

# Critical Dialogue

**Lactivism: How Feminists and Fundamentalists, Hippies and Yuppies, and Physicians and Politicians Made Breastfeeding Big Business and Bad Policy.** By Courtney Jung. New York: Basic Books, 2015. 258p. \$26.99.  
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— Mala Htun, *University of New Mexico*

Most cultures are fixated on women's bodies and the things those bodies do.<sup>1</sup> We subject them to strict personal status laws; commercialize and sensationalize them in film, advertising, and the internet; and regulate their rhythms and treat their failures with medicines and surgeries. The desire to improve women's lives is only one motivation driving such activity. All too often, the codified laws, social norms, and dominant discourses that inform how women perceive, and how others treat, their bodies serve other agendas. States, religious groups, capitalist enterprises, and social movements frequently use women's bodies as instruments to support the glory of the nation, the expansion of state power, the growth of profit, and the honor of a particular family.

Even breastfeeding, one of the ways that women's bodies have sustained the human race, has been coopted. As Courtney Jung shows in her terrific new book called *Lactivism*, breastfeeding in the contemporary United States has been captured by diverse constituencies including the Christian Right, environmentalists, feminists, experts working in public health and global development, the government, and for-profit corporations. Thanks to these groups, breastfeeding has come to mean much more than merely holding an infant to suckle at your breast. Today, it is an indicator of class status, evidence-based parenting, and a "moral marker" to identify good parents and punish bad ones. Jung argues that these trends shame women and limit their choices.

*Lactivism* is directed at a large audience. It is brilliantly written, insightfully argued, and often hilarious. Jung draws on historical narratives, interviews with key figures, government documents, medical research, and her own life experiences to expose the passions, hypocrisy, sexism, and denial that runs through national discourse on breastfeeding.

Jung explains that she is not against breastfeeding (indeed, she testifies that she breastfed both of her children for years, and that it was easy for her). Rather,

she opposes the zealotry of "lactivism." Lactivism, which includes "compulsory breastfeeding" and "breastfeeding as a moral crusade" (p. 7), has come to characterize much of breastfeeding advocacy. Lactivists, who believe that "breastfeeding is the best choice for everyone," have bolstered racial and class hierarchies in the contemporary United States and have legitimized coercive interventions into the lives of poor and minority women (p. 209).

The consensus around breastfeeding is less than a generation old. Most people born in the 1960s and 1970s, like I was, were fed by formula. It was seen as the "modern" and "scientific" thing to do. But today, people who otherwise disagree about almost everything come together to endorse breastfeeding. Jung remarks that "for feminists it is an act of female empowerment; for Christians a symbol of womanly submission; for yuppies an affirmation of class status; and for hipsters a way to reduce the carbon footprint" (p. 71).

She observes that Americans across the political spectrum love breastfeeding so much, that "to be against [it] is almost sacrilegious" (p. 50).

Jung is concerned that many of us are forced to breastfeed, and that we beat ourselves up trying to do it, even when we aren't good at breastfeeding or when circumstances make it difficult. She claims that we have been intimidated by pamphlets, websites, and advice from doctors and nurses, all of which exaggerate the "proven" benefits of breastfeeding on a range of diseases, conditions, and characteristics (like IQ). These medical studies, Jung contends, are frequently deployed to justify "heavy-handed policies" to promote breastfeeding.

For middle- and upper-class women, it is one thing to suffer public criticism and personal torment once the formula and the bottle come out: usually, we can just turn away, or compensate our babies by reading them an extra story that night. But for disadvantaged women, punishment for not breastfeeding is more pernicious, for it can affect the shape of our welfare benefits and our relationship with government personnel. Jung blasts guidelines of the U.S. government's Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC), which offer breastfeeding mothers "enhanced food packages" denied to non-breastfeeders, and allow them to stay on the program for a longer period of time.<sup>2</sup> Breastfeeding campaigns focusing on African-American

women, she reports, have the effect of reinforcing racial stereotypes and the idea that white people make better parents.

Many women who have felt like failures because breastfeeding was difficult for them, or because they had to stop earlier than they had hoped, have been grateful for Jung's book. By questioning the scientific and ethical basis of lactivism, she has legitimized these women's own struggles and choices. But the important question is: Is it breastfeeding *per se* that inspires efforts to demean and criticize women? Or is breastfeeding merely a tool, in the context of sustained gender inequality, that groups use to put women in their place? More on this later.

