

Example of feminism and 'respect for culture' essay

[Parts of the World](#), [European Union](#)



The problem is the conflict between feminism and 'respect for culture'. There are different opinions on how it should be resolved. There is also a "misunderstanding of the nature of cultures" (Saul 291). This problem occurs when Western feminists rise against what they think is abuse of women who live in non-Western countries. Some of these countries do practice rituals that are bad for the health of women, but in other cases there is cultural relativism which means that what is not acceptable in one culture is encouraged in another. The reasons for this are various and there have also been cases of misuse of tradition, such as murders in the name of culture. The first argument is that there should be interference of Western people in the traditional policies of non-Westerns. Feminists believe that they have the right and moral duty to oppose to the customs that can harm the health of women. However, Western feminists, usually white and middle-class, have been focusing mostly on problems they believed that the women from other cultures also had. There is a question if it is possible to respect other cultures and be a feminist. In non-Western cultures most issues involve women and their rights. Western feminists cannot understand the Muslim women who wear veils or some other customs in India, such as sati, burning the widows with their husbands' at their funerals and dowry murder. There is also the case of female genital mutilation (FGM) which has several forms. Its function is to deprive women of sexual pleasure and it is a tradition in some cultures. There have been cases of severe punishment of girls and women who disobeyed some rules. The one case that cannot be justified is when the religious police let fifteen girls die in a fire in a school in Saudi Arabia because they didn't wear abayas at the time.

The second argument is that Westerners cannot understand that there is cultural diversity and that they should leave the natural order of things. In some cases, they can even make things worse. The non-Westerners know much about the Western civilizations and they see it as essentially different than their cultures. The Westerns, on the other hand, know only very little about other cultures. All of these cultures are prone to change during time and there is no such thing as a monolithic culture. That is the first thing that should be acknowledged when encountering a new culture. Also, there have been cases that Westerners were judging veiling as well as seclusion and discouraging female education. In other cases their influence put women in danger. Such an example is when authorities in Iran forbade veiling in 1936 which led to women being ashamed to go out of their homes leaving them more secluded than ever. Outsiders make errors in judgment both because of bas analysis as well as due to inadequate experience with the insiders. There are also different subgroups within the same cultural group.

I am on the side of Western interference because there are many cases where the lives of non-Western women are endangered in the name of tradition and religion. There is nothing more sacred than the human life. The biggest discrepancy between Western and non-Western cultures is the role of women. Women are equal to men in Western countries and in non-Western, they make a lot of sacrifice for men. In the case when their husbands die, they could also die. The existence of dowry is misused in Hindu tradition. Some men kill their wives and make it look like kitchen accidents. That is difficult to prove because there is a lot of cooking equipment which is not safe and accidents can happen easily. However, this

is equal to domestic violence in Western cultures.

I think that the argument on my side is a good one because women should be given more rights and the freedom of choice. There is a hypocrisy that women are deprived of earthly pleasures because they serve as examples whereas men are weak and cannot have control over themselves. This is a belief that is shared by Javanese people. Women are used to this order of things. People who have been oppressed their whole lives and brought up that way, are not aware that they have any other rights than those imposed on them.

The other argument also has some good points. The main is that Western nations have a history of trying to “impose their own cultural standards on others” (Saul 264). They use these cultural standards for the purposes of colonization. “Colonizing powers have used women’s liberation as a justification for their actions” (Saul 269). Another important argument is that Westerners should let other cultures exist in any form they prefer as long as there are no lives that are put in danger because of the tradition. Westerners also need to realize that they need more insight if they really want to change something.

There is the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and it was written by a committee whose influential members were Filipino, Indian, Chilean and Chinese. That means that non-Western cultures realize that there is a need for such a document. They do not encourage the bad treatment of women. I would respond to the argument on the other side by mentioning that despite of cultural relativism, some standards should exist globally. This is the era of globalization and although it has advantages as well as

disadvantages, women should have rights in all cultures. They are human beings equal to men and that is why they deserve equal treatment in all cultures. It is obvious that they can't be treated exactly the same in Western and non-Western cultures, but at least, they shouldn't have to worry about their lives, health and rights for education. That is opposed to some non-Western traditions and the feminists should work to improve the rights of women globally.

Works cited

Saul, Jennifer. *Feminism: Issues and Arguments*. Oxford: OUP Oxford, 2003.

Print