

Multiculturalism Without Culture. By Anne Phillips.
Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007. 216p. \$29.95.

Justice, Gender, and the Politics of Multiculturalism.
By Sarah Song. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007. 212p.
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— Frank Lovett, *Washington University in St. Louis*

These latest contributions to the multiculturalism literature have much to recommend them, and—in light of their many affinities—they are particularly rewarding to read as a pair. Both Sarah Song and Anne Phillips start with the same preoccupation, namely, the apparent tension between the importance of respecting cultural diversity on the one hand, and the feminist project of achieving gender equality, on the other. Both are absolutely committed to the latter, of course, but both are also concerned that the feminist backlash against multiculturalism—posed most forcefully and famously by Susan Moller Okin—might have been carried too far. Accordingly, both aim to recover and reconstruct what is worthwhile from the multiculturalism program in a manner that can be reconciled with a commitment to gender equality.

Nor do their affinities end here. Both authors further argue that feminism and multiculturalism can be reconciled by challenging what might be called “the assumption of cultural solidity.” Cultures might be thought relatively solid along several dimensions: first, in terms of their being primordial and unchanging; second, in terms of their being homogenous and free from internal dissent; third, in terms of their determining and explaining the behavior of their members; and fourth, in terms of their having stable and well-defined memberships. Rejecting this notion of cultural solidity along some or all of these dimensions (Song’s critical focus is on the first and second, while Phillips attacks mainly the second and third) has become something of a catechism in the multiculturalism literature; that said, having dutifully recited the formula, few actually do anything about it. Song and Phillips are thus to be warmly commended for actually trying to work out the implications of moving beyond the solidity of cultures.

In Chapter 2 of *Justice, Gender, and the Politics of Multiculturalism*, Song lays out her critique of the cultural solidity view, and presents an alternative “constructivist account” of culture. On the constructivist account, we should direct our “attention to the politics of cultural construction, change, and maintenance” (p. 35). Having done this, she argues, we will discover that, far from being primordially fixed and internally homogenous, cultures are constantly evolving through a process of internal debate and contestation—often in complex interaction with the workings of the majority culture. Here, Song is undoubtedly correct, though the fact that most multiculturalists would profess to agree suggests that replacing

the solidity view with the constructivist view might not transform the debate as much as one would hope.

In Chapter 3, Song presents her account of “rights-respecting accommodationism.” She argues that on straightforward egalitarian grounds, special cultural accommodation might be required in cases where there is discrimination against persons on the basis of their cultural membership, where past injustices persist in disadvantaging cultural groups today, and where the state unavoidably disadvantages or marginalizes minority cultures, for example, by conducting its business in the majority language. She argues that “differential treatment through a range of accommodations is sometimes required to treat members of minority cultural groups with equal respect” (p. 41). Fair enough, but is this really the issue? If one is an egalitarian, then reducing discrimination, providing multilingual ballots, and so on is not really a matter of cultural accommodation so much as it is of remaining consistent with one’s own doctrine. The real challenge arises when the demands of equal justice cut *against* the demands for special accommodation. Consider the practice of polygamy, for example. Here, there may be a conflict between giving equal respect to polygamous and nonpolygamous cultures (for example, in the provision of survivor benefits) and ensuring the equality of individual women and men within both.

Song’s strategy for addressing such dilemmas is laid out formally in Chapter 3 and developed substantively through a set of case studies in Chapters 4 through 6, which discuss the cultural defense in criminal law, tribal sovereignty of the Santa Clara Pueblo, and polygamy in America, respectively. She argues for a “two-part inquiry” (p. 67 ff.) in which we investigate, first, the burden that a law or policy would impose on a minority culture, and second, the strength of the public rationale for that law or policy. The relative weights of these two considerations must then be balanced against each other in settling on an appropriate outcome. Both stages of inquiry must proceed through processes of deliberation. With respect to the first, it is important to attend to the voices of vulnerable subgroups within cultural minorities in assessing the burden imposed by a proposed law or policy, since they might not share the views expressed by the opinion elites in their culture. With respect to the second, it is important that public rationale for the proposed law or policy be expressed in terms that can be understood and appreciated by both parties. This “semicontextual” (p. 8) approach is both the strength and weakness of Song’s book. We may heartily endorse the deliberative investigations she proposes, yet nevertheless be disappointed to find in the end that there is, on her view, no general and principled solution to such dilemmas.

