Anita Dremel[12]

THE SPECTRES OF FEMINISM AND MULTICULTURALISM

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Abstract

Through a critical analysis of feminist and multicultural discourses, this paper aims to analyse the tensions between universal ethical demands and the recognition of cultural specificity. Feminism and multiculturalism are here understood as belonging to leading discourses on minority rights. However, the myriad positions that can be taken within each of these contingent socio-political constructions contribute to their spectre-like quality. The research method used in this study synthesizes theoretical insights and engages with contemporary debates revolving around inter alia postcolonial feminism and liberal arguments for and against multiculturalism, thus contributing to a deeper understanding of the complexities inherent in navigating the realms of gender and diverse strategies to cope with cultural diversity. The empirical material includes case studies from seminal literature on the subject (by Kymlicka, Barry, Bhabha, Okin, Kuriyama, Hall, and others) as well as examples from the Croatian context, which are analysed through the lens of tensions and productive intersections between feminism and multiculturalism, which both seek recognition of difference in the context of norms that are universal in theory but not in practice. Gender equality namely often clashes with the interest of minority cultures and individual rights, as the fundamental position of the feminist movement cannot be sacrificed in the name of group rights, which can reinforce existing hierarchies. The perspective and analytical strategy applied in this paper result in revealing a gradual shift from an obvious conflict of interests between feminism and multiculturalism, towards a more nuanced and complex understanding of the meaning and purpose of the ethical norms they advocate in research, social and cultural policy, international relations and everyday lives.

Keywords: cultural specificity, feminism, liberalism, multiculturalism, universal ethical norms

12 Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences in Osijek, Croatia, dremel@ffos.hr

Introduction

The question of the relationship between feminism and multiculturalism has become one of the key topics within cultural sociology, particularly given the growing diversity of modern societies. Feminism advocates for gender equality and the empowerment of women, while multiculturalism strives to recognize and protect cultural diversity. However, these two ideologies sometimes come into conflict, especially when cultural practices within minority communities challenge women's rights (cf. Okin, 1999; Volpp, 2001).

Through an in-depth critical examination of feminist and multicultural theory discourses, this paper aims to explore the tensions between universal ethical standards and the recognition of cultural specificity. Feminism and multiculturalism are approached as prominent discourses within the field of minority rights, with awareness of great variety within them. The varied positions that can be assumed within these socio-political constructs contribute to their elusive nature. Feminism is not a unitary concept (cf. hooks, 2000) but shares a common interest in that it can be seen as a socio-political movement that advocates for gender equality and the empowerment of women and other marginalized groups. Multiculturalism is a philosophical and political approach that promotes the coexistence of diverse cultures within a society, emphasizing the recognition, respect, or celebration of differences (Taylor, 1994). Feminist universalism argues that certain rights and values, such as gender equality, should apply universally, transcending cultural differences. However, multiculturalism emphasizes cultural relativism, suggesting that concepts of equality and justice vary between cultures and should be understood within specific cultural contexts. This dichotomy fuels debates about the universality of feminist principles and the need to respect cultural autonomy.

Early feminist movements were predominantly represented by middle-class white women, marginalizing the experiences of women from diverse cultural backgrounds (Mohanty, 1984). Critics argue that mainstream feminism often overlooks the unique challenges faced by non- white women, LGBTQ+ individuals, immigrant women, and other marginalized groups. This tendency toward exclusion has led to debates about whose voices are prioritized within feminist discourse and activism.

Multiculturalism offers a platform to address the limitations of mainstream feminism (cf. Volpp, 2001). It emphasizes the importance of intersectionality, acknowledging that individuals possess multiple identities shaped by factors such as race, ethnicity, religion, sexuality, and socioeconomic status. By recognizing and valuing different perspectives, multiculturalism aims to enrich feminist discourse and foster inclusivity. Negotiations between human rights and cultural practices may conflict with feminist ideals, such as traditional gender roles, arranged marriages, or religious dress codes. Striking a balance between respecting cultural diversity and promoting gender equality requires nuanced approaches. Collaborative efforts include engaging communities in dialogue, promoting education and awareness, and supporting initiatives that challenge harmful practices while preserving cultural identity.

