

## WOMEN IN POLITICS: IS MULTICULTURALISM BAD FOR WOMEN?

### INTRODUCTION

The ideas of feminism turn out to be one of the most topical issues to discuss for a long period. The concept of feminism is widely spread in different spheres of our every day life: many political, cultural, and even economic aspects need to be taken into consideration. Canada is one of few countries that succeed in their attempt to support gender equality as well as in the attempt to support the ideas of multiculturalism. However, certain tensions still exist and put the connection of feminism and multiculturalism under a question. Susan Moller Okin was one of the first writers who was not afraid to define the relations of multiculturalism and feminism, ask whether multiculturalism could be bad for women – the most provocative question! – and to give nonetheless a provocative answer, calling the concepts of feminism and multiculturalism entirely oppositional. Though “multicultural and feminist psychology, despite considerable shared values and perspectives, have long existed in parallel universes” (Reynolds and Constantine 346), it becomes difficult and even impossible to give one concrete answer to the question concerning the link between multiculturalism and feminism. The ideas of multiculturalism can be hardly regarded as either purely negative or positive for women. The connection between feminism and multiculturalism is evident indeed, and the two different theories that feminism and multiculturalism offer each other’s supplement and promote both negative and positive outcomes, which become crucial for this life.

### GENERAL INFORMATION ABOUT FEMINISM AND MULTICULTURALISM

Feminism is one of the most influential social theories that have specific impact on political and economic basics of the state. At the same time, feminism is a movement

that aims at establishing equal rights for women, basing on women's personal experience, demands, and interests. Feminist political actions help to clear up what may cause inequality, how the existing rights may influence the situation, and why it is so hard to cope with such problems like domestic violence, sexual harassment, and discrimination. The existence of feminism serves as a powerful proof that male superiority becomes more and more evident, and women have to take considerable steps to prove their positions, rights, and interests. "Over the centuries, and in many different countries, women have spoken out for their sex, and articulated, in different ways, their complaints, their needs, and their hopes" (Walters 2). Within a short period of time, the idea of feminism has established certain goals and principles, being labelled as a "male-hater" movement. According to feminists opinion, it is not enough to define women rights, but it is also crucial to respect women's demands and respect ladies. Women social status has already changed; women have finally got a chance to participate in social, political, religious, and economic development and strive for human rights. The above-mentioned merger unites the ideas of feminism to the ones of multiculturalism, that is, the desire to re-organize the levels of the field, where all human beings happen to be found.

It can be assumed that the idea of multiculturalism and the reasons of its restrictive meaning vary in different countries. "Culture is a way of life, a rich and time-worn grammar of human activity, a set of diverse and often conflicting narratives whereby communal (mis)understandings, roles, and responsibilities are negotiated" (Honig 39). The idea of multiculturalism is to promote different cultures existing in the world and to disclose the idea of diversity to the mankind, yet still be able to unite interests and organize communication on the necessary level. However, the varieties of culture may have both negative and positive intentions. For example,

it is possible to accept the ideas of multiculturalism and get a chance to unite people with different positions and attitude to this life, on the one hand. On the other hand, it sometimes becomes difficult to get used to a foreign culture and at the same time keep in mind one's personal interests. It is worth mentioning that each country has its own position to the definition of multiculturalism. One of the best examples of differences in the attitude towards the ideas of the two phenomena may be observed in America and Europe. British and other Europeans admit that multiculturalism is caused "not so much by the emergence of a political movement but by a more fundamental movement of peoples" (Modood 2). In England, the ideas of multiculturalism depend on immigration of people; in Sweden, a low level of inequality plays a very important role; and in Canada, unbelievable mix of races and cultures and constant immigration promote the development of multiculturalism. People's demands are the main motivating power; in addition, the consideration of the demands mentioned above offers different people a possibility to express their true natures. Moreover, the ability to adapt to certain social issues is considered as powerful grounds to support multiculturalism. However, there are still certain opposite factors, which make people doubt about the effectiveness of multiculturalism in all countries. The opponents of multiculturalists admit that multiculturalism leads to the raising of restrictions, inability to get freedom, and failure of democracy. One of the brightest opponents is Susan Moller Okin and her work about the ideas of multiculturalism and feminism. Shedding some light on the situation, one must mark that the problems undermining the core of multiculturalism are connected to feminism. It is high time to discuss how exactly multiculturalism and feminism are related to each other, what are the outcomes of this connection, and whether multiculturalism is really bad for women.