*Lactivism* charts the important but largely unacknowledged shift from breastfeeding to breast pumping. In the contemporary United States, breastfeeding no longer means holding a baby to nurse at your breast. Rather, it has come to mean pumping milk from your breast and storing it, so that another person can feed it to your baby from a bottle. Though we lack precise data on the prevalence of this form of breastfeeding (which we should more accurately call *breastmilk* feeding), Jung argues that it amounts to a large share of the practice today.

The push for *breastmilk* feeding is state-sponsored. The Affordable Care Act (ACA) revised U.S. labor law to require employers to give women break time and space to pump milk during their child's first 12 months (but also contained numerous accommodations to employers; see p. 136). Later, the ACA required health insurance plans and Medicaid to cover the cost of breast pumps and accessories. Noting that "the US government's initiatives to promote breastfeeding have focused almost exclusively on breast pumping," Jung observes that pumping constitutes a uniquely American method of breastfeeding. In no other culture, "do women use breast pumps as much as they do in the United States."

For some feminists, the pump advances gender equality. Nothing poses more of a challenge to liberal notions of equality than pregnancy and breastfeeding, since only women can do these things. Like the birth control pill, the pump offers women greater control over their bodily functions. Like hiring a nanny or paying a day care center, the pump enables women to subcontract reproductive labor.

Jung argues that the pump's availability helps deflect demands for publicly-paid and longer parental leave. If the benefits of breastfeeding can be gained by women pumping at work, why do employers need to give women time off to be with their babies? If nannies and day care workers can feed babies pumped milk, who needs parental leave? Pumps enable women to get back to work right away while minimizing guilt and entertaining the belief that they are still benefiting their babies by *breastmilk* feeding.

In her recent work, Nancy Fraser contends that the spread of the pump may reflect (and contribute to)

a broader crisis of social reproduction.<sup>3</sup> Certainly, the pump signals a marginalization and alienation from these processes: it separates women, bodily and geographically, from their breast-milk dependent infants. The pump also supports a social order that continues to hide and devalue the work of caregiving. Instead of helping women to combine caregiving with paid work through publicly financed parental leave and flexible working hours, U.S. policymakers support breast pumping.

The pump has upsides too: it helps women and babies in crisis circumstances. When my third child was in the NICU and unable to take any food by mouth, I pumped for the first two weeks of her life. She took my colostrum and milk through a repole descending the length of her reconstructed esophagus. Pumping exclusively was hard work. But I was glad to do it: lactating, even with a machine, helped me feel less alienated as a mother, and helped set up a good breastfeeding relationship with my daughter later on.

In her most powerful indictment of extremist lactivists, Jung reveals that the desire to promote breastfeeding led organizations such as La Leche League, the World Health Organization, and UNICEF to withhold information that HIV could be transmitted from mothers to infants through breast milk. Having won a prolonged battle against Nestlé and other formula companies, and having convinced international organizations to recommend breastfeeding as a matter of policy, lactivists were reluctant to jeopardize these gains by admitting the connection between breastfeeding and HIV. On the contrary, as evidence mounted in the 1980s and early 1990s, UNICEF and WHO continued to insist that breastfeeding carried a low risk, and to recommend it regardless of a mother's HIV status. This unstinting lactivism aroused scattered protests by sub-Saharan activists, some of whom accused global health officials of inflicting a double standard on mothers and babies from the Global South. Not until 1998, Jung reports, did world health organizations change course and acknowledge that, to eliminate the risk of transmission, HIV positive mothers should feed their babies with breast milk replacements (p. 187).

La Leche League's response to the WHO policy undermined the group's credibility. Inspired by a Canadian AIDS denialist, La Leche co-founder Marian Tompson formed a non-profit organization to question the science linking breast feeding and HIV transmission. Tompson's new NGO received the blessing of other La Leche founders, according to the group's spokesperson (p. 193). Jung concludes that the group ended up prioritizing breastfeeding over the ~~very~~ lives of the babies they had sworn to protect (p. 200).