According to Stuart Hall, the 'multicultural question' addresses 'how we are to envisage the futures of those many different societies now composed of peoples from very different backgrounds, cultures, contexts, experiences and positions in the ranking order of the world; societies where difference refuses to disappear' (Hall, 2000, 209). Multiculturalism as a concept always intersects with the politics of inclusion and exclusion of multiple cultural forms within nation-states. Stuart Hall distinguishes the concept of 'the multicultural' as expressed by the adjective 'multicultural' from that of 'multiculturalism' as a noun. The term multicultural as adjective addresses problems of society and of governance which stem from different cultural communities coexisting within the same nation-state while at the same time retaining and protecting something of their 'original' culture and identities. In contrast, 'multiculturalism', as a noun, refers to 'strategies and policies adopted to govern or manage the problems of diversity and multiplicity which multi-cultural societies throw up' (Hall, 2000, 209). Thus, 'the multicultural' is a theoretical and contested discourse whereas 'multiculturalism' is a governing policy of specific nation-states.

It is the purpose of this article to sketch the various relations of multiculturalism to feminist theory, their tensions and productive intersections, by offering an overview of some relevant publications on the subject during the last decade. This general overview will show a gradual shift from an obvious conflict of interests between feminism, intended as a Western liberal project, and multiculturalism, towards a more nuanced and complex understanding of multicultural feminism intended not as a self-contained

and descriptive concept, but as an analytical and discriminatory tool to be applied within a transnational perspective.

The used research methodology synthesizes theoretical insights and engages with contemporary debates, including postcolonial feminism and liberal and conservative arguments for and against multiculturalism, thus contributing to a deeper understanding of the complexities inherent in gender and the diverse strategies for addressing cultural diversity. The empirical material encompasses case studies from seminal literature (e.g., Bhabha, Okin) alongside examples from the Croatian context. These are analyzed through the lens of tensions and productive intersections between feminism and multiculturalism, both of which seek recognition of difference within norms that are theoretically universal but practically uneven. Gender equality frequently clashes with the interests of minority cultures and individual rights, as the core stance of the feminist movement cannot be compromised in favour of group rights that may reinforce existing hierarchies.

The perspective and analytical approach taken in this paper reveal a gradual shift from a straightforward conflict of interests between feminism and multiculturalism to a more nuanced and complex understanding of the ethical norms they advocate in research, social and cultural policy, international relations, and daily life.

A note on the title, why spectres? There is a reference to how Marx is theorized by Derrida (2002), who wishes to discuss the lingering presence of unresolved or contested ideas, with the "spectre" metaphor embodying the notion of ideas that haunt contemporary thought—concepts that are neither fully present nor entirely absent but continue to exert an influence. Just as Marxism haunts political and economic structures with the question of equity and power, feminism and multiculturalism cast shadows on current debates around identity, justice, and inclusivity. In this context, the spectres of feminism are seen as reminders of the continuous struggle for gender equality and the ways in which patriarchal norms still permeate societal structures. Similarly, the spectres of multiculturalism symbolize the ongoing challenge of accommodating diverse cultural identities within frameworks that often favour dominant norms. Both concepts may seem at times elusive or fragmented—shaping policies and public discourse, yet not fully actualized in practice.

The metaphor points to the tensions that arise when the universal ideals of feminism (such as gender equality) intersect with the particularist nature of multiculturalism (which seeks to protect and celebrate distinct cultural identities). These "spectres" are present as reminders that while these movements aim for justice and inclusivity, they sometimes conflict or lead to difficult questions about whose rights take precedence and how universal ethical standards should be applied across different cultural contexts.

