

Religious Edicts and Gender Roles: Case Study of Women's Mobilization in Turkey, Iran, and Afghanistan

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Abstract

This study examines the relationship between religious edicts and gender roles. Specifically, this study empirically focuses on, under what conditions do religious edicts shape gender roles, either prescribing or proscribing them. In contrast to other studies, this study considers how women's mobilization in particular societies moderates the effects of religious edicts or surpasses them, providing additional social space to deal with the construction of gender roles. Using literature that focuses on effects of religious edicts and formations of gender roles, this paper uses a comparative-case approach, looking at Turkey (high women mobilization), Iran (moderate women mobilization), and Afghanistan (weak women mobilization). Therefore, religious edicts and women's movements in a particular society are key causal factors determining gender roles in a society. The study concludes that the religious edicts have a huge effect on gender roles in society if the women's movement is obsolete or weak in mobilization; but if the women's movement is of equal or greater strength than the religious edict, then religious edicts has little to no effect in promoting gender roles.

Keywords: Women's mobilization, Religious edicts, Gender Roles

1. Introduction

Religious edicts have a great effect on gender roles in a society, but it is imperative to also understand the level of strength of both the religious edict and the women's mobilization used to construct these gender roles. This thesis asks the following question: Under what conditions do the effects and endorsement of religious edict and women's social mobilization perpetuate and or maintain order of gender roles, either by prescribing or proscribing them?

In order to understand this relationship and answer this question, it is important to focus in detail on all the variables researched in other studies in the world of feminist scholarship. Kandiyoti 1988 study examines the relationship between patriarchal societies on gender roles, but overlooks the relationship between religious edict and women's mobilization that are overtly involved¹⁷. Kazemi 2000 study examines the link between religious edicts on gender roles, implying that religious edicts had the only effect on gender roles, but is overlooking other factors of society, such as women's mobilization¹⁸. Seidman 1993 study examines the relationship between women's mobilization on constructing gender roles, but again excludes the implications of other factors on gender roles, including religious edicts²⁷. The current literature appears to contain little, on effects of religious edicts on gender roles, in a society with any influence of women's social mobilization.

To address this relationship, a structured-focus comparison approach is employed, measuring the extent of women's mobilization and its effect on gender roles in Turkey, Iran, and Afghanistan. The methodological rationale for picking these case studies is the disparities in women's mobilization in each of these countries, one being strong (Turkey), moderate (Iran), and weak (Afghanistan). The dynamic nature of Sharia law interpretations has shaped the feminist consciousness in all three case studies and will be held as the constant.

The outcome measures the types of gender roles in the societies mentioned above, including the number of women in the

social sphere, and influence of their mobilization on the society, overall. The hypothesis is that in a society where religious edicts are strong but women's social mobilization is not, the effect on gender roles is defined by the religious edict. In reverse, in a society where women's mobilization is strong, religious edicts are incapable of proscribing gender roles. The principal conclusion drawn is that religious edicts has a huge effect on gender roles in society if only women's movement is obsolete or weak in mobilization; but if the women's social mobilization is of equal or greater strength than the religious edict, the edict has little to no effect in maintaining gender roles.

1.1 Literature Review

To validate the argument that religious edicts prescribe (recommend) or proscribe (forbid) gender roles, and also looking at the influence of women's mobilization on the formation of gender roles as whole, the lit review is divided into three main themes; which are gender roles, women's mobilization, and religious edicts. Gender roles are simply the roles constructed and followed in a respected society according to one's gender. Women's Mobilization is the act of mobilizing women's groups together, politically, socially, economically, in means to draw attention to unequal proscribing of their roles. Women's mobilization can be in the form of a protest, walkout, petition, reaching local representative and officials, or researching of the law. The last of these themes is that of Religious Edicts, which are normally in the form of public lectures (fatwas) given by a Mufti (qualified jurist) with issuing pertaining to Sharia law and are normally given after every Friday prayer. These are interpretations of Islam and the Quran and are almost always given by men. It is in the Fatwas where it is often times determined how a person can act, socialize, interact, dress, etc., in the context of a society. Women's mobilization and Religious edicts are the two causal factors being examined by looking at the outcome of both on a society, which in this case are the gender roles in Turkey, Iran and Afghanistan.