Jung does a terrific job identifying the dangers of lactivism. While she claims to oppose lactivism and not breastfeeding, the text tends to conflate lactivism as social movement and political position with the humanly

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practice of breastfeeding. Perhaps as a consequence, Jung has a tendency to blame breastfeeding for trends and experiences that have other causes. In one section, Jung tells the story of a glass factory worker who suffered harassment, insults, and intimidation at work because of her determination to pump milk for her infant (pp. 137–138). Yet later in the book, rather than condemn the misogyny motivating this treatment, Jung lists “ribbing, harassment, and discrimination” as yet another “less tangible cost” of breastfeeding (p. 208). Other stories include women who felt like failures because they couldn’t breastfeed, or women who were insulted in public due to a perception that they weren’t breastfeeding. Rather than attributing such episodes to lactivism, sexism, or competitive parenting, she singles out breastfeeding: “experiences such as Maya’s offer a glimpse of the zealotry and social shaming that breastfeeding sometimes elicits—and, sometimes, even encourages” (p. 98). Finally, at the end of the book, Jung laments that women who conform to societal pressure to breastfeed for six months “pay a significant price . . . [including] giving up jobs and careers that will be very hard to re-enter years later” (p. 208).

By holding breastfeeding—or even lactivism—accountable for workplace harassment, public insults, and women’s disadvantaged position in the labor market, Jung mischaracterizes the source of the problem. She implies that if lactivists stopped forcing women to breastfeed, these conditions would improve. Yet the end of breastfeeding would do almost nothing to combat the big problems alluded to by Jung, which include enduring sexism in the workplace and other organizations, the neglect of families by U.S. public policy, and the ways that groups in all cultures have manipulated the meanings of women’s bodies as weapons in other struggles, and gotten away with it.

At times, Jung runs the risk of abandoning breastfeeding to the same dustbin of history as the racist, classist, and sexist agendas she divulges. This would be a mistake. Breastfeeding does not have to be “a substitute for maternity leave” (p. 210); rather, it complements the extended parental leave, high-quality child care, health care, and other family supports necessary to reverse the trend toward greater class inequality in this country. Breastfeeding is not just “the particular infant feeding practices of one privileged demographic” (p. 22), but the way humans survived for millennia, and even today an important way to teach people that being a parent requires relinquishing control, demands patience, attentiveness to a child’s needs, and is unpredictable.

Lactivism’s consequences must be seen within the broader cultural context. In a society characterized by pervasive gender inequality, the things women do—including breastfeeding but also walking, earning money, speaking up, or standing out—are held to a double

standard. The righteousness of public debate over breastfeeding, in which the pain, joy, ambivalence, confusion, and fear experienced by actual women occupies only a marginal place, is a symptom of women’s relatively precarious position. Can we imagine an equally impassioned and entitled examination of men’s urination? Salivation? Sweating? Ejaculation? We should contemplate the background conditions that enable scientists, feminists, Christians, environmentalists, and capitalists to use breastfeeding—and the women and infant bodies involved—as instruments to promote their agendas.

Jung’s outstanding book demonstrates how breastfeeding, in a context of gender inequality, can be pitted against women’s interests. The solution to this predicament is not to reject breastfeeding. Rather, it is to build political will and public support for policy changes to make breastfeeding—and whatever else women need to do to take care of their children—compatible with working to support a family and ascending to positions of public leadership. Women should not have to conform to the rules of the masculinist workplace; rather, we should change these rules. Breastfeeding can serve as a crucial reminder of the ties of human dependency that enmesh us all, ties that merit greater recognition and protection in the public sphere. Breastfeeding doesn’t need to lead to lactivism.

### Notes

- 1 I am grateful to Jeff Isaac, Francesca Refsum Jensenius, Sara Niedzwiecki, and Frances Rosenbluth for helpful comments on this essay.
- 2 Some reviews of Jung’s book have pointed out that WIC offers different food packages to breastfeeding and non-breastfeeding mothers because: 1) breastfeeding mothers need the extra food in order to produce milk; and 2) breastfeeding babies tend to have lower levels of iron than formula-fed ones (since formula contains iron), so babies need extra supplementation when they start eating solid food. See, e.g., Marisa Bellack, “Just how bad are the breast-feeding police?,” *Washington Post*, November 24, 2015.
- 3 Nancy Fraser, “Freezing Eggs and Pumping Breastmilk: On the Gendered Contradictions of Contemporary Capitalism,” Lecture at the University of Oslo’s Center for Gender Research, Oslo, June 9, 2016.

