



Book Reviews

Healing Identities: Black Feminist Thought and the Politics of Groups. By Cynthia Burack. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press. 2004. 203 pp. \$45.00 cloth, \$19.95 paper.

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Tired of watching, waiting and wandering for someone else to speak my mind.

Hancock, “Tired Too,” 1993

In the introduction to this book, Cynthia Burack articulates her self-identity as multiple and shifting—nonblack, feminist, and interested in working through questions of group identity for personal, political, and intellectual reasons (p. 4). She summarizes the relationship delineated by black feminist theorists themselves regarding group membership and the relative power of the interpreter’s voice: “Black feminist theorists are themselves often scholars in the humanities and social sciences. They write of their own struggles. . . . They do not reject outright the possibility that non-group members can participate in group discourse as readers or interpreters. Rather, they hold that participation confers responsibilities: to listen respectfully to the voices of group members, to claim the grounds and consequences of one’s own interests, methods, and perspectives; and to avoid Olympian forms of closure that end intellectual conversation” (p. 4).

Burack successfully engages these standards throughout the book. Her respectful listening includes an attentiveness to black feminist theory beyond the “three divas” so often celebrated and cited in most mainstream feminist theory but far less frequently interpreted: Patricia Hill Collins, bell hooks, and Audre Lorde. Burack would frame my claim as a charge of idealization, a defense mechanism that prevents engagement with the difficult issues presented by black feminists (p. 134). She proposes a

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different approach: to engage with black feminist thought as a discourse on its own terms, from within.

This approach is not without its ethical hazards. That this book attempts such a discursive analysis reflects a move to take black feminist thought seriously; to de-idealize black feminists and their work. In this regard, Burack's approach should be celebrated. Yet a less skilled analyst could again relegate the subject of black women to a position of object, replicating many of the same issues black feminists have struggled against for centuries—the power to define oneself and one's social context on one's own terms, rather than have it defined *for* them *by* someone else. I read this book with some ambivalence about the degree to which black feminist thought should be situated as a *case* for discursive analysis instead of an *analytical framework* from which analyses emerge.

Burack attempts to locate and interpret a discourse of black feminist theory that contributes to a psychoanalytic, reparative theory of groups. In so doing, she uses black feminist theory as an exemplar of reparative group leadership, conflict management, within-group solidarity, and coalitions. Her fluency in the language of psychoanalytic political theory is enlightening and presents a tantalizing proposition—revising the dour pessimism of psychoanalytic political theory and relational theory more generally toward an empowering, reparative theory of groups. Put most succinctly, Burack asks if in fact it is human “nature” to form groups, and groups have many destructive tendencies if left to their own devices, how might we learn from another discourse about processes that serve to heal and empower group members, groups themselves, and ultimately intergroup relations? She justifies attention to black feminist theory based on the pessimism in relational theory as well as the mixed record that psychoanalytic political theorists have “in acknowledging the existence and salience of subordinated groups, whether racial/ethnic or gender” (p. 52).

I take Burack at her word when she claims that psychoanalytic political theorists could do a better job (presumably hewing to all the standards cited here) of attending to marginalized populations. Yet her fluency in psychoanalytic theory and her close readings of black feminist discourse are shadowed by a repeated tendency to use language that consistently places “race/ethnicity” and “gender” on either side of an “or,” suggesting, falsely, that they are mutually exclusive categories.

The author later reifies this placement, positing it as a limitation of both earlier relational theory and current black feminist psychoanalytic research: “While [Melanie] Klein's thought does not allow [Amina]

Mama to disaggregate the effects of identity of race and of gender, it does enable her to analyze the effects of social and cultural pressures and meanings on the construction of identity” (p. 57). This use of language serves to resplit the self after the reparation process so heralded by Burack. Most importantly, it is a split enforced by the interpreter, rather than the black feminist theorist herself. Much of the literature she cites, Kimberle Williams Crenshaw and Patricia Williams especially, argues explicitly that the disaggregation motivation is misplaced regarding black women, based upon an unjust, liberal individualist legal system and political history. This is an important hindrance to Burack’s interpretation.

