

tivists whose relation to reform is limited to lobbying the state for limited gain, Bannerji's work presents a challenge to reconsider the assumptions underlying their praxis and its efficacy. For self-styled revolutionaries Bannerji points to a clear pathway out of the dilemma of how to incorporate antiheterosexist feminist and antiracist politics with revolutionary socialism. In her own words, "If we can frame our critique and create organizations that challenge patriarchy, heterosexism, class, and "race" with even a semblance of integrity, we will create the bases for an embodied social revolution." Bannerji compellingly argues this claim, with great flexibility and in diverse contexts, in each of the five essays in this volume.

IS MULTICULTURALISM BAD FOR WOMEN?: SUSAN MOLLER OKIN WITH RESPONDENTS

Joshua Cohen, Matthew Howard,
and Martha C. Nussbaum, Eds.
Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1999.

BY COURTNEY
FAIRWEATHER

In posing the question, *Is Multiculturalism Bad for Women?*, Susan Moller Okin opens the door to many complex and controversial issues. At the core is the crucial discussion about how areas of conflicting interest arise between multiculturalism and feminism, specifically how special group rights, granted to protect minority groups from the dominance of majority cultures, may perpetuate discrimination against women within those groups. Fifteen leading thinkers on multiculturalism and feminism respond to Okin's thought-provoking essay, sometimes

answering her directly; other times developing a particular strand of the debate in a thought-provoking and extremely readable collection of essays. Following their responses, Okin replies to each and further defends her position.

Many of the questions surrounding the interface of special group rights for minority cultures and the right to freedom from discrimination by individual female members of these groups will be familiar to the reader. What gives this work its particular vitality is the sense of a lively debate afforded by the format of a forum. This assemblage of different voices allows us to compare points of view and test our own opinions against those spread out before us. Susan Moller Okin's fiery arguments certainly cause the sparks to fly.

A number of the provocative assertions that Okin makes in her essay, which first appeared in *Boston Review*, are bound to offend and outrage even some who are basically in agreement with her position that gender discrimination, carried out in the name of preserving the cultural identity of minority groups, should not be permitted to infringe upon the individual rights of female members of those groups. Many strong claims can be made to support this position and Okin certainly focuses on some of the more controversial customs, such as clitoridectomy, polygamy, forcing children into marriage, and other forms of coerced wedlock. But she also makes sweeping generalizations about the inherently patriarchal nature of many religions, basing her argument upon a somewhat superficial reading of what she sees as the "founding myths" of Greek and Roman antiquity, Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. None of the respondents commented on her interpretation of the Classical myths, but challenging those of contemporary religions hit a nerve with such people as Cass R. Sunstein, Bonnie Honig, Robert Post, Azizah Y. al-Hibri, and Martha C. Nussbaum. Those responses took a number of

different directions. Sunstein supports the contention that the same laws which govern other areas of sexual discrimination should also be applicable to religious institutions. Others take umbrage at her claims, with Honig and Post, for instance, pointing out that many women may feel privileged by the position and protection accorded them by religious practices. Al-Hibri attacks Okin's inadequate understanding of Islam, claiming that the basic tenets of Islam, as laid out in the Qur'an, do indeed guarantee gender equality and that more restrictive attitudes are a result of later, jurisprudential interpretations. Nussbaum also reacts to Okin's blanket condemnation of religion, claiming that she should give a more balanced picture of the good, as well as the bad, aspects.

Okin responds to these criticisms, accusing both Nussbaum and Honig of having weak support for their arguments. She acknowledges the strength of al-Hibri's appeal to the Qur'an, but points out that current practice often does not support gender equality. In her response to Post's claims that Orthodox Ashkenazi Jewish women feel that they have equal dignity with men, Okin states that "surely they would be deluded." One may argue that she here exhibits the kind of offhanded insensitivity to the position of "the Other" which her critics accuse her of.

Indeed, Bhikhu Parekh, Homi K. Bhabha, and Nussbaum find her attitude patronizing and disrespectful, both in regard to religion and to her assumption that liberal values are necessarily applicable to all cultures. Okin ably defends herself, but in response, for instance, to Parekh's defense of the limited practice of clitoridectomy by adult women who wish to focus on motherhood or make a religious sacrifice, she suggests that they "go talk to a psychiatrist or marriage counselor."