Thus, by invoking Derrida's spectres, the article could emphasize that feminism and multiculturalism are not merely historical movements but active, albeit unsettled, presences that continue to influence and shape contemporary debates. They remind us of the unfinished work in negotiating the intersections between gender, culture, and rights within contemporary societies.

Multiculturalism: varieties and critiques

Multiculturalism in its milder form involves promoting dialogue between cultures, encouraging cultural sensitivity, and fostering awareness of other cultures, often referred to as interculturalism (Meer and Modood, 2012). In its stronger form, multiculturalism advocates for the active protection and encouragement of minority cultures (Parekh, 2000). It posits that no culture is more significant than another and that each individual needs their culture as a framework for life. This form of multiculturalism asserts collective rights, with cultures enjoying special protection from the state, which can include exemptions from certain laws.

A postmodern society marks the end of grand ideologies and denies any ideology or culture the right to universal validity (Rorty, 1989). The relativization of knowledge and the global awareness of the relativity of one's values and norms have contributed to the rise of multiculturalism.

To discuss conservative and liberal view of multiculturalism we can ask (cf. Modood, 2007): Why is the wearing of coverings banned in public spaces in many countries? Why do Christian conservatives and nationalists oppose Muslim religious attire? Conservatives advocate for assimilation, believing that the nation-state protects only the majority culture—the majority culture is perceived as the "owner" of the state. Conservatives equate the political and cultural community, asserting that only one

(public) culture should exist in a state. Liberals seek assimilation based on the belief that the state must be culturally neutral. In other words, the political community in which individuals participate as equals is paramount. The official language is maintained for functionality rather than as a means of protecting the majority culture and only individual rights are recognized.

The liberal version of multiculturalism is most notably championed by Will Kymlicka (1995), who seeks to demonstrate that multiculturalism is compatible with individual rights and that the protection of individual rights requires multiculturalism. This perspective allows members of minority cultures to have an equal range of life choices compared to members of the majority culture. Kymlicka bases his argument on the fundamental liberal idea that self-respect is a primary good. Self-respect is acquired through the ability to choose one's values and way of life. Only values and ways of life that have been chosen after considering various alternatives can instil confidence in having made the right choice. Without state encouragement and protection, minority cultures would likely face extinction. For instance, minority languages and literature would probably disappear. Culture provides the context for choice—without protecting different cultures, choices become limited. Members of minority cultures would only have formal rights to practice their culture without state protection, not substantive ones. This undermines the principle of equality. Exemptions from laws may be justified when they conflict with the cultural practices of minority groups. The underlying idea is that cultural belonging is not a choice, and factors that are not chosen should not restrict one's life choices. For example, in Britain, Sikhs are granted an exemption from the law requiring protective helmets. If such laws were enforced, Sikhs would be unable to work in construction, ride motorcycles, etc., limiting their life opportunities due to their cultural identity, which is inherited and not chosen.

The protection of collective cultural rights as discussed by Kymlicka (1995) can be pursued through internal restrictions and external protections. Internal restrictions involve limiting individual choices, such as prohibiting girls from continuing their education. Most liberals find internal restrictions unacceptable. However, some liberals argue that these can be defended by the possibility of leaving the community (Kukathas, 2003). For example, a woman dissatisfied with her status within her community

could choose to leave. Critics counter this argument, stating that the theoretical possibility of leaving masks practical difficulties, such as threats, material dependence, and other barriers (Spinner-Halev, 2000). For instance, communities that believe women should only hold traditional roles may steer the education of girls in that direction, making leaving the community in adulthood merely theoretical. Therefore, such practices are deemed unacceptable, and communities should be compelled to provide equal access to education for both boys and girls. According to Kymlicka (1995), internal restrictions are never acceptable. Liberal multiculturalism is based on the principle that a good life is one that is freely chosen, with real and achievable alternatives available when making choices. External protection, on the other hand, refers to limiting the influence of broader society through mechanisms such as federalism, polyethnic rights (including funding for ethnic communities and their media), and special representation (such as political quotas and affirmative action).