1.2 Effects Of Patriarchal Societies On Gender Roles:

The first important subdivision to look at is the relationship between patriarchal societies and gender roles, alone. Patriarchal societies are imperative to understand because patriarchal society is the larger outcome of these constructed gender roles. Patriarchy is a system of society or government in which men hold the power and women are largely excluded from it. Moghadam analyzes the bigger picture of gender roles and its effects due to patriarchal societies²¹. Moghadam offers an alternative explanation, one focused on the dynamics of patriarchy and contradictions of development and social change overall²¹. Moghadam defined patriarchy as a kinship-ordered social structure with strictly defined sex roles in which women are subordinated to men²¹. Moghadam goes further to argue that patriarchy persists where there is limited industrialization; urbanization may be legislated by the state²¹. There is also a collision of tradition and modernity and unwanted changes, particularly in the status of women and may further result in a preoccupation with cultural identity on the part of some social groups. This in part Moghadam implies, is due to the limited women's mobilization²¹. The article further discusses the persistence of patriarchal structures, the role of the neo-patriarchal state and the contradictory effects of social change, focusing on Iran, Afghanistan, and Pakistan²¹. Moghadam not only highlights the implication of patriarchal societies on gender roles as a whole, but also focuses on two countries analyzed in this thesis: Iran and Afghanistan.

Implicit in women's mobilization is the notion of bargaining. Kandiyoti would agree with much Moghadam wrote, as he also probes the same context. Kandiyoti explores the concepts of bargaining in patriarchy in different societies and how the women and men negotiate the amount of power they have¹⁷. Women negotiate and strategize within their constraint in order to maximize their power and opportunities¹⁷. Kandiyoti illustrates the impacts of moderate women's mobilization, where one might need to bargain¹⁷. This is where Kandiyoti gets the term, "patriarchal bargaining"¹⁷. Kandiyoti also focuses on the formation of unequal roles with the help of bargaining, and maximizing women power¹⁷.

Gender roles are the sets of societal norms dictating what types of behaviors are generally considered acceptable, or desirable for a person based on their perceived sex. But these roles are also means through which one may express their gender identity. The World Health Organization (WHO) defines gender roles as "socially constructed roles, behaviors, activities, and attributes that a given society considers appropriate for men and women". Historically the traditional gender role for women emphasizes marriage and motherhood as central role for women, according to Russo in 1976. Through this it is clear that there is great ambiguity just in deciding what gender roles are to begin with in a society.

1.3 Effect Of Religious Edicts On Gender Roles:

The second important theme is that of religious edicts, the constant of this study. Mullally highlights the entanglement of religious and nationalist with the relationship and struggle in reproduction autonomy, "highlighting the ways in which gender roles are given greater or lesser weight depending on their "fit" with state interest and nation-building" ²⁵. Mullally shows in practice the conceptual outcome; the use of religious edict to prescribe gender roles on the basis of proscribing²⁵. Mullally

examines the Roman Catholic religion adhered to by a majority of the Irish people and how it became one of the distinguishing identity makers²⁵. The conservative Catholic ethos that permeates much of the 1937 constitution culminates in the provisions on the family²⁵. Articles in this constitution leave little room for debate as to the nature of women's citizenship under the Irish constitution²⁵. The challenges raised have been perceived as hostile religious-cultural beliefs and practices²⁵.