## MULTICULTURALISM AND FEMINISM: BAD OR GOOD FOR WOMEN

Speaking about women and their contribution to the world culture, one must mention that the men's dominance can be traced even in the modern society. As Susan Okin admits, men get too many rights to control women and their styles of life by means of cultural identities. Due to "fairly clear disparities of power between the sexes," as Okin (9) defines it, beliefs of any social group, its culture and practices are determined by men, which show that men's ability to control and improve human rights leads to the development of antifeminist ideas and limitation of women's capacities (Waller and Marcos 29). However, the same idea of multiculturalism may have positive outcomes. For example, one country has the culture and traditions to respect women and even encourage them more than men. With the help of the diversity that is apt to multiculturalism, people all over the whole world might be able to observe how things may change if power is completely allowed to women, partially available to women, or completely forbidden to women. Why not accept the existence of multiculturalism as a chance to evaluate the same concept from different perspectives and foresee possible consequences? Taking into consideration this possibility, the ideas of multiculturalism and feminism have to be regarded as "both contradictory and complementary at the same time" (Reingold and Baratz 54). People have to find more ways to make women and men's rights equal; as a rule, it becomes easier to find out the way on how to deprive a person of something than to provide the same person with the ability to have something for free, become free, or get equal rights. If a person wants to see and realize that multiculturalism is bad for women only, it is easy to find enough grounds to prove it; and if a person wants to believe that multiculturalism is another good chance to protect women and give them one more chance to get out of male shadow.

Why may multiculturalism be bad for women? Okin was eager to underline that the ideas of conflict that exist between multiculturalism and feminism became considerable with time. Multiculturalism promotes certain respect and flexibility of diversities. Many multiculturalists support the idea to break racial and cultural inequalities, help people make their lives easier, and create comfortable conditions. However, the same multiculturalists do not want to pay enough attention to the questions of polygamy that should not allow one man to have more than one wife. Is it fair that multiculturalism supports polygamy and does not consider such necessities of man-and-woman relationships as trust, devotion, and loyalty? Why should a woman suffer because of the ideas of polygamy? The worst point is that the idea of male polygamy becomes more and more insignificant and even acceptable. From this very perspective, multiculturalism can never be good for women, so the thoughts and suggestions of Susan Okin sound rather comprehensible.

However, it would be erroneous to accept multiculturalism as a concept with pure negative impact on women; still, it is necessary to find out the reasons of why it influences positively women, their styles of life, and communication with men.

Okin's view of the interface between feminism and multiculturalism is so focused on the "conflict" generated by the anti-feminist and patriarchal effects of criminal cultural defense that, against her own best advice, she allows herself to produce "monolithic," though gender-differentiated, characteristics of minorities. (Bhabha 79)

The monolithic structure of society, which multiculturalism presupposes, practically means that there will be no conflict between these two concepts; in addition, the offered structure of society will make it possible to evaluate what benefits one can get from the connection of multiculturalism and feminism. First of all, it is necessary

to admit that different cultures demonstrate different approaches to women treatment. While one culture does not want to accept women's rights and abilities, another culture may demonstrate a perfect way on how to respect, appreciate, encourage women on their way to independence, etc. There is no need to use one standard and follow it all the time when changing women's status in the world, since changes are inherent to different spheres of life, human behaviour, and means of communication. Multiculturalism undergoes certain changes all the time and women should not suffer from these changes but use them to their own benefit.

Multiculturalism allows people with different cultural backgrounds to share their traditions; therefore, it may be a good chance to improve one culture by means of another, which means that women have all chances to break the existed inequality and get the same to men's rights.

#### CONCLUSION

In general, it becomes very difficult to come to one conclusion and give a certain answer to the question concerning the influence of multiculturalism on women. The situation of women differs considerably from one country to another country. This is why the representatives of different cultures truly believe that the grounds of multiculturalism will help them improve their own culture, be involved into the ideas of other cultures, and face fewer problems while communicating with the representatives of opposite cultures. However, it is also necessary to consider the negative influence of different cultures on the position of women in society. Susan Okin demonstrated the way in which one country may have a negative impact on another country. It is obligatory to define that multiculturalism doubtlessly results in negative effects for women. A lot, however, depends on people's attitude to the

problem of feminism and multiculturalism. Hence, if a person wants to use multiculturalism as one more means to enlarge his/her knowledge and to achieve success in certain sphere, the attempts will be positive, and multiculturalism will have the positive impact on various aspects of women's life.

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