### Response to Mala Htun review of *Lactivism: How Feminists and Fundamentalists, Hippies and Yuppies, and Physicians and Politicians Made Breastfeeding Big Business and Bad Policy*

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— Courtney Jung

Why is contemporary American society so profoundly invested in breastfeeding? In many ways, *Lactivism* is

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a standard work of critical social theory. Whereas breastfeeding is the relatively straightforward practice of nursing an infant at the breast, lactivism is an ideology. It's a set of ideas, held in common especially by members of certain social circles, with the power to guide people's understanding, action, and judgment. The book exposes the existence of an ideology around breastfeeding, traces its roots and emergence, demonstrates how it has taken hold in our society, and shows how it works to shore up and entrench many of the prejudices and hierarchies that already structure American social life.

Of course, as Htun points out, breastfeeding does not have to lead to lactivism. Breastfeeding is as old as humankind, whereas lactivism has crept up on us in the last decade or so. Lactivism is not breastfeeding, but it derives from two commonly held beliefs about breastfeeding. The first is that breastfeeding is crucial to child health and development; the second is that "all women can breastfeed." Held together, these twin convictions lead almost inevitably to the verdict that all women *should* breastfeed, and that women who don't breastfeed are bad parents. That, in a nutshell, is lactivism.

I devote a chapter to evaluating the medical research that supports these convictions. The evidence that breastfed children are healthier is mostly weak and inconclusive. It may make a difference at the margins, especially when it comes to infections, but it probably doesn't have much impact on most other outcomes. Experts estimate that about 15% of women cannot breastfeed, for a wide range of reasons.

This is where critical theory comes in. If lactivism is not driven by scientific evidence, then where does it come from, and why is it so powerful in contemporary social life? As Htun points out, *Lactivism* tells a familiar story about society's interest in regulating women's bodies and bodily functions. Although breastfeeding has been embraced by many feminists, an imperative to breastfeed that eliminates a mother's choice is hardly liberating. As lactivism takes hold in our collective consciousness, it performs the role of the panopticon, practically eliminating the need for a watchman as women discipline themselves—and each other. If good parenting necessarily involves breastfeeding, lactivism also polices the boundaries of gender, and sexuality.

Surprisingly, though, lactivism also works to shore up the hierarchies of race and class that structure American life. In the U.S., breastfeeding statistics that are routinely recorded according to race and socio-economic status show that wealthy and middle class white women have the highest rates of breastfeeding. Those statistics justify a range of interventions—which I catalogue in my book—specifically aimed at changing the infant feeding choices of women who are African American, or poor. Against a backdrop in which breastfeeding is equated with good parenting, those statistics also reinforce insidious tropes

about the "pathology" of black families, in circulation since at least the Moynihan Report.

Htun claims that I hold breastfeeding "accountable for workplace harassment, public insults, and women's disadvantaged position in the labor market," and that I imply that "that if lactivists stopped forcing women to breastfeed, these conditions would improve." That is a wrong-headed argument, and she is right to remind me to be clear that it is not the one I make in the book. For the record, breastfeeding is also not responsible for racism, or for enduring class inequality. But just because lactivism has not caused those problems, doesn't mean it isn't constituted by them. Htun and I agree that lactivism's consequences exist in a broader cultural (and political, and economic) context.

Nevertheless, there are still important differences between us. I took up breastfeeding without much thought, as a way to feed my babies. If it hadn't worked, I would have switched to formula, fast. I don't believe breastfeeding made my children smarter or healthier, or that it produced a stronger attachment between us. Although breastfeeding may teach us that being a parent is unpredictable and demands patience, I think most parents learn those lessons, even if they don't breastfeed.

Htun concludes by calling on women to take up breastfeeding as a weapon against misogyny, in order to challenge the masculinist workplace and public sphere. Here she proposes that, even though lactivism doesn't cause misogyny, it may help to eliminate it. In fact, however, lactivists have been instrumental in *adapting* breastfeeding to the masculinist workplace, by embracing breast pumps and regulations that allow women to pump breast milk at work during unpaid breaks. In collusion with corporate and government interests, lactivists propagate the idea that human milk is "liquid gold," a valuable commodity that supports not only the \$1.2 billion pump market, but a burgeoning market in human milk. As Htun points out, pumps can be convenient, but pumping three or four times a day on the job, during unpaid breaks, so that someone else can feed our babies breast milk from a bottle, adds enormously to the burden of working mothers. While there is nothing inherently anti-feminist about breastfeeding, lactivists have advanced the cause of breast milk not only against the interests of children, as Htun notes, but against the interests of the women who produce it.

