's receive news coverage, while more routine experiences of stalking and harassment are largely ignored. Therefore, to draw attention to the ongoing, systemic nature of abuse, Arnold, like others (e.g., see Rhonda Hammer, *Antifeminism and Family Terrorism*, 2002), suggests characterizing domestic abuse as *terrorism* and victims as *targets*. Yet these can be totalizing terms that raise questions of agency and strategy. Reading domestic abuse as terrorism can cast it as an individually perpetrated problem, and describing victims as targets portrays them as somewhat fixed and always under attack. All of this risks minimizing the structural reasons why women remain in abusive relationships and their possibilities for agency. Furthermore, how do we address domestic abuse as terrorism? Given the ongoing failure of the "War on Terror," and the overwhelming tendency to adopt carceral solutions to social problems in the United States, is it realistic to imagine a war against domestic-abuse-as-terror that addresses the conditions of structural vulnerability? Arnold's asylum cases indicate that this is possible, and even if we have our doubts, we must applaud her call for radical, preventative solutions to a problem that is clearly without end.

Beyond the issue of domestic abuse, *Why Don't You Just Talk to Him?* also challenges the assumption that scholars must be Enlightenment figures who are necessarily (objectively) detached from research. At the end of the book, Arnold writes that she was and continues to be a target of domestic abuse. To argue that this experience "biases" her arguments only reinforces the bind for so many targets of abuse: They are expected to communicate about their experience, but when they do, this is often dismissed for its particularity. Arnold challenges this bind, showing that domestic abuse is a public and political problem for both college professors (like her) and housekeepers (like Saavedra), and arguments to the contrary allow it to persist and undermine women's full democratic citizenship. In developing this account, Arnold has performed an important service.

The Power of Memory in Democratic Politics. By P.J. Brendese. Rochester, NY: University of Rochester Press, 2014. 234p. $85.00.
doi:10.1017/S1537592716002127

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In the past year, the question of whether and how to remember American history has become an urgent one. The Confederate flag was removed from the state capital in Columbus, South Carolina. A commemoration of southern heritage for some, it remains a paean to slavery and racism for others. Students at Yale University likewise advocated that the university rename Calhoun College, named after John C. Calhoun, a defender of slavery, and Princeton University students want Woodrow Wilson's name removed from the Woodrow Wilson School of Public and International affairs because of his segregationist beliefs and actions. Meanwhile, the Equal Justice Initiative has begun the process of erecting markers at the sites where each of the 3,959 lynchings of African Americans took place between the end of Reconstruction in 1877 and 1950. Yet others worry that removing names from university buildings simply encourages amnesia about the conditions under which the enterprises were named, and that marking sites of lynching has the potential to incite resentment and more violence. How, then, should the United States deal with its unjust past? Can we remove the influence of a racist history by removing its symbols—its flags, statues, and memorials? Or does removing the symbols allow that history to influence us all the more surreptitiously? Will documentations of past lynchings and anti-black riots allow Americans to finally come to terms with their past, or will it, instead, provoke further violence? What does it mean to come to terms with the past? Does it mean replacing one official history with another that may be equally incomplete? Or does it mean fostering an inclusive sense of the past, open to revision?

P.J. Brendese's valuable book, *The Power of Memory in Democratic Politics*, notes the fundamental tension between facing up to the past and letting it bind us, between the amnesia or amnesty that allows for a fresh slate and the duty to remember those we have wronged, between, as he puts it, remembering to forget and, citing Pablo de Grieff, remembering "what our fellow citizens cannot be expected to forget" (p. 65.) Brendese's focus is democracy. On the one hand, he writes, "amnesty and amnesia appear to be a precondition of democratic engagement free of violent retribution and division." On the other hand, an "inclusive public commemoration is integral to the very identity of the polis" (p. 7). How then are we to think of public memory in a democracy?

First, what do we mean by democracy? Brendese sets it between two poles of possibility and impossibility, where democracy as possible is democracy as a stable institutional form and democracy as impossible is utopian. Radical democracy, the democracy he favors, amounts to the possibility of the impossible. Here, he follows Sheldon Wolin for whom democracy is "inherently unstable, inclined toward anarchy, and identified with revolution . . . resistant to the rationalizing conceptions of power and its organization" (p. 21). The importance of public memory to democracy, on this account, lies in recalling moments when the impossible became possible or, in other words, in fostering "memories of radical resistance to oppressive power, collective responses to grievances, and participation that does not rely on proxies" (p. 23).