The debate over whether multiculturalism aligns with liberalism involves assessing the balance between collective rights and individual freedoms. Liberalism is fundamentally based on respecting individual rights, with each person having the right to decide what constitutes a proper way of life, what values to uphold, and what goals to pursue. The state should provide a framework for these choices without imposing specific values or culture. In contrast, multiculturalism emphasizes collective rights and the obligation of the state to protect the specific cultural norms of individual communities. This raises important questions: What happens if these norms conflict with individual rights or oppose the law?

Examples of conflicts between collective and individual rights include cases such as the refusal of blood transfusions by Jehovah's Witnesses, arranged marriages involving minors, and the enforced schooling of children in specific languages, as seen with francophone parents in Canada. Other examples include neglecting the education of girls or children in general, as in some Romani communities, and severe punishments like stoning for adultery. Conflicts between collective rights and civic values also arise in issues like refusing military service, wearing religious clothing or publicly displaying religious affiliation, using intoxicants in religious rituals, breaking environmental laws for practices like whale hunting by indigenous communities, and the nomadic lifestyles of some Romani groups.

The state's approach to collective rights sometimes allows behaviour that is part of someone's culture but not permitted as a matter of personal choice. For example, conscientious objection might be allowed only as part of religious belief in some countries, and drug use may be permitted in religious rituals but not for individual recreational use. This approach raises the question of when collective rights should take precedence over individual rights or civic values. Levey (2009) argues that collective rights can be prioritized if the individual makes an informed, autonomous decision to accept them, especially when the consequences are self- chosen by adults or are not significant and irreversible, such as sending children to minority schools or refusing military service.

However, critics point out that these criteria are culturally conditioned and stem from European values (Parekh, 2000). In some cultures, tradition (collective rights) takes precedence over individual rights, and autonomous choice is not always permitted. Universalism and individual equality, also products of Western values, are not inherent to all cultures—Hinduism being an example of a non-universalistic culture. The question of whether it is permissible to criticize other cultures becomes particularly relevant in the context of reactions to criticisms of Islam or acts seen as offensive, such as caricatures of Muhammad or the burning of the Quran. This tension underscores the conflict between the right to freedom of expression and the need to respect other cultures.

Conversely, conservative critiques of multiculturalism are based on the belief that a unified culture is essential for social cohesion (Scruton, 2017; Huntington, 2004). Culturally plural societies, conservatives argue, often experience reduced social solidarity, which can lead to negative outcomes such as political conflict, lower social rights, and higher crime rates. From this perspective, a unified national culture is preferable, but this leads to questions about defining an "authentic" national culture and can result in cultural essentialism. There is a notion of permissive tolerance, where minority cultures are tolerated for pragmatic reasons but are expected to remain within the private sphere, maintaining the dominant position of the majority culture. A notable example of this position is the argument for the presence of religious symbols in public institutions, where minority demands for their removal are seen as forms of intolerance by the minority towards the majority. Minorities may practice their culture privately, but public culture is expected to reflect the majority. Conservatives argue that

multiculturalism rests on the flawed assumption of the equality of all cultures, which can lead to selective arguments, distorted facts, and a denial of the significant contributions of Western culture to human civilization.

Liberal critiques, such as those presented by Brian Barry (2001), argue that multiculturalism negates universal human rights and prioritizes cultural relativism, thus departing from the principles of classical liberalism. Barry suggests that postmodernism and the decline of Marxist ideology have influenced the rise of multiculturalism, which relies on the relativization of knowledge and values. He advocates for a return to classical liberalism, which emphasizes individual rights and the concept of citizenship. According to Barry, everyone should enjoy the same fundamental human rights, and special rights based on cultural affiliation are unjust. He rejects the idea that cultural context should justify exemptions from laws, as it undermines the principle of equal treatment. Barry's argument assumes that cultural choices are equivalent to any other personal preference, such as not wearing a helmet for thrill-seeking being comparable to not wearing one for religious reasons. He contends that cultural exemptions from laws are unjustified and that the state should allocate resources based on universal needs, not individual cultural preferences. Barry also critiques leftist intellectuals who have embraced multiculturalism, accusing them of betraying the Enlightenment project and modernity. He argues that addressing social inequalities and ensuring substantive equality would be more beneficial than multicultural policies.