The call to take up our breasts, so to speak, in the fight against sexism, is one that appeals to many women. We now read routinely about nurse-ins to protest against stores and restaurants that have policies against nursing in public. It's my sense that they have been successful at raising awareness about laws that allow women to breastfeed in public, which makes breastfeeding a lot easier. But it is also true that this type of activism has been embraced primarily by middle and upper middle class white women,

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and that it does not necessarily speak to the issues that concern women outside that demographic. Not only that, but more than one third of women will never breastfeed. Feminists have learned before the dangers of deploying essentialized conceptions of womanhood, that divide and exclude many women, in the fight for women's rights. As we were reminded painfully on November 8, it's going to be a longer battle than we realized. We're going to need all the solidarity we can muster.

**Inclusion without Representation in Latin America: Gender Quotas and Ethnic Reservations.** By Mala Htun. New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2016. 226p. \$99.99 cloth, \$29.99 paper.  
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— Courtney Jung, *University of Toronto*

Around the time that Arend Lijphart wrote *Democracy in Plural Societies* (1977), on electoral engineering and institutional design to accommodate profoundly felt cultural differences in democratic states, Crawford Young wrote *The Politics of Cultural Pluralism* (1976), arguing that ethnic groups are fluid and contextual. Whereas Lijphart and his intellectual descendants took "groups" for granted and focused attention on designing institutions around them, theorists of ethnic identity showed that ethnicity itself is often a product, rather than a precondition, of politics.

Over the next forty years, political scientists would go on to design not only increasingly sophisticated institutions and electoral mechanisms, but also constitutions to accommodate ethnic difference, as if those differences were not only over-determining, but permanent. And theorists of identity would go on to demonstrate that ethnic, racial, gender, and class differences often intersect to complicate both identities and interests.

Mala Htun's book finally brings these two literatures together in a way that does justice to both. The institutions she looks at, quotas and reservations, are designed to ensure that members of historically excluded groups are elected to political office. Often, although not always, as she shows, they succeed. In Latin America, women and indigenous people in particular are now routinely elected to offices at all levels of government. But does that mean that the interests of "women" and "indigenous people" are represented and advanced in politics? No, or perhaps, not necessarily, is Htun's answer. And part of the reason is that "women," "indigenous people," and also "Afrodescendants" are quite often not actually groups at all. Divided by region, class, ideology, and history, people who identify as women, indigenous, or black often do not also have a distinct set of political interests in common. That's one reason, and I would argue the most important reason, that

political inclusion does not translate easily into political representation.

Htun makes this argument in two different ways. The first few chapters of the book describe how reforms introducing quotas and reservations came into being. The influence of the 1995 World Conference on Women in Beijing looms large in some cases, and in others there was strong presidential support. But Htun's real argument is that political inclusion was achieved when group members were able to unite politically to demand inclusion. The case of Bolivia is instructive here. Why, Htun asks, did the Evo Morales government, which was friendly to indigenous people but hardly feminist, pass quotas to ensure women's inclusion in political office but fail to guarantee similar accommodations for indigenous people? The answer is that women were able to build a coalition for quotas that crossed party lines. Indigenous people were divided, mainly along regional lines that separate them historically, culturally, economically, and politically, and failed to unite behind a single plan for indigenous reservations. In another chapter she argues that women's quotas were approved in Argentina and Mexico, but not Chile, for the same reason: because in Argentina and Mexico women organized across party lines to demand them, but in Chile they did not. Her point here is that uniting "women" or "indigenous people" politically is a political achievement, not a biological accident.

In the second half of the book, Htun turns more squarely to her fundamental argument, that inclusion does not beget representation. Here she focuses attention not on the cause of inclusion, but on its effect. Once quotas and reservations are put in place, do officials elected through them represent the interests of indigenous people, women, and Afrodescendants? Chapters on Colombia, Brazil, and Argentina make the case that by and large they do not.

In "After Quotas" Htun and her co-author argue that women's quotas made some difference in Argentina. As women's presence in Congress grew, both men and women were more likely to introduce legislation that affected women. But statistical evidence shows that approval rates for gender-related legislation dropped. Women, she argues, enter political office as individual members of different parties. Even if those parties include women, it is still the party that determines the success of particular pieces of legislation. Here the argument seems to be not so much that inclusion often fails to engender representation but that quotas are a particularly weak mechanism of inclusion because they divide women through the party system.

