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Rich Democracies, Poor People: How Politics Explain Poverty

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the articles to stand alone. The collection debunks the Western notion, while also exploring the forces behind such representations by both visitors and insiders, but does so much more. We see the harem as an institutional practice that has changed over time and varies from place to place. The opening articles, for example, show how the stories of the lives of the first generation of prominent Muslim women changed in significant ways over time, erasing their public roles, and reveal that in the first five centuries of Islam, Arabic texts did not represent the harem as a social space occupied by women. Later on, Leslie Pierce traces changes in Ottoman imperial law with regard to sexual crimes to analyze what that reveals about the harem. Other authors contrast imperial with more ordinary household harems in monogamous families and reveal the changing architecture and artistic representations of the harem.

Yaseen Noorani, drawing from Habermas, takes on directly what is perhaps the most important theme that emerges from the volume: the troubling of the notion that the harem was "private" while public space belonged to men. In a number of articles, we see women engaging in public and political activities: influencing public affairs from within the caliphal harem of Baghdad in the Islamic fourth/CE tenth century; socializing in the interests of business, politics, and diplomacy in the seaside bathing houses of precolonial Tunisia; and writing and hosting literary salons. Continuing the critique of public and private as separable gendered spaces, such scholarship gives concrete examples of the ways that public influence and power can emanate from private domestic spaces. Illustrating the complexity, Irvin Cemil Schick argues that the harem, as a socially constructed space often more imagined than real, functioned as a "technology of gender" where Muslims learned how to be women and men but also served as a site of resistance.

Another central theme of the collection is the equally complex relationship between "West" and "East." Booth opens her introduction with two vignettes that illustrate that theme. Demetra Vaka Brown, born in the Ottoman Empire but living in the United States, returned to her home country in the

early twentieth century and wrote about harem life in Turkey. "I had lived so long in a civilized country that I had forgotten how much more civilized, in some respects, uncivilized Turkey is," she wrote (p. 2). The pseudonymous Zeyneb Hanoum, around the same time, penned the story of her visit to Britain's Parliament, commenting in her book to an English friend, "But, my dear, why have you never told me that the Ladies' Gallery is a harem?" (p. 2). The theme of who is observing and influencing whom runs throughout a number of articles. Orit Bashkin, for example, analyzes the popular Arabic historical novels of Jurji Zaydan, who appropriated Orientalist concepts of the harem for his own political purposes. In this way, Bashkin argues, we can see "the impossibility of regarding East and West as separate entities" (p. 311).

In all these ways, then, *Harem Histories* offers concrete historical examples of the ways that gendered space is constructed and imagined, public and private overlap and merge, and cultural interaction has complex dynamics and consequences. Although perhaps of most interest to historians and other scholars of the Middle East, these are issues of more general concern to sociologists as well.

Rich Democracies, Poor People: How Politics Explain Poverty, by **David Brady**. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2009. 268pp. \$24.95 paper. ISBN: 9780195385915.

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David Brady's *Rich Democracies, Poor People* delivers a stunning blow to prevailing myths and social-scientific theories of poverty and its determinants. Its principle contribution is to demonstrate that poverty is first and foremost a *political* problem. The provocative implication is that poverty amelioration is a matter of political choice.

Whereas poverty scholarship has traditionally zeroed in on variation at the individual and group levels within a single national context, Brady's research operates at a macro-analytic level—enabling him to address the

critical question of why some affluent Western democracies evidence higher levels of poverty than others. Arguing that a narrow focus on the characteristics of poor people or groups diverts our attention from more macro-level causes (pp. 17-19)—and noting that an exclusive focus on the U.S. “. . . samples on the dependent variable by selecting a case at the extreme end of the distribution” (p. 173)—Brady finds that poverty is most powerfully explained by variation in welfare state generosity (conditioned by leftist collective actors and “latent coalitions for egalitarianism”). Working with an impressive cross-national data set on eighteen Western democracies, Brady establishes this conclusion through a series of clearly-articulated statistical tests that pit dominant poverty theories against his own “institutionalized power relations theory.” Underpinning this ambitious exercise is a subtle and convincing rethinking of poverty *measurement* that itself represents a tremendous contribution to poverty scholarship (Chapter Two).

Most pointedly, this book stands as a critical rebuttal to liberal economic theories of poverty. Identifying as fundamental to these theories the principles of “harmonious progress, free market capitalism, human capital and worker productivity, and supply and demand” (p. 123), Brady submits liberal economics to empirical test (Chapter Six). First, while he finds a negative association between economic growth and poverty, this relationship is shown to be relatively weak. Second, the hypothesis that “government intervention into the free market (especially through welfare programs) should produce more poverty” is roundly rejected. Indeed, it is the book’s core finding that welfare programs *reduce* poverty. Third, labor productivity and its underlying human capital requirements are found to have *no* significant effects on poverty intensity. Finally, while the analysis supports the “supply and demand” hypothesis that unemployment predicts poverty, the effect is not as large as that of welfare generosity. While Brady relies on his own *relative* poverty measures in conducting these analyses, he also demonstrates that none of the relationships are statistically significant when the *absolute* measures preferred by liberal economics are substituted.