In practice, multiculturalists believe that immigrants do not seek full assimilation but rather integration that respects their cultural identity. The urban violence and protests by immigrants in European cities are often seen as responses to discrimination and lack of opportunity, not as outright rejections of majority culture or democratic values. Preserving cultural identity can be a form of protest against systemic inequality, with multiculturalism serving as a framework for navigating these complex dynamics. Critics like Barry argue that while multiculturality is an empirical reality, state-promoted multiculturalism is problematic, as it risks undermining the integration needed for social cohesion. Assimilation, Barry contends, is essential for fostering civic culture but should not demand that individuals abandon their cultural heritage, provided they embrace the principles of democracy and tolerance. Critics of liberalism argue that its focus on the autonomous individual making rational, free choices is

not universally applicable and may not be suitable as a global principle. The concept of autonomy, rooted in Western thought, might not resonate with all cultures. Some conservatives (Scruton, 2017) propose a different liberal approach that values individuals' decisions and respects their reasoning without inviting skepticism that erodes all beliefs. In conclusion, accepting multiculturalism does not mean embracing cultural relativism or skepticism, but rather acknowledging the subjectivity of ethical principles and the challenges of balancing respect for cultural diversity with the protection of individual rights.

Challenges for Feminism

The concept of multiculturalism is well-known as we have shown for its ambiguity, encapsulating a web of confusion and uncertainties regarding the interplay of cultures, how they should interact, and the alignment of their worldviews with the broader world (Kuriyama, 1994, 337). In contrast, feminism grapples with an unstable equilibrium, navigating between a universalizing common ground and the acknowledgment of differences among women. The inherent tensions within both discourses make it apparent that the intersection of multiculturalism and feminist concerns has been characterized by numerous contradictory associations. Nevertheless, the evolving relationship between the two is gradually acquiring its own historical development.

However, as Shigehisa Kuriyama writes (1994, 337), the term multiculturalism is notoriously vague as 'it sweeps under its blanket generality a tangle of confusion and uncertainties about how cultures can or should relate to each other, and how their worldviews relate to the world'. Conversely feminism is marked by the unstable equilibrium between the universalizing common ground and the recognition of difference between women. Given the internal tensions within the two discourses it is only too obvious that questions of multiculturalism have been connected to feminist issues in many contradictory ways, though the relation between the two begins to have a genealogy of its own.

According to Stuart Hall, multiculturalism deals with the question of how multiple cultures can coexist within a single society (Hall, 2000). However, feminism faces the challenge of criticizing oppressive cultural practices

without imposing Western norms as universal. Susan Moller Okin (1999) in her essay Is Multiculturalism Bad for Women?, discusses the tensions between the demands for the protection of minority cultural rights and the feminist ideals of gender equality. Okin (1999) argues that multiculturalism can be harmful to women because some forms of cultural practices perpetuate patriarchal structures. This stance has been criticized for overlooking the potentially empowering aspects within cultural communities. Leti Volpp (2001) warns that merely positioning feminism and multiculturalism as opposites can produce a discourse that marginalizes women from minority communities and overlooks their agency.

The original essay by Okin (1999, 131) argued that feminism and multiculturalism both seek "the recognition of difference in the context of norms that are universal in theory but not in practice". Gender equality often clashes with the interest of minority cultures and individual rights, as the fundamental position of the feminist movement cannot be sacrificed in the name of group rights, which do often reinforce existing hierarchies. Okin's major take is on Will Kymlicka's defence of cultural group rights that should provide members with a meaningful way of life, that include both the public and the private sphere and therefore encompass social, religious, educational and recreational aspects of life.

