

Reviews

A feminist reading of Rethinking Democracy

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We are most certainly living in difficult democratic times, and populism is on the up. Any reader of this book who has a lingering complacency about the health of liberal, representative democracy is likely to be well and truly disabused by its contributors. In the opening essay, Tony Wright is pointed: democracies can die, and they do not always do so via non-democratic means.¹ The contributors document, and in many ways lament, the sorry 'condition and conduct of representative politics' - and they also make a strong case for its defence. It may be, as some argue, that the era of 'pure representative politics' (p61) is over, but for many of these highly and rightly regarded scholars, this means that it needs to be protected by more participatory reforms, rather than rejected. The book is dedicated to the editors' grandchildren - 'citizens of the future'.

The failings of representative democracy to do good by women is the focus of Joni Lovenduski's essay, 'Feminist reflections on representative democracy' - and it is also our main focus here. Lovenduski is not alone in documenting how the institutions, actors and wider norms of representative democracy have not fully delivered on promises of political equality, popular control, freedom of expression and transparency.²

Not all authors subject their analysis to a feminist reading - but we can. As feminist defenders of representative democracy, we wish to see it protected both from a populist critique that is antithetical to feminist politics - even as it might

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claim to speak for women; *and* from the many varieties of post-representative politics that, like too much of representative democratic theory and practice, fail to admit, or take into account, gender inequality.

Like Lovenduski, we agree that representative politics fails to represent women well, notwithstanding advances in women's political presence and the greater attention given to 'women's issues'. The failure to realise women's inclusion and equality rests on women being an 'afterthought'. Established prior to women's political mobilisation, representative democracy is premised upon a 'public/private divide' and a sexual division of labour that traps women in the home. The evidence Lovenduski marshals is pretty damning: women are not equally present in our parliaments; they enter political institutions not of their own making - institutions which privilege a masculinised political agenda and reproduce gendered norms of behaviour; and gendered institutional reforms have thus far been inadequate, and frequently resisted. Her reconsideration of the centrality of women's political accountability is a must-read. Elected representatives 'tend not to have a clear mandate about how to act concerning women's issues and interests'; women are 'explicitly considered to be a group to whom decision makers should be accountable'.

There is moreover a strong warning that some of the proposed institutional and other reforms in circulation - some of them put forward in *Rethinking Democracy* - need themselves be subject to feminist critique. There is much support for the redistribution of political power, and the reform of local government is advocated across the chapters, but some caution is needed here. Gerry Stoker seeks to counter 'the politics of resentment' with a 'politics of place and identity': through local accountability citizens will regain their 'stake' in politics. He also makes an appeal to a 'more consensual, better gender balanced and more open representative politics' (p148). But feminisation does not happen by chance nor is it secure. Stoker's example - the National Assembly of Wales - was 'made' more gender-balanced by Labour using a sex quota; and over time the institution has become less gender-balanced. Questions must be asked, too, about how gender plays in the politics of place and identity. In popular commentary, feminism and 'metropolitan elites' are frequently elided. When Stoker considers 'resentful social liberals', we worry about a populism/anti-populism that is nostalgic and sees feminism as a cause of democracy's current difficulties - not that we are suggesting that Stoker thinks this.

The current fashion for more participatory and direct democracy to augment

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representative democracy also requires critical reflection. Participatory experiments are quite the fashion (Bogdanor, p60).³ Proponents of decisions made by groups selected by lottery make optimistic claims - and on paper they are correct. Women would almost certainly be better represented numerically in such forums given they make up half of the population. But recent scholarship queries whether women will be able to take up their invitations. Recalling Lovenduski, even when present women's lack of authority means that they are frequently silenced.⁴ More than this, random lot will struggle to ensure that a diversity of women are made present; privileged women will be enabled to participate by the private-sphere labour of poorer and likely minority ethnic women. Nor should we assume that random lot unquestionably brings about 'good representation' - is it really representation? Accountability is in any case written out.⁵

The attention given to who it is that participates in our parliaments by male scholars in *Rethinking Democracy* is to be welcomed. Criticism of narrow political classes (Runciman and Wright), and suggestions that 'we' should be 'far more interested in the whole business of political recruitment than we currently are' (p15) is something feminists have been talking about for decades.⁶ Colin Crouch suggests a critical role for women's political leadership in facing up to populism's macho politics: the problems of post-industrial society 'may be best articulated by women', given women's keener experiences of work/life imbalance, precarious labour markets, inadequate care services and consumer manipulation. As other contributors argue, feminist criticism of populism, and of its academic study, builds on criticism that there is simply no such thing as a 'pure' people (Wright; Weale), while some are left out (Crouch). If illiberal democracies threaten the civil, social and political rights of minorities (Gamble, p153), they also threaten women's rights: 'the people' are not gender-undifferentiated.

The discussion of social media across the chapters limits our confidence that women's and feminists' role in defending democracy will not be met by resistance. The political public sphere reproduces social and cultural inequalities and is dominated by the right (Finlayson pp79, 89). In asking feminists to engage with, or lead, the democratic fightback, we may be putting them at serious risk. Margetts (p117) argues that social media misogyny 'threatens to discourage a whole generation of women and ethnic minorities from public life', and some gender and politics scholars consider this to be violence against women.⁷

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A feminist defence of representative democracy against itself and its critics would need to be more extensive. We read in Lovenduski's essay a lingering optimism that it can be made. *Rethinking Democracy* is great place to start, led by Lovenduski. She has always challenged non-gendered political science. In the face of a backlash against feminist gains, there is an urgency to identify and exploit the 'resources needed to mobilize for [feminist] change' (Lovenduski, p34).