As suggested by the title *Multiculturalism Without Culture*, Phillips starts down the same path as Song, but goes further in her critique of the cultural solidity view. The

main thrust of Phillips's argument, developed especially in Chapters 1 and 2, is that the idea of culture is most often deployed to explain the behavior of others (usually non-Westerners), when we (usually Westerners) cannot understand that behavior on our own terms. "They do that because of their culture" is rarely, if ever, a sound causal explanation, and, what is worse, the common tendency to deploy the idea of culture in this way has two pernicious consequences, she argues. First, it conveys the impression that the members of a given culture act under a sort of compulsion—that they cannot help but act as their culture dictates—when, in fact, participation in cultural practices is often an expression of human agency. Second, and following on this, it obscures the existence of debate and contestation within cultures by assuming that all members of a given culture must act under the same compulsion.

Phillips thus proposes that we drop the idea of culture, or at any rate the idea of culture as itself a sort of causal force in the world. The remaining four chapters explore what a politics of multiculturalism would look like if we adopted this proposal: Chapter 3 focuses on the cultural defense in American law; Chapter 4 on the various efforts to ban cultural practices that seem oppressive to women (wearing headscarves, forced marriage, sex trafficking, and so forth); and Chapters 5 and 6 on the value of exit and voice, respectively, as protections against in-group oppression. Somewhat surprisingly, she argues, "refusing the determinist understanding of culture . . . will sometimes commit us to policies that are more multicultural rather than less" (p. 101). How might this be? Roughly speaking, the thought is that if we take people's participation in cultural practices as an expression of their personal agency, then we might be less inclined to interfere with those practices.

Suppose, for example, that we hold the deterministic view with respect to the wearing of headscarves in minority Muslim communities. "When culture is taken as something that dictates what girls and women must do, it becomes that much easier to generalize from evidence that some girls and women are being coerced to the conclusion that pretty much all of them are" (p. 125). In other words, it is *because* we believe that Muslim women have no choice in the matter that we propose to ban the practice. But this is too crude. Many women participate in this practice voluntarily, and their personal autonomy ought to be respected as much as anyone's.

Suppose we concede this point. Then the whole issue will be "how to differentiate choice from coercion," as she puts it (p. 41). That these are treacherous waters can be illustrated by an example she herself provides, namely, that of Muslim girls who want to wear headscarves at school because their families would not otherwise permit them to obtain a public education (p. 117). Should this count as consensual participation in the practice or not?

Phillips is certainly right that a blanket ban on headscarves is not the ideal solution, but surely that is not the end of the matter. What is important, it seems to me, is not the act of choice as such, but rather the structural features of culture and society that determine, for better or worse, the choice scenarios people ultimately face.

What can we do to ensure that people do not face such dismal choice scenarios? Phillips convincingly argues that promoting a mere right to exit one's cultural group is not sufficient, since this places the burden entirely on the aggrieved individual. Like Song, apparently, she believes that a better strategy is to promote deliberation within cultural groups. But it is hard to be sanguine about the outcome of such deliberations unless we are confident that each of the cultural group's members has had the opportunity to develop authentic points of view, and it seems that we cannot have this confidence unless those groups are already sufficiently liberalized. But this is precisely what some groups resist. Far from having resolved the question, we have merely returned to where we began. At the same time, we are better off for having traversed this difficult terrain with the illumination provided by these fine books.

The Demands of Liberty: Civil Society in France

Since the Revolution. By Pierre Rosanvallon. Translated by Arthur Goldhammer. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007. 368p. \$35.00.
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— Julian Bourg, *Bucknell University*

Pierre Rosanvallon thinks about democracy in historical terms, and his investigations of French political experience since the revolution of 1789 hold lessons for democratic thought and practice outside his native country. His latest book to be translated into English adds to a growing reception of his rewarding thought. Though a jazzed-up retitling of the more homely original (literally translated as *The French Political Model*), this work describes both the strictures placed upon democracy by the French tradition of political centralization and the demands made upon the French state in the name of the free, solidaristic, and mediatory field of civil society.

Rosanvallon sets his sights on the well-known phenomenon of French Jacobinism: the political tradition long understood to have revolved around a strong national state. Beating at the heart of Jacobinism has been a "political culture of generality," which for more than two centuries has marshaled and expressed suspicions about intermediary bodies and civil society. The French Revolution had targeted the Old Regime's corporatist structure and had sought to pave over political and even social differences with a unitary republicanism made manifest by the nascent Jacobin state. The "one" was to trump the "many" in the name of liberty, fraternity, and equality.