Okin states (1999, 20):

> Cultural minorities need special rights, then, because their cultures may otherwise be threatened with extinction, and cultural extinction would be likely to undermine the self-respect and freedom of group members. Special rights, in short, put minorities on an equal footing with the majorities.

According to Okin there are two major downsides for group rights. First, they treat cultural groups as monolithic and do not pay attention to differences among and within groups; they accord little or no recognition to the fact that minority cultural groups are themselves gendered, with substantial differences in power and advantages between men and women. Second, the advocates of group rights disregard the private sphere which is essential for the definition of any culture as it revolves around crucial issues such as family, sexuality and reproduction. In other words the private domain, that is the sphere where women realize the most visible contribution to culture understood in traditional terms, gets erased in the name

of an abstract definition of cultural identity, which does not take into account the different roles that cultural groups impose on their members. Therefore, group rights are blind to gender inequalities and at times even illiberal as they 'violate their individual members' rights, requiring them to conform to group beliefs or norms' (Okin, 1999, 11). Okin goes into a list of ad hoc examples from completely disparate cultural settings to prove her point on gender inequalities within group rights such as clitoridoctomy, polygamy, divorce systems biased against women, the marriage of children, purdah, abortion, the practice common in Latin America of requiring a rape victim to marry her rapist, the offence of *zina* in Pakistan, or sex outside marriage, for which the law allows the whipping or imprisonment of such women. While she accounts for the sexual discrimination present in Western society Okin stills proclaims that women in more liberal cultures are at the same time legally guaranteed many of the same freedoms and opportunities as men (1999, 16–18). The impasse is, according to Okin, in the international arena where Okin's appeal to look at gender inequalities within group rights is responded to by critics such as Kymlicka (2002) himself and postcolonial view of hybridity by Homi Bhabha (2002).

Kymlicka (2002) takes on Okin's critique of looking more carefully at intra-group dynamics, in particular pertaining to gender. Bhabha, in a response entitled 'Liberalism's Sacred Cow', also welcomes Okin's voicing of the tension between feminism and multiculturalism as it is a useful corrective to the prevailing orthodoxy that establishes "equivalences" between disadvantaged groups, aggregating "communities of interest" without doing the hard work of specifying rights and interests, shying away from conflicts within, and between, minorities (2002, 79). However, Bhabha is in a postcolonial tone very critical of Okin's restricted understanding of the liberal ground on which feminism and multiculturalism might negotiate their differences about rights and representations. According to Bhabha, Okin's view of the interface between feminism and multiculturalism is too focused on the conflict generated by the anti-feminist and patriarchal effects of criminal cultural defence which make her produce, against her best intentions, monolithic descriptions of minority, migrant cultures, though gender differentiated. Bhabha (2002) argues that minorities are too frequently imaged as the abject "subjects" of their cultures of origin huddled in the gazebo of group rights, preserving the orthodoxy of their

distinctive cultures in the midst of the great storm of Western progress. To mention another worthy postcolonial contribution, feminist theorists like Patricia Hill Collins (2006) have emphasized the importance of intersectionality for understanding how different identities, such as race, ethnicity, and class, shape women's experiences. Also critical multiculturalism, as explained by McDowell and Fang (2007), offers an opportunity to promote equality by acknowledging intersectional identities.

Examples from Croatia

In Croatia, the Ombudsperson for Gender Equality and the Croatian Bureau of Statistics collect data on the representation of women in various sectors, showing how cultural practices change over time. In the Croatian context, the intersection of feminism and multiculturalism presents unique challenges that highlight tensions between advocating for gender equality and respecting cultural diversity. These challenges are particularly pronounced when cultural practices conflict with feminist principles, leading to what some scholars describe as "false multiculturalism" (Bogdanić, 2004).