A second interpretive obstacle emerges in Chapter 5, which discusses solidarity. The author depends on Gail Pheterson’s definition: “Solidarity is knowledge of, respect for and unity with persons whose identities are in certain essential ways common with one’s own” (quoted on p. 116). While I agree with Burack that solidarity is undertheorized, Pheterson’s definition and Burack’s subsequent analyses are impoverished by a premise that solidarity among individuals is based on the commonality of identity “in certain essential ways.” In her dependence upon Pheterson, Burack first limits her analyses of solidarity to the creation of within-group solidarity, which ignores a significant contribution of black feminist theory to political theory more generally—an egalitarian process of how “like-minded” but not “like-identified” individuals can stand in solidarity with a group. This omission disconnects Burack from the aforementioned interpretive standards set by black feminist theorists.

More importantly, however, this dependence limits her later interpretation of Hannah Arendt’s exchange with Gershom Sholem. Arendt is also making a larger point beyond Burack’s claim regarding multiplicity of identity. Choice, not essence of identity or sociopolitical location, is at the heart of politics and should be part of any group constituted in the political sphere, according to Arendt. Addressing this matter would entail a broader analysis of solidarity.

How might Burack, as a nonblack feminist, stand in solidarity with the goals and tenets of black feminist theory? How does Cornel West or Manning Marable stand in solidarity with black feminist theory? Burack’s serious engagement with black feminist theory as a discourse serves as an entrée into two traditionally underinvestigated areas of political theory. Issues of interpretation and language notwithstanding, *Healing Identities* may convince many black feminist theorists and psychoanalytic political theorists that many important reparative conversations and stands are yet to be taken—together, in solidarity.

Women in the South African Parliament: From Resistance to Governance. By Hannah E. Britton. Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press. 2005. 198 pp. \$35.00.

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The women's movement in America tried but failed to have this language added to the U.S. Constitution: *Equality of rights under the law shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any state on account of sex.*

Here's what South Africans wrote into their 1994 constitution: *The state may not unfairly discriminate directly or indirectly against anyone on one or more grounds, including race, gender, sex, pregnancy, marital status, ethnic or social origin, colour, sexual orientation, age, disability, religion, conscience, belief, culture, language and birth.*

In addition to crafting an extraordinarily progressive constitution, South Africans, particularly newly enfranchised women in Parliament, used the momentous occasion of apartheid's end to construct an elaborate array of state institutions charged with advancing and empowering women in the new South Africa. Known as the National Gender Machinery, these structures of state feminism represent an achievement of considerable significance.

By way of explanation for these achievements, Hannah Britton's new book offers a compelling account of the efforts of women in South Africa, particularly the first two generations of women in Parliament, to bridge their myriad modes of involvement in the liberation struggle with the continuing struggle to achieve gender equality in the postapartheid era.

Although this is clearly a case study, Britton makes good use of secondary material from a number of comparative cases. Of particular value are the references to the experiences of the women's movement in Uganda that run throughout the text. There are also less frequent but still illuminating references to cases in other parts of Africa (e.g., Angola, Mozambique, Zimbabwe), Latin America, Europe, and Australia. From the sort of attention to the details of institutional culture that characterize this book, we learn that women in the Parliament of the latter case found themselves, as did women in the South African assembly, literally "frozen out" of the institution. That is, in both cases, the formerly exclusive suit-wearing male institutions were kept at temperatures ill suited for work by women whose typical business attire is lighter weight. It is

such attention to the subtle obstacles to women's full and equal participation that makes this a useful and often enjoyable read.

Britton is at her best when she is engaged with the nexus of race, class, and gender. Chapter 4 does a superb job of teasing apart the ways in which these multiple identities relate to competing views among women about gender and to outcomes such as the high attrition rate of women members of Parliament. In this latter discussion, she also does a good job of reinforcing the importance of women's incumbency, and thus this business of attrition is significant. It is also the basis for her concluding assessment that the future of women is uncertain and that it will take decades to make good on the promise of the first generations of women in Parliament.