As if providing this powerful critique of liberal economic theories were not enough, Brady also makes significant contributions to more sociological theories of poverty, anti-poverty politics, and the welfare state. Testing sociology’s dominant social-structural theories against those of liberal economics, he finds the former to be more successful at predicting cross-national variation—although not as powerful as his own theory (Chapter Seven). With regard to anti-poverty politics, he demonstrates—*contra* some social movements theories—that formal, institutionalized politics have a greater impact on poverty outcomes than the “dissensus” politics of protest and strikes (Chapter Five). And while building heavily on welfare state theories, Brady presents findings that call into question these theories’ assumptions regarding the independent effects of welfare regime type (Chapter Four). These and other contributions provide a firm foundation for new research going forward.

The most challenging critique that this work is likely to receive from liberal economists, policy makers, and citizens will be a charge of circularity. It might be claimed that Brady’s central finding—that more welfare state generosity reduces poverty—hinges on his reconceptualization of poverty to measure levels *after* taxation and the receipt of cash transfers and in-kind benefits from the state. A satisfying response to this critique hinges on the answer to the question of whether Brady’s poverty measure is *supportable on its own terms*.

The measure is well-founded, but the author could have gone further in making this case. Brady’s primary justification for his “post-fisc” measure is theoretical: since the state is always involved in all aspects of the market—“by setting rules on how goods and services are bought and sold, by setting standards for labor and production, by defining who and what has property rights, by funding the infrastructure on which markets unfold, and by backing the currencies and credit that make exchange possible” (pp. 38-9)—it would be “disingenuous to simulate what income would be ‘before the state’” (p. 38). This argument resonates with recent theoretical work in economic sociology and should be acceptable to most

sociologists. But a broader audience might be more convinced by the truth captured by Brady (but on which he does not elaborate) when he notes that "People live in a posttax and posttransfer world" (p. 40, my emphasis). The average person's daily lived experience of security and well-being (or the lack thereof) is not based on an abstract assessment of his or her (never-experienced) "pre-fisc" economic status, but rather on a sense of the resources enjoyed in contextualized social existence—which includes the debits and credits accrued through interactions with various social institutions, including the state. This meaningful experiential reality, along with its theoretical corollary, provides a solid footing for Brady's definition—and so for his explanatory argument.

A second, more minor critique might derive from either a social conflict or elite politics perspective. Because Brady situates his theory in a broad Marxist tradition (see pp. 169-73), it is somewhat surprising that—while attending to "latent coalitions for egalitarianism" (pp. 10 and 102-5) and "failure[s] to institutionalize equality" (p. 6)—he devotes little attention to the possible importance of coalitions *against* egalitarianism that in some cases might have been *successful* at institutionalizing *inequality*. Whether such coalitions or institutions exist (or matter) is an empirical question; but it is one worth asking.

These comments aside, *Rich Democracies, Poor People* is a carefully-conceived, adroitly-executed, and eminently-accessible piece of scholarship that will shape the fields of poverty studies and political sociology for years to come. It will be a valuable tool for undergraduate teaching, helping students to see through popular misconceptions about how poverty works. At the same time, the book should be required reading for policy makers and the general voting public—as they consider the political choices that play a key role in shaping national poverty outcomes.

Identity Theory, by **Peter J. Burke** and **Jan E. Stets**. New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2009. 256pp. \$24.95 paper. ISBN: 9780195388282.

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The authors of this compendium of social psychological theory, which describes identity theory, its origins, the research which supports it and in part its future direction, suggest that one of the main reasons for writing this book is to give scholars within sociology and across the social sciences a clear and organized statement on identity theory. No book, they claim, currently exists that does just that. They wish to make identity theory more accessible to those within the academy as well as to those outside of it. To do so, the authors have undertaken the rather formidable task of pulling together, in one volume, the work that they and their rather extensive research teams have been doing over the past several decades. In doing so, the text covers materials from chapters and journal articles published earlier. Such goals have both their strengths and weaknesses.

The strengths are that it brings together in one volume the cumulative testing and building of a highly ambitious, systematically rigorous research program in sociological social psychology from a positivist tradition. The authors show how the survey and/or laboratory research reported in the book support and/or extend identity theory. In so doing they show that theory is not the byproduct of one theorist alone, but rather the result of cumulative testing of systematic agendas of research. The benefits of a book begun some fifteen years prior to its publication are that the ideas reflect the richly developed and cumulatively thoughtful approach of two, productive, well-regarded and respected researchers and their colleagues.

While the book explores the historical roots of identity theory, not only in symbolic interaction, but also in cybernetics, the central mission of the book is an explication of Peter Burke and Jan Stets' use of perceptual control theory in the making and development of their model of identity verification, most