

Directions: The following question is based on the accompanying sources.

This question requires you to synthesize a variety of sources into a coherent, well-written essay. When you synthesize sources you refer to them to develop your position, and cite them accurately. *Your argument should be central; the sources should support this argument. Avoid merely summarizing sources.*

Remember to attribute both direct and indirect citations.

Introduction

Camilla Gibb, author of *Sweetness in the Belly*, was trained originally as an anthropologist – one who studies the cultures of peoples around the world. In doing so, anthropologists often encounter practices that are very different from our own, and people who have very different values than our own.

As cultures collide and blend in our increasingly global society, conflicts arise over the validity of certain religious and cultural practices that are enshrined in tradition for some people, but elicit negative reactions from others, ranging from puzzlement to outrage. Others, however, maintain that it is impossible to judge the practices of others if we do not understand the importance of those traditions, and that outsiders have no right to insist that those cultures change.

Assignment

Read the following sources (including any introductory information) carefully. **Then, in an essay that synthesizes at least three of the sources for support, take a position that defends, challenges, or qualifies the claim that in a global society, we have an obligation to prevent religious and cultural practices that we consider wrong.**

Refer to the sources as Source A, Source B, etc.; titles are included for your convenience.

Source A (Gibb)
Source B (Nafisi)
Source C (Rosaldo)
Source D (Rainsford)
Source E (Photo)

Source A

Gibb, Camilla. *Sweetness in the Belly*. Penguin: Toronto, 2005.

The following is an excerpt in which the protagonist visits the doctor with a young girl who has developed a serious infection following the Ethiopian practice of absuma, or infibulation – ritual circumcision of the clitoris and partial closure of the vaginal opening.

“There is a great deal of resistance,” he said. “The mothers *want* to see their daughters suffer. They believe that girls must pay this price to be guaranteed the reward of marriage. They fear that no man will want to marry their daughters otherwise, and they’ll remain a burden on their parents for the rest of their lives.”

“And is that true? Does that happen?”

“Well, yes,” he admitted. “But it’s largely the midwives who perpetuate the idea. As soon as they deliver a girl they start pressing her mother, saying, ‘Oh, I’m so sorry for this burden of a girl that has been delivered to you. Don’t worry, I will return when she is old enough to make sure she remains pure.’ This is their livelihood,” Dr. Aziz said with a dismissive wave. “They make considerable money this way, and the more radical absuma pays much more than the simple removal of the clitoris, so of course they have a vested interest in continuing the practice.”

“But they say you are not a true Muslim if you don’t have absuma,” I said hesitantly.

“Yes, they say a lot of things, but it is custom, local custom, which they attribute to Islam in order to justify it. There is nothing in the Qur’an that suggests this is necessary. Or even desirable.”

Perhaps he was right: I had never heard of anything like absuma happening in Morocco. [. . .] There was no suggestion of absuma in the holy book as far as I knew, though might it just be a matter of certain words being interpreted differently here? “It’s not just the words,” I said to Dr. Aziz, “it’s how you read them. Sometimes there is more than literal meaning. [. . .] If you probe beneath the words, you can often illuminate truths that are not apparent when you simply read them.”

Source B

Nafisi, Azar. *Reading Lolita in Tehran*. New York: Random House, 2004.

The following passages are taken from a memoir that chronicles the lives of a female literature professor (Nafisi) and her students under a strict Islamic regime in Iran.

From the beginning of the revolution there had been many aborted attempts to impose the veil on women; these attempts failed because of persistent and militant resistance put up mainly by Iranian women. In many important ways the veil had gained a symbolic significance for the regime. Its reimposition would signify the complete victory of the Islamic aspect of the revolution, which in those first years was not a foregone conclusion. The unveiling of women mandated by Reza Shah in 1936 had been a controversial symbol of modernization, a powerful sign of the reduction of the clergy's power (112).

[. . .]

I told the Revolutionary Committee that my integrity as a teacher and a woman was being compromised by its insistence that I wear the veil under false pretenses for a few thousand tumans a month. The issue was not so much the veil as freedom of choice. My grandmother had refused to leave the house for three months when she was forced to unveil. I would be similarly adamant in my own refusal (152).