In Brazil, which has the largest population of Afrodescendants in Latin America, officials have tried to tackle historical discrimination by creating admissions quotas in public universities. But it's been hard to measure who is

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eligible for admission under the quota, because the boundaries of race are much more fluid in Brazil than they are in, say, the United States. Because discrimination in Brazil is based more on class and color than race, most quotas initially took both race and class into account and, over time, class has emerged as the primary criteria of eligibility for the quota. Brazil, Htun argues, is trying to tackle discrimination through the mechanism of redistribution. Redistribution is not irrelevant, but it doesn't solve problems rooted in discrimination.

In its widely acclaimed 1991 constitution, Colombia also attempted to address historical exclusion, in this case by creating reserved seats in the Senate and the lower house for indigenous people and "black communities." The problem here, Htun argues, is that they went about it all wrong. They got the mechanism wrong by failing to create indigenous and Afrodescendant constituencies. Anyone could vote for candidates for those seats, which meant, effectively, that there was no real instrument to ensure that candidates had any connection to the groups they were supposed to represent. In 2014, the "black community" seats were won by two candidates who were not recognized as Afrodescendants and allegedly had ties to drug traffickers and paramilitaries.

They also got the framework wrong. If Brazil made the mistake of trying to deal with race as if it was class, Htun argues that Colombia made the mistake of trying to deal with race as if it was ethnicity. While urban Afrodescendants demanded integration and civil rights, and rural movements demanded land and protection from corporate extraction, the constitution granted rights to a few isolated "black communities" with distinct cultural practices. Ultimately the Constitutional Court ruled that Afrodescendants had rights to the extent they were ethnically distinct, not as a result of skin color. It was not until the late 2000s that Colombia started to deal explicitly with racial discrimination and equality.

The juxtaposition of these two accounts of the politics of race raises a more profound question. If race is neither class nor ethnicity, if racial discrimination cannot be resolved through redistribution or recognition, then what is it, and does it have a distinctive political framework? Htun writes as if it does, and as if that framework is objectively knowable.

But the story of Colombia belies that account. Htun describes a political situation in which rural, urban, and coastal Afrodescendants have distinct political goals that flow from distinct lived realities. In Colombia alone, Afrodescendants deploy at least three different political scripts. The one that gained traction was the one that was least threatening to entrenched political and corporate interests. But framing racial politics in the language of ethnicity was not a fundamental category error; it was just a strategy to redress one injustice experienced by one segment of the Afrodescendant population.

Like ethnicity and gender, race is not an automatic category of political identity or solidarity. Like indigenous people in Bolivia, and women in Chile, Afrodescendants in Colombia were divided—in this case by region, class, and history—in a way that impeded mobilization around a single political goal such as anti-discrimination legislation or more effective representation.

The greatest strength of Htun's book, besides the empirical depth and richness she brings to each case, is recognizing the ways in which groups such as "women," "Afrodescendants," and "indigenous peoples" are constructed, and, just as often, internally divided by race, class, gender, region, history, and ideology. As a result, mechanisms that guarantee that some members of a group are elected to political office will often fail to produce representation for the interests of the group as a whole. Still, Htun says, that doesn't mean that inclusion doesn't matter. Even if it's only a piece of the puzzle, we certainly won't get to representation without inclusion. The lessons we draw from this powerful book will be a crucial part of the journey.

**Response to Courtney Jung's review of *Inclusion without Representation in Latin America: Gender Quotas and Ethnic Reservations***

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— Mala Htun

A central claim of my book is that inclusion and representation are distinct political projects and distinct normative goods. Improving the political presence of excluded groups is one important democratic goal; advancing the representation of their interests is another. Yet many activists and advocates, and much of the literature, have treated inclusion and representation as sequentially and causally related. People still tend to believe that the political presence of members of an excluded group will make it more likely that the interests of members of that group will be advanced.

My book argues that inclusion often doesn't lead to representation. Jung, in her astute review, proposes that the diversity of groups is the main reason. An intellectual heir to constructivist tradition in ethnic politics emanating from Crawford Young, Jung stresses the role of politics in crafting group boundaries and, by extension, group identities. As she put it in a different piece:

Constructivism sets forth the proposition that race, ethnicity, and religion (and also class, gender, and sexuality) do not have any essential core that determines their fundamental character. . . . Instead, these categories are constituted by politics, and by the particular historical processes that have organized access to power in ways that forge boundaries of exclusion and selective inclusion.<sup>1</sup>

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Since group composition and group identities change in response to different historical and political projects, the interests that group members have in common also change.