One statement which Okin makes toward the end of her essay had a seismic impact on many of her respondents:

Indeed, [some women] *might* be much better off if the culture into which they were born were either to become extinct (so that its members would become integrated into the less sexist surrounding culture) or, preferably, to be encouraged to alter itself so as to reinforce the equality of women....”

Honig, Abdullahi An-Na‘im, and Joseph Raz all registered shock at such a suggestion. Okin, in her reply, explains that, “whether their culture stays the same, changes, or becomes extinct in a particular context because its members assimilate, more or less slowly, and wholly or partially, into one of the alternative cultures available, ... is the kind of “becom[ing] extinct” I had in mind.” Yes, well, that was not very clear and, sympathetic as one may be to her position, expecting us to read her mind is rather a tall order.

Finally, Okin takes Will Kymlicka to task for his view that only those groups which are internally liberal can be granted special rights, claiming that while he considers the civil and political domains of girls’ and women’s lives, he disregards the domestic domain in which they are universally subjected to sex discrimination. Thus, concludes Okin, no existing culture could meet his criterion of internal liberalism. Kymlicka, in response, outlines what he sees as “internal restrictions,” those restrictions within a group which limit the rights of individual members, and “external protections,” measures which protect minorities from being swallowed up by majority groups. The domestic domain would, he explains, fall within the category of “internal restrictions.” This misunderstanding clarified, he asserts his basic agreement with Okin who sums up by acknowledging a degree of shared concern, but contending that “he tends to prioritize cultural group rights and I... prioritize women’s equality.”

The issues discussed in *Is*

Multiculturalism Bad for Women? are diverse and immensely complex, and it would be unreasonable to expect definitive answers to questions on which so many distinguished thinkers are at odds with one another. What we do have is a wealth of provocative arguments laid out before us, so that we may briefly sample some or chew for a while on others. This review necessarily touches on only a few of the main issues and authors who offer us their opinions. But there is something to satisfy every appetite.

EMIGRE FEMINISM: TRANSNATIONAL PERSPECTIVES

Alena Heitlinger, Ed. Toronto:
University of Toronto Press, 1999.

BY RENUKA
SOOKNANAN

Emigre Feminism: Transnational Perspectives brings together a wide range of new theoretical work on the question of exile. The authors in this collection detail the urgency of positioning exile as part of a necessary grammar for feminist discourse. The interesting “nomadic” grove which is palpable in this book reads emigre as having been fundamentally excluded from the cannon of Western feminist traditions. *Emigre Feminism* seeks to challenge the singularity and often myopic delay of cultural, national and everyday hegemonies whilst exploring the “in-between” experience and sensibilities of those exiled. The authors show us that the

study of emigration moves beyond the latent and uni-directional confines of national patriarchal narratives such that democracy, communism, and apartheid are made more complex. Attention to this complexity is a clear indication of the many ways in which the address of gender is necessarily expedient; *Emigre Feminism* stands as incisive, contemporary commentary on the social conditions women as exiled have endured as diasporic actors.

This collection is the result of a conference on emigre feminism which was held in 1996 at Trent University, Ontario, Canada. The book features the work of thirteen women who lend their personal, academic, and activist knowledge(s) of living loss, anguish, and certain trauma—alongside a range of other physical, temporal, and spatial relations—within the borderlines of hybridity, otherness, displacement, and conditional belonging. And while it has been argued that wholly psychoanalytic readings of exile produce tropic erasures of women, mourning, melancholia, and death remain constant, “real” and endemic of exile. The emigre accounting levelled in this book is a constant reminder that we have only begun to scratch the epidermic tissue of exile. What has been revealed thus far tells the story of other kinds of surfacing to come.

As a way to expand and deepen its categorical parameters, the very definition of exile comes under contestation in *Emigre Feminism*. Emigre ruminations bring decidedly poignant readings to bear on the term in order to elide easy attempts at definition. The various approaches employed in this task show that conceptual ruptures are important in making visible the often invisible relations of gender, sexuality, “race,” religion, politics, region, nation, and so on which are integral in any narrative concerning exile. In *Emigre Feminism*, narrow conceptions of exile are problematized by each contributor as they speak to the specific