Lingering challenges notwithstanding, Britton makes clear that women in South Africa made real gains in the postliberation era and that this contrasts sharply with the experiences of women in most other postliberation contexts. The relationship between these outcomes and women's participation in the antiapartheid struggle remain somewhat unclear, however. There appear to be two related methodological questions inadequately resolved. The first is how to establish causal links between women's collective action and specific outcomes, such as the inclusion of gender in Chapter 2, Section 9, of the constitution. The second is how to account for alternative explanations for these outcomes, many of which her own work seems to suggest. For example, one intriguing alternative explanation for constitutional and institutional developments is the high level of international interaction that characterized the antiapartheid movement and the subsequent transition to democracy. These are all well documented in the transitions literature and may well account for at least some of what has transpired. The author offers no clear way of discounting such an explanation.

In support of her claim, Britton notes that each of the major parties had teams at the Negotiating Council of the Multiparty Negotiating Process and that women "forced the leadership to permit each party's negotiating team one additional member—provided she was a woman" (p. 40). This seems to point in the direction of the causal linkages she posits; in the end, however, a number of these sorts of claims—highly plausible though they may be—remain unproven. Britton herself demonstrates how insignificant the mere inclusion of women in an institution may be. Indeed, one of her strongest contributions is to the critical mass literature, which she assails for failing to appreciate that "even with a greater number of women, institutions deeply entrenched in a

patriarchal culture are often highly resistant to change” (p. 82). Similarly, the central proposition that women’s *grassroots* efforts are tied to specific *legislative* advances, such as the Maintenance Act (never explained), the Domestic Violence Act, and the Customary Marriages Act, lacks support. In fact, the grassroots claim is hard to substantiate given how well she makes the case that the 1994 and 1999 Parliaments continued to privilege elites and their policy priorities.

This methodological shortcoming has an important theoretical ramification. Given the documented achievements in the area of state feminism, as well as her convincing comparisons to less successful transitions elsewhere, one would have liked to see her offer an explanation for this South African exceptionalism. Again, her own work suggests where such a line of inquiry might go; she might profit, for example, from an engagement with the literature on transnational activism (Margaret E. Keck and Kathryn Sikkink, *Activists Beyond Borders: Advocacy Networks in International Politics*, 1998), or that on pacted transitions (Timothy D. Sisk, *Democratization in South Africa: The Elusive Social Contract*, 1995).

These problems notwithstanding, *Women in the South African Parliament* certainly has its merits. Much is found in the rich contextual detail rendered through the voices of those normally left voiceless in mainstream democratic transitions literature. It is rewarding to hear South African women—those who fought *and those who defended* the apartheid state but who now cooperate in cross-party caucusing—recount their experiences of such a remarkable time. Consistent with the best of feminist scholarship, the author brings us into contact and solidarity with the concerns of actors too often neglected in our disciplines.

Gender, Conflict, and Peacekeeping. Edited by Dyan Mazurana, Angela Raven-Roberts, and Jane Parpart. Lanham, MD, and New York: Rowman & Littlefield. 2005. 304 pp. \$75.00 cloth, \$31.95 paper.

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Framed in the language of peace (making, keeping, building), the United Nations military interventions of the 1990s have spawned feminist demands for participation, together with critiques of the sexist and gendered practices that have characterized these missions. In *Gender, Conflict, and Peacekeeping*, 14 scholar-practitioners relay their observa-

tions of the way in which gender politics pervades UN peace missions and postconflict reconstruction.

The volume is divided into four sections. The first provides overviews of issues relating to women and conflict and on gender mainstreaming, the second focuses on international law and gender-based violence, the third looks at peacekeeping operations through a feminist lens, and the last explores postwar reconstruction. The authors examine politics at UN headquarters and in peacekeeping missions in Mozambique, Angola, Namibia, Rwanda, Bosnia/Herzegovina, Kosovo, Haiti, Guatemala, East Timor, Ethiopia, and Eritrea.