One prominent example is the situation of Romani women in Croatia. The concept of "false multiculturalism" emerges when cultural practices within minority groups are acknowledged or even celebrated by the majority, but without critical engagement with how these practices may perpetuate gender-based inequalities. Romani communities, for instance, often face systemic marginalization, and within these communities, traditional gender roles can restrict the rights and autonomy of women (Bogdanić, 2021). Feminist scholars argue that while it is important to recognize and support cultural identity, it must not come at the expense of basic human rights, particularly those of women (Mesić, 2006a). The tension lies in the fact that policies promoting multiculturalism may inadvertently reinforce patriarchal structures by failing to challenge harmful gender norms embedded within certain cultural practices (Vukoja, 2021; Mesić, 2006).

This dynamic was particularly evident during the 2015 migrant crisis when Croatia, like many other European countries, experienced an influx of refugees. Migrant women often faced double marginalization: as members of ethnic minorities and as women within their cultural groups. The

integration process highlighted the difficulties of balancing cultural sensitivity with the promotion of gender equality. While multicultural policies aimed to support the cultural practices of migrant communities, feminist critiques emphasized that such policies must also address the specific needs of women within these communities (Vukoja, 2021). This includes ensuring that cultural accommodations do not come at the cost of perpetuating gender-based discrimination.

The clash between feminism and multiculturalism in Croatia is further exemplified in the debates surrounding educational opportunities for girls in minority communities. Traditional cultural practices within some groups, such as the Roma, often prioritize boys' education over that of girls. This leads to significant disparities in educational attainment, limiting the future opportunities available to women within these communities (Bogdanić, 2004). Feminist critiques point out that while cultural integration policies may acknowledge the broader rights of the Roma, they often do not address the specific barriers faced by women, such as early marriage and limited access to education (Vukoja, 2021). These issues highlight the need for policies that consider both cultural and gender perspectives, ensuring that women are not doubly marginalized. Feminist perspectives argue that while cultural rights are important, they must be balanced against the principle of gender equality (Mesić, 2006a; Vukoja, 2021). Policies that permit cultural practices detrimental to women's rights can reinforce systemic inequalities and hinder the progress of gender equality initiatives.

Moreover, the feminist critique of multiculturalism often points out the risk of endorsing collective cultural rights that conflict with individual rights. For example, practices such as arranged marriages or gender-based restrictions on freedom can be protected under the guise of cultural preservation. Feminist scholars argue that such practices should be critically examined to ensure that they do not infringe upon women's autonomy or fundamental rights. The debate extends to whether it is permissible to challenge these cultural norms without appearing to impose Western ideals, which is a central issue in postcolonial feminist theory (Bogdanić, 2004).

The Croatian context also shows the complexity of multiculturalism through the lens of state policies. While the government has made strides in protecting minority rights, these efforts sometimes fall short of

addressing gender-specific issues. Feminist theorists highlight that state policies should go beyond mere cultural recognition to incorporate gender-sensitive approaches that protect women's rights within all cultural groups (Vukoja, 2021). This approach advocates for what is often termed "multicultural feminism," which seeks to harmonize cultural diversity with gender equality by recognizing the multifaceted identities of women and addressing their unique challenges (Mesić, 2006; Bogdanić, 2004).

In summary, the intersection of feminism and multiculturalism in Croatia underscores the challenges of balancing cultural recognition with the promotion of gender equality. Feminist critiques emphasize that while multicultural policies are important for protecting minority rights, they must be designed in a way that does not perpetuate gender-based discrimination. The examples of Romani women and migrant integration illustrate that multiculturalism must incorporate a gender-sensitive approach that acknowledges and addresses the unique struggles faced by women. Only then can multicultural policies fulfil their promise of promoting both cultural diversity and gender equality.