Source C

Rosaldo, Renato. “Of Headhunters and Soldiers: Separating Cultural and Ethical Relativism”. *Issues in Ethics*. Vol.11, No. 1., Winter 2000.
Available at <http://www.scu.edu/ethics/publications/iie/v11n1/relativism.html>.

The author is a professor in the Department of Cultural and Social Anthropology at Stanford University.

In the late 1960s, I lived with a Filipino hill tribe called the Ilongots, who were headhunters. Do I think headhunting is a good idea because I worked for years trying to understand it? No, I don't. Am I horrified by it? I used to be; it gave me lots of bad dreams, but then something happened.

One day, I went to Manila to get my mail, and I found I'd been called for the draft. I opposed the war in Vietnam, so of course I was not thrilled by this news. When I went back to the Ilongots' household where I was living, I told my hosts what had happened, partly because I needed somebody to talk to about it.

But I also had an ignoble motive. I imagined that maybe this situation would make the Ilongots think better of me; maybe they would think, This guy has an opportunity to kill people, and that's great. I could not have been further from the truth.

I mentioned the draft notice, and they said, "This is terrible. Don't worry. We'll take care of you. They'll never find you here."

"Wait a minute," I said, "I thought you guys were in the business of killing."

"No, no," they answered, "we've seen soldiers." In June of 1945, they *really* saw soldiers when the Americans drove Japanese troops into the hills where the Ilongots lived. The tribe lost a third of its population during that time.

At first, I jumped to the conclusion that, having seen the carnage, they didn't approve of war. But when I talked more with them, I came to realize that they were as horrified of modern warfare as most of us would be of cannibalism or headhunting. It was a kind of moral horror.

Because I picked up this reaction, I kept pursuing the issue. Finally they said, "Well, what we saw was that one soldier had the authority to order his brothers to sell their bodies." What they meant was that a commanding officer could order his subordinates to move into the line of fire. That was absolutely inconceivable to them. They said, "How can one person tell others to give up their lives, to put themselves so at risk that it's highly likely they'll lose their lives?" That was their moral threshold.

That experience really knocked me off my moral-horror pedestal. So now, although I do not think headhunting is a good idea, I no longer have the same horrified reaction to it I once did. I realize that some things *we* do and take for granted can inspire other people's abhorrence.

Source D

Rainsford, Sarah. “‘Honour’ crime defiance in Turkey”. *BBC News Online*. October 19, 2005. Available at <http://news.bbc.co.uk/go/pr/fr/-/2/hi/europe/4357158.stm>.

A survey by a university in Turkey has shown almost 40% support for the practice of "honour killing".

The results come days after a court in Istanbul gave a life sentence for the murder of a girl by her brothers for giving birth to a child out of wedlock.

Turkish law, which used to be lenient on "honour crimes", was heavily revised as part of the country's preparation for EU accession proceedings.

Turkey has started talks with the EU but is not expected to join for years.

The survey was conducted in the conservative south-eastern city of Diyarbakir.

Disfigured

It questioned 430 people, most of them men. When asked the appropriate punishment for a woman who has committed adultery, 37% replied she should be killed. Twenty-five percent said that she deserved divorce, and 21% that her nose or ears should be cut off.

The survey group was small but the results are a reminder that "honour killing" - a practice where women are murdered for allegedly bringing shame on their family - still has significant support in parts of Turkey.

There are no reliable statistics on how many women die this way, but Turkey has made major strides fighting such violence.

Research panel

Since the penal code was reformed last summer a man can no longer claim he was provoked as his defence. That used to lead to light sentences.

But last Friday a court in Istanbul sent a man to prison for life for murdering his sister in her hospital bed. He shot her for giving birth to a child outside marriage.

And there is evidence the authorities here are committed to taking the reforms further. A commission has just been established in parliament to research the whole issue for the first time. Its 12 members are expected to report back in December.

Source E

Photo. “Muslims from all backgrounds and races united under Hijab”.
< <http://www.inminds.co.uk/hijab-demo-17jan04-741.jpg>>.

The following is a photo taken during a protest in 2004 in front of the French embassy in London by Muslim women in response to a proposed French law that would prevent Muslim girls and women from wearing their hijab (headscarves) in public.