My book, as Jung points out, also owes its inspiration to the legacy of Arend Lijphart and his quest to engineer institutions well. Lijphart believed that we can and should design institutions to correspond to the character and distribution of social groups.

Much of my work on the comparative politics of gender, race, and ethnicity has sought to explore the similarities and differences among social groups, and to inquire as to whether or not each group possesses characteristics that imply a particular scheme for inclusion and representation. As I argued in my 2004 article in this journal,<sup>2</sup> it is not groups like women or indigenous peoples *per se* that functionally require particular mechanisms. Rather, the key question is how group characteristics in certain historical and social contexts align with existing political institutions. Groups that cross cut parties do better with candidate quotas; groups that coincide with party divisions do better with reserved seats in parliament.

I am a constructivist, but not all the way down. In contrast to Jung, I believe there are variations in the degree to which groups are constructed. For example, there is a biological component to the sex traits on which gender has been built. Sex differences are functional insofar as they enable human life to reproduce. Many societies have interpreted these differences in binary ways and fashioned them into gender roles and gendered meanings. “Race” has no such analogue. There is nothing biologically functional about racial identities, or ethnic, religious, and class identities.

Jung’s review poses the question of what race is, and whether groups defined by race have an objectively knowable framework to advance their demands on the state.

Colson Whitehead also considers the issue of the nature of racialized groups in his National Book Award-winning novel, *The Underground Railroad*. As the character Lander explains to the residents of Valentine Farm—a diverse mix of runaway slaves, freemen, and northern abolitionists—during a community assembly:

In some ways, the only thing we have in common is the color of our skin. Our ancestors came from all over the African continent. It’s quite large. . . . They had different ways of subsistence, different customs, spoke a hundred different languages. And that great mixture was brought to America in the holds of slave ships. To the north, the south. Their sons and daughters picked tobacco, cultivated cotton, worked on the largest estates and the smallest farms. We are craftsmen and midwives and preachers and peddlers. Black hands built the White House, the seat of our nation’s government. The word *we*. We are not one people but many different people. How can one person speak for this great, beautiful race—which is not one race but many, with a million desires and hopes and wishes for ourselves and our children?<sup>3</sup>

Lander concludes: “Color must suffice. It has brought us to this night, this discussion, and it will take us into the future. . . . we rise and fall as one, one colored family living next door to one white family.”<sup>4</sup>

Whitehead and Jung agree that what racialized groups have in common is history: a history of social positioning, and often exclusion and violence, based on skin color. The shared interests brought about by “race” derive from this history. As Jung (and others, such as Lisa Baldez<sup>5</sup>) have shown, the denial of rights by race, political exclusion by gender, and discrimination along the lines of ethnicity invest those categories with meaning as political identities.

But at the next stop along the historical road, if groups have gained some relief from discrimination or oppression, their internal differences become more visible. The Valentine Farm in Whitehead’s novel was, at least temporarily, a safe space that created a context for diversity—which had always been there—to return to prominence. Though residents shared an oppressive past, they had different views and visions for their future. Exclusion tends to unite; empowerment often divides.

The crucial function of representative institutions is to provide a framework for both inclusion and contestation in the context of diversity, as Dahl pointed out almost 50 years ago.<sup>6</sup> Merely getting members of excluded groups into positions of power does not begin to solve the problem of how to aggregate, and translate, their variety of interests and perspectives into legitimate public choices.

### Notes

1 (Jung, 2006, p. 366).

2 (Htun, 2004).

3 (Whitehead, 2016, pp. 285–286).

4 *Ibid*, p. 286.

5 (Baldez, 2002).

6 (Dahl, 1971).

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would look  
better if the  
parentheses  
were  
removed

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## Special Book Review Section: Communism, Post-Communism, and Democracy

### COMMUNISM, POST-COMMUNISM, AND DEMOCRACY

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**Bosnia's Paralyzed Peace.** By Christopher Bennett. New York: Oxford University Press, 2016. 416p. \$75.00 cloth, \$35.00 paper.

