



The relationship between Multiculturalism and Feminism

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Multiculturalism describes the cultural and ethnic diversity of one community. Being defined as such, it deals with theories which aim to support national identity, individual rights, educational and economic conditions and good relations between different ethnic groups in one community.

The main aim of this paper is to explore the different discourses about multiculturalism and feminism and develop a more inclusive and nuanced redefinition of the relationship between multiculturalism and feminism.



Multiculturalism

- ▶ The theories of multiculturalism usually focus on the minority groups in one community i.e., those who have different ethnic background, different religion, social orientation and are very often discriminated in different ways in one community (Triandafyllidou, 2011). Thus, the biggest problem is stereotyping and putting everyone in one basket.
- ▶ According to Kymlicka, one important critique of multiculturalism is that it promotes “essentialism”, reifying the identities and practices of minority groups. (Kymlicka, 2014). He argues that the essentialist critique conflates different issues, jumping from critiques of academic the theories of multiculturalism to critiques of government policies to critiques of everyday street- level discourses of ethnic difference

How bad is Multiculturalism for Women?

- ▶ Although women and minority rights have traditionally been seen as 'progressive' issues, they now seem to be opposites in the political debate. This might imply that women and minority rights are incompatible in some cases. Susan Moller Okin addresses this question in her well-known essay "Is Multiculturalism bad for Women?" (Okin, 1999). She argues that if we agree that women should not be disadvantaged because of their sex, then we should not accept group rights that permit oppressive practices.
- ▶ Both feminism and multiculturalism aim to protect the rights of groups; either women or minority communities.

Some Scholars argued that:

- ▶ Culture and religion are important to many women in the world, but can also be sources of oppression as Okin argues. Despite the fact that this issue is essential to feminism, the debate remains problematic. Not only in academia, but also in the popular media, the relationship between multiculturalism and feminism receives more and more attention and leads to serious clashes between feminists.
- ▶ In posing the question, “Is Multiculturalism Bad for Women?” Susan Moller Okin (1999) 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.


Cultural Identity and Discrimination

- ▶ 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 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.



Multiculturalism vs Feminism

- ▶ An important observation is that multiculturalism and feminism are, in some ways, related struggles: both seek the recognition of difference in the context of norms that are universal in theory, but not in practice. Still, an essential difference remains: the special rights that women claim qua women do not give more powerful women the right to control less powerful women. In contrast, cultural group rights do often (in not-so-obvious ways) reinforce existing hierarchies.
- ▶ But sometimes, we have to ask the question “is multiculturalism actually good for the women in these minorities?” Because many times some of the traditions and values that these minority cultures have may actually be “bad” traditions that are essentially working to perpetuate oppressive way of living for their female members within the community, and therefore inherently harmful to women.

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- ▶ One of the most obvious examples that Okin used was the culture in which women who are raped and then forced to be married to her rapist because her culture says that sexual intercourse is exclusive for only her husband, and strictly interpreting from that line of logic, her rapist, whom she has had intercourse with, even when against her view, is dictated by her culture to be her most rightful husband for life.
 - ▶ Okin argues that it is hurting the women in the process of trying to appear liberal through the looking glass of multiculturalism. Okin's article cites that the only legitimate kind of culture that should be respected should be the culture, which internally incorporates liberal values. In other words, if the culture is internally good and respectful to women, then yes, one should be able to respect that culture.

Conclusions:

- ▶ The intent of having human right legislation is not to harm minority cultures, but to protect all individuals in a particular society regardless of which sub-culture they subscribe themselves to. If a culture justifies abuse or harming other human being, then it is reasonable to argue that that culture has to somehow curd to the majority's value in order to harmoniously co-exist in a long run.
- ▶ Essentially, culture is nothing beneficial to the advancement of the society if it works to discriminate some members and treat them brutally to an end. The problem is if one thinks it is inherently wrong to force the minority to assimilate, proponents of multiculturalism will argue that one is adopting a view of cultural imperialism, harming the freedom to adopt diverse cultural ideas.



Thank you for your attention!

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