Gender mainstreaming, that is, the UN's stated commitment to taking into consideration the differential impacts on women and men of various organizational practices, is at the center of this collection. Angela Raven-Roberts describes the development of policies and concept notes, of training and gender focal points in the UN's humanitarian, human rights, and security regimes. She finds a range of constraints, including lack of conceptual coherence, little commitment from senior management, resistance among male staff, the underrepresentation of women, and a marginalization of those tasked with implementing gender mainstreaming. This negative picture is not uniform, however, and the contributors to this book show that successes have been possible.

Recounting her experiences in developing and field-testing a gender training program for peacekeeping personnel, Angela Mackay describes highly problematic responses but also breakthroughs, such as an East Timorese police school graduate (a woman) gaining the vocabulary to talk about her own experience of assault with her colleagues. In Namibia, Louise Olsson argues, gender-aware leadership made possible the unbiased recruitment of mission staff. Whereas the military component of the Namibia mission was male dominated, the civilian staff was 40% female, and the mission helped lay the groundwork for the continued promotion of women's rights after independence.

The activism of women in the South West African Peoples Organization (SWAPO) was crucial for the inclusion of women's concerns in Namibian postwar reconstruction, and indeed various chapters in this collection agree on the importance of an active women's movement. Ruth Jacobson found that in Mozambique, women activists shone a spotlight on peacekeepers' demands for sex and questioned demobilization plans that gave benefits to combatants and their families. Because combatants often had multiple wives and the UN assumed monogamy, many women went empty-handed. Although the UN learned from its mistakes

in this country, the lessons did not carry over to the mission in Angola. There, the UN encountered similar circumstances but in the absence of a vocal feminist movement, gender issues were ignored. For Guatemala, Ilja A. Luciak and Cecilia Olmos attribute the strong guarantees of gender equality in the peace accords to women's activism, although success turned into disappointment when it came to implementation.

In addition to active women's movements and gender mainstreaming, international law has become another instrument for feminist purposes in the context of international peace operations. Valerie Oosterveld describes the strengthening of international legal mechanisms for prosecuting gender-based crimes in the 1990s. Case law and the statutes of war crimes tribunals (including the International Criminal Court) have developed definitions of rape and consent, and demanded gender-sensitive court procedures and staffing, all of which constitutes a significant advance for women. On the other hand, as Barbara Bedont shows, the current legal regime for peacekeeping missions has led to a situation of impunity, because the prosecution of crimes committed by peacekeepers is left to contributing states. Perpetrators are rarely held accountable, and victims of crimes have no legal recourse. Bedont suggests giving secondary jurisdiction to the host state so that local courts can become active if the legal system in the contributing countries fails the victims.

The increasingly common employment of private security forces for peacekeeping operations escalates the problem of impunity even further. Valerie Hudson describes the lack of accountability among mercenaries in Africa, and Martina Vandenberg the legal void surrounding U.S. military contractors in the Balkans. Unlike soldiers, these contractors are not subject to the U.S. Uniform Code of Military Justice, and were not prosecuted for their involvement in sex trafficking in the Balkans. Similarly, U.S. courts have no jurisdiction over police officers who are serving abroad in peace-building missions.

How is one to theorize these experiences with UN peace operations from a feminist perspective? Dyan Mazurana portrays peacekeeping and peace building as embedded in the masculinist practices of national and international elites and, citing Mark Duffield, as contributing to the construction of "emerging forms of protection, authority, and rights to wealth" (p. 34). Zoë Wilson, in her discussion of Angola, concurs: Peacemaking is state making, a key element of which is "the solidification and legitimation of the power of military belligerents" (p. 251), that is, of men in military organizations, rather than women in community and civic organizations. Cynthia Enloe, in her concluding chapter, employs an old-

fashioned, but clearly still relevant concept to describe this form of state: “The big picture,” she argues, is *patriarchy*.