**Citizens of an Empty Nation: Youth and State-Making in Postwar Bosnia-Herzegovina.** By Azra Hromadžić. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2015. 248p. \$59.95.  
doi:10.1017/S1537592717000664

— Robert M. Hayden, *University of Pittsburgh*

The war in Bosnia-Herzegovina (hereafter, Bosnia) ended in 1995, but as these authors demonstrate, the country is divided politically and largely territorially along ethno-national lines, and the central government barely functions at all, much less effectively. This is not a great surprise, because the Constitution that was part of the Dayton Agreement that ended the war could not actually structure a workable state; Christopher Bennett notes (p. 330) that my own “comprehensive analysis” of this agreement at the time it was written was “extremely skeptical” and holds up well nearly twenty years later. Both authors reviewed here see the fatal flaw in the Dayton Agreement as being its ethno-federalism, which divided Bosnia along ethno-religious lines, between Bosniaks (Muslim heritage), Serbs (Orthodox Christian heritage), and Croats (Roman Catholic heritage). Bosnia set up a consociational system, in which decisions can be taken only with the unanimous consent of the representatives of all three communities. It will not surprise any except those who actually believe in the chimera of “consociation” that decisions are not taken, since requiring unanimity is a device for blocking decisions, not for making them. The “paralyzed peace” that Bennett refers to is the effect of this consociation, and Azra Hromadžić agrees on this point. The two books are thus parallel presentations of the unworkability of the Bosnian state, and their arguments are mutually compatible.

The works use quite different methodologies in their analyses of Bosnia's postwar divisions, however. Bennett was a very young reporter in Yugoslavia when the wars broke out there, in 1991. After they ended, he returned to Bosnia and has worked ever since in various intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations dealing with the region and specifically with Bosnia; he continues to reside there. His book thus draws very heavily on his detailed knowledge of the politics of Bosnia since the end of Yugoslavia, as written by a reporter who not only had access to the major political figures but himself played a supporting role in the political processes there. For her part, Hromadžić was born in Bosnia and lived there through the wars, going through high school in the town of Bihać, which was besieged by Serbs. She went to college and graduate school in the United States, becoming an anthropologist. Her book is a revision of her dissertation,

on the Gymnasium (high school) at the other end of Bosnia from Bihać, in Mostar. The latter town was fought over and divided during the war and is now nominally shared, at least officially, by Croats and Bosniaks, though they live in different parts of the city. Although the Gymnasium is officially mixed, with both Croat and Bosniak students, students study separate curricula in separate classrooms. Hromadžić's book is grounded on her ethnography of the Gymnasium, against a backdrop of the larger conditions of Bosnia's divisions that Bennett writes about.

Hromadžić's ethnography captures brilliantly the absurdities of division in a school in which everyone must grapple with two officialized registers of what all linguists not themselves from the former Yugoslavia regard as the same language, formerly Serbo-Croatian, now Bosnian/Croatian/Serbian (BCS). North American readers might imagine a school in upstate New York in which Anglophone Canadians are a separate ethnic group and must be taught in separate classrooms to a Canadian curriculum using the Canadian language, while Americans use the American language and an American curriculum. Her discussion of the language issues is perhaps the best concise account of this set of practices that I have seen. She also provides a very good discussion of the internationally-sponsored “integrated” schools, also known as “two schools under one roof,” but actually almost totally segregated in practice. Hromadžić rightly ties this segregated “integration” to the logic of the larger consociational model that underlies all of Bosnia's official political and governmental structures. Yet she also notes that there was real resistance to integration by the minority Croats, who insisted on their separate curriculum and language. School leaders, who were compelled to speak of “integration” when dealing with foreign donors, had to avoid the same term when speaking to their own people. Long-term Bosnia watchers will be reminded of Pjer Žalica's 2003 black comedy film *Fuse* (original title: *Gori Vatra*, “The Fire Is Burning”), in which Bosnian Serbs and Bosniaks fake unity after the war in order to gain benefits from foreigners.

The greatest strength of Hromadžić's ethnography lies in her depictions of the interactions of students and teachers with each other and with her. The complexities of Bosnian identities are borne out in her statement that being from Bihać, where the war was between Serbs and Bosniaks and there were few Croats, she did not feel that the one between Bosniaks and Croats in (post)wartime Mostar was “her” conflict, and neither did she feel “Bosniak” as a primary identity even though her name marks her as such. She also did not feel at home in the increasingly Islamicized Bosniak society, yet even though her best friends in Mostar were Croats, she was excluded from Croat identity. Hromadžić thus exemplifies the liminality of the anthropologist, even when arguably