Farhad Kazemi 2000 publication focuses on the implications of Islam and politics on gender as a whole in, *Gender, Islam, and Politics*; still focusing on the theme of religious edicts¹⁸. Kazmei further discusses religious edicts and how it is used to prescribe gender roles, especially according to Islamic fatwas¹⁸. Fatwas are very powerful in influencing the followers to practice Islam in a certain way, where men should take the forefront and women should be obedient¹⁸. Hoffman and Kowski argue that structures are composed of schemas, which are constellations of rules or recipes for social action, and resources, which are cultural objects or products that may be used to achieve objectives and enhance power, women mobilization and gender roles¹⁵. Hoffman and Kowski take the same theme of religious edicts but with an additional spin. Through a comparative ethnographic study of conservative Protestant congregations, they observed that the Bible is an especially critical resource for fundamentalist women because of their exclusion from formal leadership roles in many local congregations¹⁵. Hoffman and Kowski concluded their study by stated, "our results describe how the confluence of schema and resource is manifest in gendered forms of religious behaviors and beliefs"¹⁵.

Religious edicts are used in different way to alter the power structure and or maintain it, and this is looked at in Kuwait in another study Alessandra Gonzales. Gonzales wrote about Islamic Feminism in Kuwait emphasizing on men enabling Islamic feminism¹³. Gonzales takes on a different perspective writing in recent times, indicating that Islam and Feminism have shifted dramatically in the last decade¹³. Here, the religious edicts are not preventing women from mobilizing and or preventing them from coming together for their rights and roles¹³. This is a new perspective to look at, where the religious edict is used to further the feminism not restrain it.

1.4 Women's Mobilization And Gender Roles:

The last crucial theme is that of women's mobilization and is researched by many, with different findings. The experiment in Gneezy et al. research results in interesting differences in competitiveness in the patriarchal society; women are less competitive than men, a result consistent with student data drawn from western cultures¹². Gneezy et al. look at two countries, India, and Tanzania and show how both are plagued with patriarchal practices, but the Khasi (Indian) women are more likely to choose to compete with Khasi men more often than any group of women¹². In not avoiding competition with men, it is proven further that these Indian women are happier and content with their roles in society¹². This proves the variable; the greater strength in women's mobilization, can trump unequal formation of gender roles.

This theme is prevalent in Gay Seidman's paper as well. Gay Seidman explains when there is moderate women's mobilization, and its effects on society, focusing on South Africa²⁷. Seidman highlights that even with moderate women's mobilization in any society, many patriarchal structures remain. Overall, retaining the position that any women's mobilization has huge implications regardless²⁷. Even the mere presence of attention on the issue can allow attention to be drawn to the issue of inequality of genders.

Reddock comes to similar conclusions when assessing the societies in the Caribbean, concluding, "Through the efforts of these party-affiliated women's organizations and other activists, a number of regional structures were established²⁶. The impact of these early struggles and policies reverberate throughout the region and continue to influence the new strategies, approaches and alternatives as the Caribbean Women's Movement itself grows in stature" ²⁶. Seidman and Reddock would agree on much that Seidman has concluded.

Women mobilization can happen in all aspects of society, like academia, with huge implications. This is what Jeni Hart focuses on, deducing how faculty women mobilize and how and with whom they create networks in order to be successful in academia ¹⁴. Hart focuses on women that are not just adapters and survivors but change agents and these activist shine light on women issues and what strategies these women pursue in promoting change¹⁴. Hart's study examined overall all the academic organizations, which helped to bring about the changes described but also recognizes that these campuses that Hart investigated are continuing to seek a better environment for women; that women mobilization is just the beginning, and requires continuous push to become successful.

Jocelyn S. Viterna focuses on women mobilization in the Salvadorian guerrilla war. Viterna argues that there are multiple, conjunctural causes of mobilization, even among individuals embedded within similar identity-producing networks and within similar structural contexts²⁹. Here, not only is the mobilization measured overall, but also the importance of the degree and variation in participation processes, for utmost success²⁹.

Continuing with the theme of women's mobilization, Harold Benenson takes it in another context with similar findings. Benenson writes about patriarchal constraints and women mobilization of the Lancashire women cotton workers⁶. Benenson examined the conditions that made possible these women's mobilization. Benenson found that these women breached men's job monopolies, participated in communal protests and established unconventional family arrangements for their mobilization⁶. The discovery here was that the women who were least dependent female workers were the ones to claim women's right to work and vote⁶. Through this mobilization process, Benenson validates that there are still disparities amongst the women involved,

which successfully decide their own gender roles and those that still do not; yet another problem to consider⁶.

