European multiculturalism is in crisis. Across the continent right-wing anti-immigrant parties are on the offensive. Understanding the history of European multiculturalism since 1945 and how it arrived at its current precarious state is the goal of Rita Chin’s incisive analysis. The author, born in Malaysia of ethnic Chinese parents, grown up in the United States and now associate professor of History at the University of Michigan, brings a welcome global perspective. While multiculturalism is a loosely defined Anglo-American concept that remains subject to much confusion, Chin follows Stuart Hall in using it as a useful heuristic because of its ability “to force attention on demographic realities” of diversity and “disrupt commonsense categories and assumptions” of homogeneity (p. 22).

Focusing on Great Britain, France, and West Germany, with occasional forays into Switzerland and the Netherlands, Chin argues that the preconditions for European multiculturalism were laid only in the immediate postwar period. The need to rebuild postwar societies forced governments to supplement the labor force with foreigners. In the French, British and Dutch cases, a long history of empire meant that the postwar influx of migrants was indelibly tied with decolonization. In West Germany and Switzerland, on the contrary, there was a conscious policy to bring large numbers of foreign workers from Southern Europe and Turkey. If the British always knew that Commonwealth arrivals were permanent settlers, the French rejected integration in order to keep migrants from settling permanently, while West Germans remained under the illusion that the arrivals were “guest workers” who would return after the end of their contracts.¹

The growing presence of non-Europeans did not attract much attention until the reverberations of the Algerian War in the French mainland and race riots in late fifties Great Britain. Non-European migrants were first classified as prone to crime, inherently violent and unassimilable. The global economic crisis of the 1970s prompted the curbing of labor migration. Yet, only in Great Britain and the Netherlands were there conscious, albeit top-down, efforts to embrace difference and create multicultural societies in response to race rioting and, in the Dutch case, postcolonial terrorism.

In France and West Germany, multiculturalism was deliberately rejected. For the French, multiculturalism threatened national identity. Migrants who stayed were expected to assimilate into French culture, which was defined as an embrace of secular values which was difficult for many Muslims wedded to religious mores. In West Germany, officials refused to consider the possibility of non-European migrants ever becoming Germans and held on to the belief that they would eventually return, even as their numbers grew with the arrival of family members after 1973. Only towards the end of their tenure did Social Democrats flirt with granting foreigners a path to citizenship, but their plans were cut short by their 1982 loss to Christian Democracy.

The largely state-crafted and behind-the-scenes British and Dutch strategy of multiculturalism, and the conscious refusal of it in the French and German cases, was ill-equipped to withstand the wave of right-wing retrenchment that swept Europe in the 1980s. Conservative politicians inflamed popular apprehension towards migrants and wielded it for their political benefit. Paradigmatically, the British Premier Margaret Thatcher invoked a notion of cultural difference that eschewed delegitimized racism but infused culture with immutable characteristics that precluded integration. Seemingly accepting of difference, the French notion of republicanism presented a rigid vision of a monolithic culture in need of protection against alien cultures. In France, the anti-migrant Front National rode the wave of anti-immigrant sentiment to the National Assembly and pushed mainstream parties to the right.

¹See also Rita Chin, The Guest Worker Question in Postwar Germany, Cambridge 2007.
Rushdie affair added fuel to the pyre of cultural immutability. Rushdie’s novel *The Satanic Verses* (1988) offered an image of Prophet Mohammed that was profoundly offensive to pious Muslims. The culture wars around Rushdie’s freedom of expression (and his personal safety following the fatwa issued against him by the Iranian Ayatollah Khomeini) further underscored the image of the intolerant and violent Muslim incompatible with western values of civility and public discourse. The image of Islamic migrants as a cohesive group and no longer as discreet groups of „Pakistanis,” „Turks” or „Algerians,” emerged. In France, the foulard affair of the 1990s was an outgrowth of inflexible notions of „Frenchness” and *laïcité* that denied veiled Muslim women a place in French society. Chin’s comparative approach really shines here, as the convergence between conservatives and leftists to condemn Islamic male chauvinism, which reified notions of Muslim’s cultural immutability and supposed incompatibility with liberalism, was a truly transnational phenomenon.

Chin highlights the role of „secular Muslim women” and feminists, whose championing of secularism and full-throated criticism of Islam – especially so in the case of the Somali-born Dutchwoman Ayaan Hirsi Ali – cast all Muslim migrant women who wore headscarves as failures of integration. Once again, many leftists and feminists joined conservatives in embracing a very particular and limited notion of freedom that privileged choice and expression and that cast Islam as the ultimate Other. The left abandoned its traditional defense of cultural relativism as a riposte against racism and handed control of the narrative to the right. Chin reminds us that not all critiques of multiculturalism were spurious. Minority critics such as the Indian-born British author Kenan Malik critiqued multiculturalism’s underlying premise that human culture is fixed, which in his mind „shared a crucial assumption with its ostensible opposite: the racialist ideologies of the right” (p. 270).

By 2010/11, the leaders of Europe’s most powerful countries converged in their rejection of multiculturalism, posited it as incompatible with liberalism, and forcefully demanded one-way integration. For Chin, however, the question of multiculturalism is indelibly tied with democracy’s ability to evolve in the face of changed circumstances. Europe is becoming more, not less, multietnic by the day; a situation incompatible with the fact that „immigrants are effectively written out of the social body” by politicians and citizens still enthused with dreams of cultural (and racial) homogeneity (p. 305). This may be too strong of a statement given the noteworthy transformation of German nationality law in 2000, and the statements of German politicians Wolfgang Schäuble, Christian Wulff, and Chancellor Angela Merkel that „Islam belongs to Germany.”

One conceptual criticism that can be leveled is that Chin treats the debate of multiculturalism in Europe as a purely intra-European affair. That unrest and political upheaval in the Global South might have influenced European debates is only taken into account in the case of violent decolonization. Yet, the failure of the grand modernization projects for the „Third World” of the 1950s–60s, Cold War interventionism, and political activism in migrant communities all had an important impact on domestic debates about migration and security. The uncomfortable discussion on anti-Zionism and antisemitism, which grew with the background of the Israeli/Palestinian conflict, is not broached either. More broadly, Chin’s criticism of the leftist turn toward a minimalist notion of „freedom” sounds remarkably close to the historiography on the rise of human rights as a min-

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imalist project of salvation in the 1970s. How might the rise of a culture of humanitarianism that especially singled out the Global South for abuses have influenced national debates about migrants from these countries? These are just some ways in which Rita Chin’s argumentative tour de force might be enhanced. What the book sets out to do, it achieves compellingly while remaining remarkably concise and accessible to the general reader. This is an important book that deserves a wide readership.
