

FOREWORD

By Faisal Kutty

I am honored to provide this foreword for the Law Journal Symposium, “Responses to *Against White Feminism*.” This symposium is based on the book *Against White Feminism: Notes on Disruption* by Rafia Zakaria, which provides a critical analysis of mainstream Western feminism and its limitations in being intersectional, inclusive, and transnational. It is a powerful call to action that demands a shift in the way we view and engage with feminist ideals. Zakaria argues that white feminism has centered the experiences and concerns of upper-class white women and has failed to recognize and address the diverse needs and struggles of women of color and other marginalized groups.

Zakaria’s book provides a much-needed critique of white feminism and its exclusionary practices. She highlights how white feminism has upheld privilege and cultural superiority by speaking over Black and Brown women and perpetuating colonial, patriarchal, and white supremacist ideals. Zakaria’s work follows in the tradition of intersectional feminist forebears like Kimberlé Crenshaw, Adrienne Rich, and Audre Lorde and calls for a reconstruction of feminism that centers women of color and challenges the universalization of white feminist concerns and beliefs.

The central argument of the book is that mainstream feminism is deeply rooted in whiteness and the racial privilege that accompanies it. As a result, white feminists have long been the primary voices and gatekeepers of feminist discourse, shaping the movement’s goals, values, and priorities. This has led to the marginalization and erasure of the experiences, struggles, and voices of women of color, who are often excluded from feminist spaces or forced to conform to white feminist standards. Zakaria argues that this has been an often-deliberate strategy to uphold white supremacy and maintain cultural superiority, even as feminist movements have fought for women’s rights.

The book’s critique is far-reaching and covers a wide range of topics, from the history of colonialism and imperialism to contemporary issues of sexual liberation, the aid industrial complex, and the war on terror. Zakaria shows how white feminists have co-opted the language and values of

feminism to justify their own interests and perpetuate inequality. For example, she highlights the role of white women in the British feminist imperialist savior complex, where they traveled to colonized countries to “civilize” and “save” native women from their “terrible conditions.” In doing so, they often othered, objectified, or exoticized local women and imposed Western feminist values on them, erasing their agency and cultural diversity.

Another important theme of the book is the commodification of feminist ideals, especially sexual liberation, which Zakaria argues has become a “stand-in for total liberation and empowerment.” She critiques the ways in which sex-positive feminism has been used to justify the commodification of sexual identities, leading to the exploitation of women’s bodies and desires. This is especially true for women of color, who are often fetishized and exoticized in mainstream media and popular culture.

Zakaria also takes aim at the aid industrial complex, which she argues has become a vehicle for white feminist agendas to dominate the global South. She critiques the way in which Western neoliberalism and capitalism have transformed women’s empowerment into a “buzzword that could be pinned to numerous motives,” erasing the socio-political and cultural contexts of women’s lives. This has resulted in the failure of many aid projects and initiatives that were meant to empower women, but instead perpetuated harmful stereotypes and cultural imperialism.

The book’s strongest message is its call for a more inclusive, intersectional, and transnational approach to feminism that fully includes women of color and their experiences. Zakaria argues that a reconstruction of feminism is necessary to disrupt the hegemony of white feminism and its complicity with colonialism, patriarchy, and white supremacy. She cites the work of intersectional feminist forebears Kimberlé Crenshaw, Audre Lorde, and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak as examples of feminist thought that has challenged the status quo and values the experiences of marginalized women.

The implications of the book for the feminist movement are profound. It challenges us to rethink the way we approach feminist activism, discourse, and solidarity. It demands that we confront the ways in which our own privilege and biases shape our understanding of feminism and limit our ability to support the struggles of women of color. It also reminds us that feminism cannot be divorced from broader socio-political and cultural contexts and that it must be grounded in the realities and experiences of all women, not just those who have the privilege of being heard.

As the global feminist movement continues to grow and evolve, it is essential to recognize and address the unique experiences and needs of women of color and other marginalized groups. The book argues that we must challenge the dominant narrative of white feminism and work towards a more inclusive and intersectional feminist framework that recognizes and values the diverse experiences and identities of all women.

The Law Journal Symposium is an important platform to continue this conversation and engage with Zakaria's work critically. It is comprised of six articles, each addressing a different aspect of feminism, human rights, and social justice. The first article, co-authored by Professors Nadia Ahmad and Victoria Beatty, challenges the concept of "Climate Chauvinism" and proposes new ways of thinking about loss and damage. The second article, written by Syeda ShahBano Ijaz, explores the impact of white feminism on women of color and questions the notion of "Determining Development." Professor Saba Kareemi situates colonial feminism in Ibn Khaldun's theory of *asabiyyah* in the third article, while Professor Kathleen Cavanaugh examines culture and othering in the human rights project in the fourth article. Professor Samuel Moyn contributes a historical perspective on white feminism in the fifth article, and the final article, written by Dr. Erum Sattar, is a direct response to "Against White Feminism." Overall, the Symposium provides a fresh exploration of feminism, race, and social justice in today's world.

I look forward to reading the various responses and perspectives shared in this symposium and hope that it contributes to a more nuanced and inclusive understanding of feminism.

As we continue to fight for gender equality and justice, we must recognize the diverse needs and experiences of women and work towards a more inclusive and intersectional feminist framework that uplifts all women. Zakaria's work challenges us to examine the ways in which systems of oppression are interconnected and urges white feminists to actively work towards building a more inclusive and intersectional feminist movement. I hope that the responses published in this volume will be a valuable contribution to the ongoing conversation about how we can create a more just and equitable world for all women.