This volume then is about the struggle to undermine the reestablishment of patriarchy during and after conflict, taking conflict as an opportunity for a new beginning—as Tracy Fitzsimmons puts it in her exploration of the creation of new police forces in Haiti and Kosovo. The difficulty of this project is amply illustrated in the various chapters and perhaps most painfully in the chapter on Rwanda. Here, women have become the “leaders for peace,” the force in which both the international community and the national government have put its hope. Women’s organizations provide a range of services, and women-only elections have created women’s committees with considerable influence throughout the polity. But the politics of Rwanda are not those of a feminist state. As Erin Baines shows, “universal woman” here has become both the symbol of unity and a force for suppressing difference. There is a taboo concerning the naming of ethnic groups and a “dark veil of silence and a deep fear” (p. 232) that prevent people from articulating ethnic inequalities. Woman has become a means for silencing dissent.

Mainstreaming gender into UN peace operations is perhaps one of the most ambitious feminist projects currently under way. Not surprisingly, changing institutions entails contradictions, co-optations, and unanticipated outcomes—and changing security institutions perhaps even more so. This collection does justice to the complexity of the micro-politics of change. It is a fascinating read and highly recommended.

Women’s Political Discourse: A 21st Century Perspective.

By Molly Mayhead and Brenda Devoe Marshall. Lanham, MD:

Rowman and Littlefield. 2005. 304 pp. \$75.00 cloth, \$26.00 paper.

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Political discourse has proven a worthy source of material for scholarly investigation into power, politics, and policymaking. Policy scholars have frequently used discourse to explore issue framing, media content, and policy decisions (e.g., Frank Baumgartner and Bryan Jones, *Agendas and Instability in American Politics*, 1993; Roger W. Cobb and Charles D. Elder, *Participation in American Politics: The Dynamics of Agenda Building*, 1983; Deborah Stone, *Policy Paradox*, 1997; Nayda

Terkildsen, Frauke I. Schnell, and Cristina Ling, "Interest Groups, the Media, and Policy Debate Formation: An Analysis of Message Structure, Rhetoric, and Source Cues," *Political Communication* 15 [1998]: 45–61). As a tool for investigating abortion debates (e.g., Myra Marx Ferree, William Anthony Gamson, Jurgen Gerhards, and Dieter Rucht, *Shaping Abortion Discourse: Democracy and the Public Sphere in Germany and the U.S.*, 2002) or sex education (e.g., Janice M. Irvine, *Talk about Sex: The Battles over Sex Education in the U.S.*, 2002), discourse also reveals the gendered dimensions of contemporary American politics. At the same time, this insight is not lost on advocates and opinion leaders: "Words are . . . bullets" in the culture wars, says James Dobson, founder of the conservative evangelical group Focus on the Family (quoted in Irvine 2002, 73).

Expanding beyond policy studies, Molly Mayhead and Brenda Devoe Marshall have taken on the ambitious task of trying to assess the cumulative impact of women's discourse on contemporary politics. Focusing on 39 pioneering and contemporary female officeholders in U.S. politics, the authors analyze the ideographs and rhetoric of these women to say something about the transformation of political discourse and politics. Tracing first the contributions of a number of congressional women and a handful of female governors from the twentieth century, they argue that women's discourse in the twenty-first century contributes to an increasingly "gender-neutral rhetoric that occupies an androgynous in-between space" (p. 18). Their subjects possess the necessary *standing* (voice in the media) to generate data for the analysis, and so the book is a timely contribution.

Mayhead and Marshall have written a book that is a pleasure to read for its nicely detailed personal narratives. The biographical details cover some of the usual suspects (e.g., Rep. Jeanette Rankin [R-MT] and Sen. Hillary Rodham Clinton [D-NY]), as well as lesser known congresswomen and governors (e.g., Rep. Diana DeGette [D-CO] and Hawaii Governor Linda Lingle). The major chapters are organized around women occupying the same institutional space—the U.S. Senate, U.S. House, and state capitols. The narratives are accessible and highly readable.

