As to paternalism, we are rightly reminded in this work on Sartre that it is a form of bad faith, and that, if it is true that relations are often conflictual, there is also the possibility of positive reciprocity and friendship among human beings. The later Sartre of the interviews with Benny Lévy, published with the title *Hope Now* (1996), clearly put into relief the "conversion" Sartre went through in old age. This "conversion" indicates how much his previous theories were the result of a one-sided understanding of the human condition and situation. Many intellectuals reacted negatively to these interviews and dismissed them as a sign of senility; they did not recognize in them "their" Sartre, yet the interviews show a philosopher who had the courage to go further to explore additional dimensions of human comportment.

To conclude, it must be said that, in this work dedicated to Sartre, he is absolved from the worst accusations that a feminist philosophy can make to a thinker. Sartre was not a misogynist, and even though his perspective was mainly masculine in character, he left ample room for women to consider their situations and historical circumstances, just as did Simone de Beauvoir, "the mother of us all," as she is called in this collection of essays (229). Thanks to her, and indirectly to Sartre, feminism has advanced to the extent that we know now.

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Is Multiculturalism Bad for Women? By SUSAN MOLLER OKIN. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1999.

Cynthia Kaufman

Should we ask if Multiculturalism is bad for women?

I first agreed to review the book *Is Multiculturalism Bad for Women?* because I found the title so outrageous. It struck me as a profoundly counterproductive

way to pose some politically hot and philosophically complex issues. When I received the book in the mail and began to read it I became more sympathetic to the project. The book purports to examine issues such as female circumcision and polygamy, and to ask if calls for multiculturalism require assent to these practices.

I have taught Women's Studies for many years, and have always found discussions of these sorts of practices to be challenging (even the choice of what to call them makes a political statement). The relativist and anti-racist in me says that it is not up to me to decide on the practices of other people, and that practices cannot be decided without some knowledge of the cultural context in which they take place. It is very easy for members of dominant cultures to find the practices of subordinate ones to be "barbaric." Still, some practices, such as radical infibulation, seem ripe for denunciation. Many of my students use human rights discourse to challenge these practices and find my tendency toward relativism to be maddening. I have often wished for help in giving language to the subtle paths through these debates. It would be nice if there were a way to make moral judgments while avoiding imperialist logics.

I was therefore pleased to have a short volume with a wide variety of authors discussing these issues. The book, edited by Joshua Cohen, Matthew Howard, and Martha C. Nussabum, is organized around an essay published by Susan Moller Okin in the *Boston Review*. It includes fifteen short critical essays by authors such as Homi K. Bhabha, Sander Gilman, Katha Pollitt, Saskia Sassen, and Azizah Y. al-Hibri. It closes with a response by Okin. The range of authors responding to Okin is impressive and the format of short responses makes the book very readable and engaging.

In her response to her critics, Okin summarized her original essay as follows:

> I argue that many cultures oppress some of their members, in particular women, and that they are often able to socialize these oppressed members so that they accept, without question, their designated cultural status. I argue, therefore, that in the context of liberal states, when cultural or religious groups claim special rights—whether to be exercised by them together as a group or individually as members of that group—attention should be paid to the status of women within the culture or religion. This means that it is not enough for those representing the liberal state simply to listen to the requests of self-styled group leaders. They must inquire into the point of view of the women, and to take especially seriously the perspective of the younger women. (1999, 117)

Okin's argument is framed as a response to the work Will Kymlicka has done, which argues for a limited form of "cultural rights." She summarized his position as the claim that, "[b]ecause societal cultures play so pervasive and

fundamental a role in the lives of their members, and because such cultures are threatened with extinction, minority cultures should be protected by special rights" (1999, 11). Kymlicka argues that this protection should be limited only to cultures that are "internally liberal." In other words, he does not support granting "special rights" to cultures that oppress their members.

Okin's main critique of Kymlicka is that she believes that attempts to legally protect a culture may make that culture stronger, and it might be that the culture is oppressive in private ways beyond the reach of the state. Okin argues, "In the case of a more patriarchal minority culture, no argument can be made on the basis of self-respect or freedom that the female members of the culture have a clear interest in its preservation. Indeed, they *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 . . ." (23). So Okin is primarily arguing that the state should not act to preserve cultures that contain patriarchal practices.

A curious aspect of the book is the relationship between the narrow discussion of whether cultures should be allowed to have "special rights"—such as a right to kill a woman for adultery, or to practice polygamy in the United States—and a more broad discussion of the relationship between feminism and cultural pluralism. The position, put forward by both Kymlicka and Okin, that Western states should not grant members of minority cultures rights to engage in practices that are otherwise illegal and that are seen by feminists in that Western state as oppressive, does not seem problematic.