Simi Afonja takes the previous literature discussed and takes it into another context to test it. Afonja highlights the fact that women mobilization created new resources and along with that new equalities but also still a fair share of inequalities in regard to access to resources². But along with this tactic of mobilization for political and social purpose, there still is a long way to go, but Afonja demonstrates through her findings that, mobilization overall has been successful but still requires more support to tackle all issues of the macro level². This is a similar thesis that Susan Marshall gets to when writing about women mobilization during the anti-suffrage movement²¹. Overall, the consensus is that these developments in women's mobilization radicalize their cause and allow shift in focus to the concern of women and equal gender roles. In many of the cases mentioned above (Afonja 1989, Benenson 1993, Marshall 1985), much was still remaining for full liberation and freedom of women to decide their roles, but all the studies showed that the mobilization still had a momentous impact.

All the literature looked at examines one of the many crucial themes prevalent in this research paper. Further proving that religious edicts and women's mobilization has a huge impact on formulating gender roles for women in a society. The missing literature here is trying to examine what impact religious edicts and women's mobilization have on the roles of women, if the levels of women's mobilization is weakened or strengthened in the context of strong religious edict and this is what this paper hope to address.

2. Methodology

The cases examined are women mobilization in Turkey, Iran, and Afghanistan. The methodological rationale for picking these case studies is the disparities in women's mobilization in each of these countries based on prior research conducted each country. Turkey has strong women mobilization, Afghanistan with weak women mobilization and lastly, Iran with moderate women mobilization. The dynamic nature of Sharia law interpretation has shaped the feminist consciousness in all the case studies so it is pivotal to understand the level of strength of both the religious edict and the women's mobilization used to construct these gender roles. The query of this thesis is to probe, under what conditions do the effects and endorsement of religious edict and women's social mobilization perpetuate and or maintain order of gender roles, either by prescribing or proscribing them? It is important to again to define the measurements of women's mobilization and religious edicts, which are prevalent in Turkey, Iran, and Afghanistan. Women's Mobilization is the act of mobilizing women's groups together, politically, socially, economically, in means to draw attention to unequal proscribing of their roles. To be considered women's mobilization, this can be in the form of a protest, walkout, petition, reaching local representative and officials, or researching of the law. Religious Edicts are normally in the form of public lectures (fatwas) given by a Mufti (qualified jurist) with issuing pertaining to Sharia law and are normally given after every Friday prayer. These are simply interpretations of the Islam and are almost always given by men. This is where it is determined many times how a person can act, socialize, interact, dress, etc., in the context of a society. These are the two causal factors being looked at in this paper as mentioned before, to examine the outcomes, which are the gender roles in the three societies.

In order to examine this relationships, it is imperative to not only understand and examine other research in the world of feminist scholarship but also from there connect the dots to see what is missing and hasn't been examined. To fill in the void of missing research the relationship between religious edicts and women's mobilization is examined through the structured-focus comparison approach to measure the extent of women's mobilization in Turkey, Iran and Afghanistan. To achieve this, the information gathered for this study is through several databases of peer-reviewed literature and previous studies in these regions. The data was collected from all three regions up until 2015 and keywords like "women's mobilization" and "religious edicts" were used with each country. This was done to achieve as much comparable data as possible. This being said, some data was easily accessible for one country and sometimes was not available for another. This led to several sporadic mentioning of different examples of women's social mobilization, but overall the religious edicts were easily accessible and similarly presented in all three case studies. To choose systematically, the religious edicts was held constant in terms of lit collected but the social mobilization came in different forms and in different sectors of society leading to very different examples of it in each society; further leading to a broader definition of women's mobilization as mentioned above. Mobilization in one society was either not allowed or not executed the same way in another country and was only considered based on the outcomes trying to be achieved by the women in each example of mobilization.