Conclusion

This paper has critically examined the complex relationship between feminism and multiculturalism, emphasizing both the tensions and opportunities for fostering inclusivity in diverse societies. Feminism, with its focus on gender equality and empowerment, often clashes with multiculturalism's emphasis on recognizing and protecting cultural diversity. These conflicts are particularly pronounced when cultural practices within minority groups challenge feminist ideals of individual autonomy and gender equity.

The discussion began with an exploration of the foundational concepts of feminism and multiculturalism, establishing their theoretical underpinnings and highlighting their shared but often divergent aims in advocating for minority rights. The paper then delved into the debates between feminist universalism and cultural relativism, addressing how universal ethical standards intersect with the recognition of cultural specificity.

Subsequently, the analysis focused on critiques of ideologies, including liberal and conservative perspectives on multiculturalism, and feminist

concerns, especially postcolonial, regarding the limitations of traditional multicultural approaches. Particular attention was paid to the intersectionality framework, which enriches feminist discourse by acknowledging the overlapping identities and experiences of marginalized individuals.

The examples from the Croatian context served to illustrate the practical challenges at the intersection of feminism and multiculturalism. These included the experiences of Romani women and the impact of multicultural policies during the 2015 migrant crisis, highlighting systemic issues such as gender-based inequalities in education and cultural preservation practices.

The concluding analysis revealed a shift from perceiving feminism and multiculturalism as inherently conflicting to recognizing their potential for productive intersection. The notion of "false multiculturalism" and the importance of gender-sensitive approaches were emphasized as essential for developing equitable multicultural policies that do not perpetuate patriarchal structures.

Ultimately, this paper argues for the necessity of ongoing dialogue and critical reflection to reconcile these two ideologies. A nuanced and context-sensitive approach, informed by both theory and practice, is essential to balance respect for cultural diversity with the imperatives of gender equality. This endeavour is crucial for fostering more equitable, inclusive, and sustainable societies.

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SABLASTI FEMINIZMA I MULTIKULTURALIZMA

Sažetak

Kroz kritičku analizu feminističkih i multikulturalnih diskursa, ovaj rad ima za cilj analizirati napetosti između univerzalnih etičkih zahtjeva i priznavanja kulturne specifičnosti. Feminizam i multikulturalizam ovdje se shvaćaju kao vodeći diskursi o pravima manjina. Međutim, mnoštvo pozicija koje se mogu zauzeti unutar svake od ovih uvjetnih društveno-političkih konstrukcija pridonosi njihovoj sablasnoj kvaliteti. Istraživačka metoda korištena u ovoj studiji sintetizira teorijske uvide i uključuje se u suvremene rasprave koje se, između ostalog, odnose na postkolonijalni feminizam i liberalne argumente za i protiv multikulturalizma, čime se doprinosi dubljem razumijevanju složenosti inherentnih u navigaciji područja roda i raznolikih strategija za suočavanje s kulturnom raznolikošću. Empirijski materijal uključuje studije slučaja iz temeljne literature na tu temu (Kymlicka, Barry, Bhabha, Okin, Kuriyama, Hall i drugi) kao i primjere iz hrvatskog konteksta, koji su analizirani kroz prizmu napetosti i produktivnih presjeka između feminizma i multikulturalizma, koji oboje traže priznavanje različitosti u kontekstu normi koje su u teoriji univerzalne, ali ne i u praksi. Naime, rodna ravnopravnost često dolazi u sukob s interesima manjinskih kultura i individualnih prava, jer se temeljna pozicija feminističkog pokreta ne može žrtvovati u ime grupnih prava koja mogu učvrstiti postojeće hijerarhije. Perspektiva i analitička strategija primijenjena u ovom radu otkriva postupan pomak od očitog sukoba interesa između feminizma i multikulturalizma prema nijansiranijem i složenijem razumijevanju značenja i svrhe etičkih normi koje zastupaju u istraživanju, društvenoj i kulturnoj politici, međunarodnim odnosima i svakodnevnom životu.

Ključne riječi: feminizam, kulturna specifičnost,liberalizam, multikulturalizam, univerzalne etičke norme