The authors build their theoretical argument from the second-wave feminists' rallying assertion: "The personal is political" (p. 5). Their theoretical argument, however, is more complex than the simple claim of the importance of acknowledging the political dimensions of the private sphere. Borrowing from the work of Edward Soja (*Thirdspace:*

Journeys to Los Angeles and Other Real-and-Imagined Places, 1996), Henri Lefebvre (*Key Writings*, 2003), and James Flanagan (“Ancient Perceptions of Space/Perceptions of Ancient Space,” *Semeia* 87 [1999]: 15–43), Mayhead and Marshall posit a spatial terrain of women’s discourse that simultaneously occupies the “First Space” of women’s lived empirical experiences, the “Second Space” of conceived and legitimized social hierarchies, and the “Third Space” of the marginalized and the silenced (pp. 12–13). They argue that women in politics occupy an “in-between space” and contribute a discourse, which simultaneously gives voice to women’s lived reality, breaks the silence covering the private sphere, and helps to transform social and political hierarchies: “We suggest that by the mid-nineteenth century women’s political discourse began to frame this ‘new’ political site as a more androgynous arena in which both masculine and feminine views of the world could be heard and acted upon. Moreover this reconfiguration is transformative, not simply integrative. . . . And, we argue, this both/and perspective promises to be the salient feature of women’s political discourse in the twenty-first century” (p. 13). This bold argument is worthy of further investigation and gives readers much to contemplate.

Unfortunately, the authors’ conclusions may be more ambitiously stated than their data can support. By their own acknowledgment, the analysis of women’s discourse is handicapped by a lack of available source material, and they note the uneven and sporadic record available among contemporary public officials, not to mention the illusiveness of women no longer in office. Relying mostly on statements submitted to the *Congressional Record*, as well as speeches and other documents posted to the Web pages of women officeholders, Mayhead and Marshall describe their data as “fragmented samples” and their analysis as piecing “together bits of glass in the broad mosaic of political discourse” (p. 211). Further complicating the sampled discourse is the reality that the featured women’s source material, as for all political figures, is highly edited and self-consciously crafted.

I have two relatively minor quarrels with the authors’ analysis. First, I would have liked a further explanation of the analytical strategy for determining the important ideographs of the women featured in the book. The authors present these ideographs and bolster them with illustrations from the sampled speech, but they give little insight into how the dominant ideographs were discerned. My own preferences run toward the kind of empirical content analysis supplemented by qualitative interviews used by Ferree, Gamson, Gerhards, and Rucht (2002) to assess abortion

discourse, but other approaches are possible. A methodological appendix would have been appreciated.

Second, and related to the first, I would have liked to see some acknowledgment of the empirical work done on women's political discourse (e.g., Dianne Bystrom and Lynda Lee Kaid, "Are Women Candidates Transforming Campaign Communication?," in Cindy Simon Rosenthal, ed., *Women Transforming Congress*, 2002; Kim Fridkin Kahn, "The Distorted Mirror: Press Coverage of Women Candidates for Statewide Office," *Journal of Politics* 56 [1994]: 154–73; Lyn Kathlene, "Power and Influence in State Legislature Policymaking: The Interaction of Gender and Position in Committee Hearing Debates," *American Political Science Review* 99 [no. 3, 1994]: 560–76; Lyn Kathlene, "Alternative Views of Crime: Legislative Policymaking in Gendered Terms," *Journal of Politics* 57 [1995]: 696–723; Katherine Cramer Walsh, "Enlarging Representation: Women Bringing Marginalized Perspectives to Floor Debate in the House of Representatives," in Cindy Simon Rosenthal, ed., *Women Transforming Congress*, 2002; among others). These scholars and others would have bolstered the basic argument made by Mayhead and Marshall, while providing additional glue to their mosaic.

In conclusion, this book makes an important argument about the contributions of women's discourse and relates the discourse of a diverse group of contemporary female officeholders in an interesting way. More definitive support for the authors' assertions will have to await a more comprehensive and systematic analysis. Finally, in perhaps their most important recommendation, the authors encourage twenty-first-century female politicians to contribute to the development of an archive to capture and preserve women's political discourse for the use of future scholars, students, and practitioners. Such an archive would contribute to a "culture of mentoring" as well, according to the authors (p. 211). This recommendation warrants serious attention and action.