But on a broader level, I find Okin's position to be quite irresponsible. Okin did not title her original essay "Are Culture-Based Special Rights Good for Women," nor did the editors of the book insist on a more narrow title. So as it is, the book purports to be about a general conflict between feminism and respect for cultural difference. Indeed, Katha Pollitt in her positive response to Okin says that it should be obvious by now that multiculturalism is in conflict with feminism.

In the United States, anti-racist forces have been working for years to transform the dominant culture of feminist academia and the women's movement. At this point so many people's lives have been devoted to building better relationships across racial lines that it is incredible that an experienced feminist would casually tromp on that ground. To argue that feminism is not compatible with multiculturalism and to claim that it is good for women of minority cultures in Western societies that their cultures become extinct is surprisingly insensitive.

Many of Okin's critics raise fine points against her argument. One particularly interesting line of inquiry wonders if liberalism (the philosophy that Okin advocates) is compatible with feminism. Bonnie Honig writes, "Okin assumes that Western liberal regimes are simply and plainly 'less patriarchal'

than other regimes, rather than differently so" (38). Honig points out that Western women are isolated from one another in ways they are not in many other cultures, and she reminds us that the extreme individualism of liberal societies often ends up forcing women to care for children without any means of support (38–39). Does this mean that women from non-Western cultures should advocate for the elimination of Western liberalism?

Several of Okin's critics point out that attempts to "exterminate" or suppress subordinate cultures usually end up fostering conservative backlash, so that attempts by Western women to "free" their sisters in ways not respectful of their cultures end up making the situation worse by forcing a choice between one's culture or one's gender. Given that many of the people Okin is interested in helping live in racist Western societies or in nations dominated by Western neocolonialism, this ends up not really being a serious choice. In response to the anti-Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) movement, feminists in countries where female circumcision is practiced have pointed out that supporting indigenous efforts to transform local practices such as FGM is more productive than attempting to abolish them in ways that don't show respect for local cultures.

That Western feminists continue to frame questions of cultural pluralism in ways that counter-pose a modern West to a backward set of "others" speaks of something deeper than mere analytical disagreements. In her now famous essay "Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses," Chandra Talpade Mohanty pointed out that Western feminists' condemnation of the practices of other cultures often end up doing more to consolidate a sense of themselves as civilized and superior than it does to improve the lives of women outside the West.

Several of Okin's critics helpfully point out that the pursuit of women's rights needs to be embedded in a wider pursuit of human rights. They further argue that in this pursuit, when cultural and gender rights come into conflict, much sensitivity and careful balancing is necessary (61). Thus, Abdullahi An-Na'im writes that "in seeking to eliminate discrimination on the grounds of sex, one should avoid encouraging discrimination on the grounds of race, religion, language, or national origin" (60).

Most of these authors argue for a position that exists somewhere in between the denunciation of practices that Westerners find problematic on decontextualized Western philosophical grounds and the acceptance of a relativism that finds all practices to be uncriticizable. Instead, they argue that sensitivity to context is crucial and that cautious attention needs to be paid to the imperialist baggage of the tools used and to the real possibilities of nationalist backlash.

Okin responds to these critics by saying that of course she is interested in protecting human rights more broadly, and that she agrees that Western societies have forms of sexism that need to be challenged. In response to the hard questions about encouraging women in non-Western cultures to find their

own paths to feminism Okin's response is surprisingly naive and uninflected by an awareness of the arguments of authors such as Mohanty, and indeed, her critics in the book.

She quotes an unnamed "Indonesian Muslim woman" she met at a conference who responded to claims that women in non-Western societies might work for their own freedom as saying, "How can they hope to succeed? There are more than twenty million illiterate women in Indonesia, and they know their rights: they know that if they do not obey their husbands, they will go to hell" (123). So, it seems that for Okin, since they cannot liberate themselves, we must liberate them by bringing them into Western liberalism.

Okin's article is clear and well argued. Many of her respondents make excellent arguments that raise important broad concerns. If you are sympathetic to Okin's argument you will probably like the book and find its debate format useful. If you are not sympathetic, you are likely to find the way the debate switches from a narrow concern with "special rights" to broader issues to be frustrating. You will probably also be disappointed by the breeziness of Okin's response to her critics.

While I found much of the discussion to be interesting, I would not use this book in my classes because of its lack of detail and cultural context and because of its title. It seems quite inflammatory and counterproductive to my work in fostering multicultural anti-racist feminist practices to have my students walk around with a book asking so flatly if this is possible. And, at this point in time, the discussions we need on this topic need to begin from a more nuanced and respectful place. I can't imagine asking my students to condemn or support practices they aren't well informed about, and the book does nothing to offer information or context beyond what one finds in newspaper articles.

Bringing this book into the classroom is likely to reproduce the view that feminism is a white middle-class practice and that it is somehow problematic to be a feminist of color. Given all of the good work that has been done to get us past that impasse, it is crucial that discussion of practices Westerners find problematic take place in a debate centered in an anti-racist framework. Otherwise, we will continue to develop feminism in ways that are not helpful to the majority of the world's women.

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