This House Believes Feminism must be a Rising Tide that Lifts All Ships

Press Release: Thursday 9th March 2017

**Proposition 1: Lola Okolosie**

Lola Okolosie, English teacher and columnist opened by stating that this debate seems obvious and we should not be discussing feminism’s inclusivity and that intersectionality is the only way of ensuring that the movement survives. Feminism needs to center marginalized women. Feminism does not account for women who work and ignores their needs as the cost of childcare is a barrier to their career advances. Normally childcare work isn’t paid sufficiently and is done by poor, marginalized women. She highlights that the average pay gap is 13% but for black women it is 19% and for disabled women it is 22% which needs to be greater recognized. Feminism should not be colonial in its outlook or seek to tell women how to live when they are already experts in their fields.

**Opposition 1: Eve Livingston**

Freelance writer and journalist Eve Livingston began by arguing that she feels frustrated that women from different races, abilities, and backgrounds are not adequately included in the dominant feminism debate. She continued that when feminists speak of intersectionality, that “these are labels rather than practice, allowing feminists to adopt intersectionality as a sort of yardstick to measure the diversity of their panels”. Livingston then elaborated on ‘corporate feminism’, based on aspiration and the notion that success flows from working hard and “aspiring their way out of feminism, rather than recognising the structures keeping them there.” However, “this model doesn’t apply to poorer women”, making it an unattractive understanding of feminism. She argued that “we need a feminism of raising women as a group, not just wealthy individuals who happen to be women”. Indeed, this capitalist striving for individual success does not help poorer women and that “this goal should not be devoted time or energy by any feminist movement”.

**Proposition 2: Nina Ansari**

Nina Ansari, Iranian-American historian and best-selling author, opened by stating that feminism at its core is about equality and freedom from oppression and should apply to all women. Each feminist wave has built on the success of its preceding waves. She recognizes the power of kinship in order for feminism to succeed and expand. There must be an emphasis on equality for the expansion of the movement. She highlights how the different waves of feminism have expanded off of each other and today’s feminism is very different to first-wave feminism. The
movement started from upper class white women and has now become global and vastly economic and legal rather than just political. The ever-expanding nature of the movement is one of its greatest assets and the most successful movements have been all inclusive taking the example of Rosa Parks in Alabama in the 1950s and Ghandi’s protest. This led to millions of Americans staging sit-ins, protests and boycotts regardless of their race or gender. Vibrant social movements always have the potential to grow and they must extend their agenda or else they will not evolve. The most successful movements are not just about women’s rights but about human rights as history has shown. She closed by stating that women from all corners of the globe have the power to change the world.

Opposition 2: Susan Connolly

PhD candidate Susan Connolly said that she is disturbed by the failure to consider “the possibility of asking white women to give up some of their own privilege to gain the equality they seek”. “It is beyond the bounds of probability to not believe that a woman of colour could do a better job” in Susan’s PhD than her, but that due to structural circumstances, they “would not even consider applying to Cambridge”. However, Connolly argued that privileged women do not want to give up their privilege, and that this makes it difficult to sell feminism because the relative position of women with privilege will decrease if feminism is instated. She argued that “Rosa Parks was a PR campaign to spark change” and Parks was deliberately chosen to “be PR-friendly, an example of this respectability of politics of the ‘right’ kind of feminist”. “For the world to be a better place, some people will be worse off” and that this is deeply unpalatable

Proposition 3: Baroness Haleh Afshar

Baroness Haleh Afshar, a prominent Muslim feminist, opened by stating that feminism is not limited especially being from Persia. The notion of women being capable and forceful in Iran is embedded in history and that men and women were even paid equally way back in history. Islamic marriage is a contract between consenting partners and the women even get paid to agree to the marriage. She highlights that housework in Islam is paid work and women who are mothers and housewives are entitled to wages. It is important for the West to open their eyes and recognize that the world is full of successful feminists and we should celebrate all the different feminisms. She ended by stating that the sisterhood is alive and there is a lot to offer to everyone.

Opposition 3: Srishti Krishnamoorthy-Cavell

Cambridge doctoral scholar Sristhi Krishnamoorthy-Cavell began by arguing that much of the debate is in the semantics, and that deciphering the terms is important, particularly the word ‘all’. “This motion doesn’t say that privileged/white/Western feminism must be a rising tide, it just says ‘feminism’”, which means that feminism either means privileged feminism, or “that a woman fighting against FGM or child marriage has to care how many women there are in listed
companies”. This means that “everyone is in it together, and that this is atrocious”. “The equivalent of All Lives Matter for feminism, placing equal obligation on everyone creates a “de-weaponisation of feminism” and that this represents a flawed political movement because politics requires the prioritisation of certain rights. “There is a hierarchy of responsibility, meaning that more privileged people have to do more than the less privileged”, highlighting that “you can never have absolute equality”. Instead, we should “aspire to a world where everyone has parity” but we need to be realistic about what feminism can achieve.

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For footage of the event go to https://www.youtube.com/user/cambridgeunionsoc