

17.523: Ethnicity and Race in World Politics-Fall 2005

Prof. M. Nobles

Lecture 18: Are Human Rights Universal?: Women's Rights versus Cultural Practices (Contd.)

Finishing up with Okin today

Okin has many critics

- Most important one is Canadian philosopher Will Kymlicka who writes about multiculturalism
- Canada's history is very similar to the U.S. with the exception of slavery
- They have a similar history of immigration and aboriginal populations
- There are two groups Kymlicka is concerned with
 - National minorities: aboriginal minorities
 - What is their relationship with their government?
 - Student: they didn't immigrate and laws are imposed on them.
 - Student: the notion that the government owes them something since they were there first
 - Aboriginal peoples have a certain amount of autonomy and governance that is recognized and upheld. There are constant negotiations between the Canadian government and aboriginal peoples.
 - How are women in these groups treated? There's the issue of autonomy that makes it difficult for the Canadian government to oversee. They aren't fully independent and are restricted by the country's law (Canada, U.S.)
 - Kymlicka
 - Thinks that their rights should be protected, but not wholesale. Concerned about the welfare of women within aboriginal groups.
 - Tends to be more deferential to aboriginal group rights.
 - The U.S. and Canada can't interfere as much as they would want because of the autonomy of these groups.
 - He tries to walk a very fine line.
 - Okin says that's not good enough and that Kymlicka doesn't say enough about the welfare of the women in aboriginal groups.
 - Immigrant populations
 - Kymlicka:
 - Does multiculturalism require us to tolerate any and all cultural policies for immigrants?
 - He says "no."
 - Multiculturalism in the U.S. should tolerate cultural traditions but not at the expense of individual rights

- Why would Kymlicka have different policies for these two groups?
 - Immigrants choose to live in Canada/U.S. while the aboriginals were there first
- Does this make sense?
 - Student: are there practical examples of aboriginal practices that are objectionable?
 - The Canadian government was concerned with the women's rights among some tribes.
 - The government's concern had to do with active rights, rights that women could exercise and not merely gender roles.
- According to Kymlicka there are pros and cons
 - Multicultural policies is an issue in France now.
 - Multiculturalism policy recognizes cultures but also attempts to integrate cultures.
 - Multicultural means that the government recognizes distinct cultures in a mostly democratic framework.
 - Four pros for Multicultural policies
 - Multicultural policies foster integration
 - Ease the transition into the majority society
 - Enhance respect for cultural differences
 - Potentially enriching for all.
 - 4 Cons
 - Doesn't foster integration, fosters separation
 - Doesn't help transition
 - Rather than respecting differences, it privileges ethnic chauvinism
 - Rather than enriching society it balkanizes it.
- What's an example of a country with multicultural policy that is doing well?
 - Student: Canada exhibits both.
 - Canada: fairly good treatment of aboriginals
 - Con: French Canadians versus the British Canadians.
 - Student: U.S. The freedom to practice religious freedom and people are allowed to immigrate from just about anywhere. The cultures are freely accepted.
 - Student: The policy is more open ended and it depends on who you're talking to concerning the openness of society to different cultures.
 - Student: if you look at the immigration of Mexico, the four Border States declared a state of emergency and the "Minute Men."
 - "Minute Men" guard the borders and some call them vigilantes. Attempting to take law into their own hands.
 - Student: it depends more on legal/illegal immigration. Some of the "Minute Men" are actually Hispanic, legal citizens and are open to other cultures. They just don't want illegal immigrants.

- There's an internal war in the Republican Party as to what to do about immigration
 - Bush wants to establish a guest worker policy in order to provide immigrants with some standing
 - Student: on the flip side, they're at the mercy of the employer and the employer can abuse the worker in terms of working conditions/pay. The worker wouldn't likely report it because they want the job.
- Other main points against Okin
 - Kymlicka: Different policies for immigrants vs. Aboriginals
 - Her assessment of women in the West
 - Counter authors: What cultures aren't sexist in some way?
 - Counter authors: How do you avoid western judgment?
 - Counter authors: How is it oppressive to wear a head scarf but liberating to wear a mini skirt?
 - Student: Have the choice to wear the mini skirt.
- The U.S. is always looking out at other cultures, what would you see when looking into the U.S. ?
 - Student: rap videos show women being objectified.
 - Student: booming pornography industry
 - Student: there's still a glass ceiling.
- Part of Okin's claim is that these cultures have bad practices
 - Counter Authors: Can't cultures change?
 - Counter Authors: Okin's argument presumes a static nature of culture that doesn't exist. Culture is very dynamic.
- Is there a connection between religion and the state?
 - Nearly all of the authors think that the state should have something to say about religion in certain instances and that's when religion violates individual rights.
 - Nusbaum introduced political liberalism (a more give and take view of things. Accept group rights only to a point) and comprehensive liberalism (only look at individual rights.)
- Is multiculturalism bad for women?
 - Okin says mostly "yes."
 - Student: not entirely bad for women. In some cases picking group rights over individual rights is a good thing.