Notes

1. See also S. Levitsky, and D. Ziblatt, *How Democracies Die*, Viking 2018.
2. See for example M. Saward, 'Enacting Democracy', *Political Studies*, 51, 1 2003.
3. See P. Allen, *The Political Class*, Oxford University Press 2018.
4. See C. Karpowitz and T. Mendelberg, *The Silent Sex*, Princeton University Press 2014.
5. *The Political Class*, op cit
6. P. Norris and J. Lovenduski, *Political Recruitment*, Cambridge University Press 1995.
7. M.L. Krook, 'Violence against Women in Politics: A Rising Global Trend', *Politics and Gender*, 14, 4 2018.

Trump and trade with the East: the continuing story

Marc Reyes

Andrew C. McKeivitt. *Consuming Japan: Popular Culture and the Globalizing of 1980s America*, University of North Carolina Press, 2017

'The Cold War is over and Japan won.' This was Massachusetts Senator Paul Tsongas's rallying cry during his 1992 presidential campaign. Running for the Democratic Party's nomination, Tsongas made the case to voters that Japan was to blame for the early-1990s economic decline in the United States. He called for a

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'battle plan' to fend off the 'attack' of Japanese ownership of US industries and real estate. To Tsongas, the United States had fought the Cold War to make the world safe for capitalism, and now the Japanese were swooping in to savour the spoils. If a US victory in the Cold War was supposed to herald the superiority of capitalism, why did it feel like United States had missed the victory party?

Senator Tsongas's criticisms of Japan and its business practices represented what historians of US-Japanese relations and media scholars have investigated as the era of 'Japan Panic'. From the 1970s to the early 1990s, American choruses - in film, television and literature - voiced anti-Japanese sentiment. Diatribes lambasted the strength of the Japanese economy, characterised its gains as underhanded, and feared Japanese exports would gradually replace American goods. *Consuming Japan* skilfully analyses how Americans worried about Japan's growing economic prowess and omnipresence of their goods, while at the same time finding comfort in the mass consumption of Japanese products, gobbling them up as fast as possible.

McKevitt's earlier chapters trace the rise of US fears regarding Japan's economic success during the 1970s and 1980s. In American films and literature, Japan is depicted as taking advantage of American businesses or destabilising the US economy. The middle chapters discuss initial US protests about Japanese goods, and the later acceptance of Japanese automobiles, in terms of Americans driving and constructing them. The final chapters explore how Americans encountered new Japanese exports and popular culture like the VCR (videocassette recorder), sushi, and animation (anime).

The book also asks what happened to the 'Japan Panic'. How did Americans go from fearing Japan and its economy to finding them, according to a 2015 Pew Research Center survey, more trustworthy than China? McKevitt posits that Americans who came of age in the 1970s and 1980s forgot the trade wars of those decades, and older images of Japan were replaced with recent events like the 2011 earthquake, tsunami, and Fukushima Daiichi nuclear disaster. But what turned the page for good was Japan's 'Lost Decade' of economic stagnation. As Paul Tsongas was warning audiences about the dangers of Japanese companies, Japan was entering a decades-long recession of job losses, falling wages and a shrinking national economy. Not too long afterwards, the US economy took off, and once the two countries' economic positions had flipped, Americans lost interest and Japan lost the power to make Americans panic.

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The consumption of Japanese goods has been a central facet of US social and cultural life since the mid-1970s. The history of the United States in that era lacked a place for this story, but McKevitt's work fills that gap and goes further: he claims that no nation was more central in the globalising of the US than Japan. New Japanese ideas, images and products initiated and intensified the processes of contemporary globalisation. As McKevitt makes clear, globalisation is about cultural change, not just economic change. The transmission and reception of Japanese popular culture found eager American audiences and, over time, this embrace helped wash away anxieties about Japan's growing economy. American economic and cultural consumption of Japanese goods became so ordinary that many Americans never realised how Japan had transformed American life. McKevitt's insights invite scholars of the era to look beyond the economic aspects of globalisation and recognise the cultural dynamics at work, and how the two produce change.

Consuming Japan concludes with the story of another presidential candidate, this one much more successful: Donald Trump. In 1980s interviews and speeches, Trump used his many media appearances to pillory Japanese success in the global automobile and electronics industries. Three decades later, as a presidential candidate, he remained an ardent foe of Japanese competition but his barbs about Japan fell flat, and instead his comments about China found receptive audiences. Fears about China replaced fears about Japan and continue to perpetuate an American tradition of racist anxiety towards rising Asian nations. As McKevitt explains, what makes China different from Japan in this go-around is that China is eager to translate its economy success into regional and global power. Whether from Japan or China, Americans like Donald Trump will regard any challenge to US economic standing as illegitimate, ill-gotten, and unfair to the rules of the current system. In other words, Americans say they favour a competitive marketplace, so long as the competition never bests the US, and it remains firmly atop the global economic ladder.

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‘willing to ask the biggest questions, but always rooted in the here and now: it’s a vital link between the tradition of progressive thought in Britain and the futures which all of us are working for’ **Jeremy Gilbert**

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