2.1 Case Study: Turkey

The dynamic nature of Sharia law interpretation has shaped the feminist consciousness in all the case studies. The first case study of Turkey shows the power and implications of women's mobilization on gender roles, in a society dictated heavily by religion. This case examines the feminist women in Turkey, who helped bring about the change in political values during the past decade. From the beginning of the nation-state and modernization efforts in Turkey had a crucial dynamic, which was the emergence of duality in the sphere of women's identities. During these period women of the urban privileged layers provided

with several outlets to realize themselves and their capacities outside the confines of home with more equal footing in terms of legal rights. In contrast to Atatürk's efforts to include women in all roles in Turkish society, the current Islamist government of the Justice and Development Party (AKP) advocates a conservative role for women with statements that a woman's role is that of mother and homemaker.

This has led to many changes in gender roles through mobilization, which includes but is not limited to; the veil was outlawed; civil marriage and divorce were established; Turkish women obtained the right to vote, to hold political office, to bequeath and to inherit wealth on their own right. Another example of outcomes of these gender roles is pertaining to arrange marriages, which are still common in the countryside and among the more traditional, religious families, although in the cities modern ideas of girl-boy courtship, love and marriage are not uncommon. Female virginity upon marriage is valued, though it is not universal anymore. Also the participation of women in higher education has increased throughout the years. The data also shows that the share of women in higher education is close to one third of the total.

Now that the outcome, which is the newly constructed gender roles, mentioned above, is seen in current day Turkey, it is imperative to examine some of the past religious edicts or fatwas (clergy interpretations) and their impacts in pushing social mobilization in these societies. In 1996, a Turkish Islamic party had gained enough popularity to win over 20 percent of the national vote and came to power in a coalition government. Turkey's Islamic clergy is far from having a pro-democracy, liberal mindset, with apparently no interest in offering a less-Islamist, more liberal, alternative to the Turks.

Even though civil Islam has been officially removed from public life, it is still deeply rooted in the minds and hearts of the Turkish people. The Kemalist ideology, which is the founding ideology of the Republic of Turkey, had national, secular and modern elements, but could not fill the gap that civil Islam was supposed to have forcefully vacated. The State, through its secular policies and programs of Westernization, threatened the value system of the Muslim people in the country without providing, at the same time, a satisfactory and all-encompassing ideological framework that would have mass appeal and was capable of replacing civil Islam. This validates the importance and strength of religious edicts and interpretations of Islam in the jurisprudence of Turkey regardless of it being presented as a secular state.

Religious feminists even when they do make pleas for women's right are bound within the constraints of perceived sacred law. Both religious and secular feminists have left their imprint on political discourse with their demands for rights as they themselves define them. The power involves setting the agenda of public debate and shaping the way people define their concerns, and this is exactly what the women's mobilization led to in Turkey. These activities took place beyond the scope of traditional political intuitions, generated power to advocate change in political values and consciousness.

An example of this in Turkey is Purple Roof women's shelter, which waged a battle against the institutions of the states to remain autonomous and to have discretionary power, as feminists rather than as social service providers to accommodate battered women³. This is when fatwas would forbid the mention of women that were raped or victims of any sexual assault, and domestic violence. They refused to allow the state to subvert the feminist meaning of their endeavors. The feminists who have their individual and individualistic revolt against statist and solidest societal norms had to act in solidarity to reach their goals. For the sake of feminist solidarity, individual feminists had to curb individual feminist demands. The women of Purple Roof with 60 volunteers provided counseling to about 1000 women between 1990 and 1995, with their limited means, they organized panels and discussions to draw public attention to the issue³.

Another example of strong religious edict in prescribing gender roles was fatwas given about the men being the leader of the house and the women should be submissive and subordinate to him. This gave the image of all women to be housewives under the supervision and control of their husbands. Some women's mobilization constructed a journal called Pazartesi which gave explicit support to the efforts of the Islamist women who wanted to redefine their identities as women. The radical feminist of Pazartesi aimed to fight political Islam in dialogue with its female partnership. Through these efforts they were able to begin defining what they themselves perceived to be their interest to be their interest groups contested concepts of equality enshrined in the legal system and expanded the domain of democracy as participation with "affected interest"³.

Turkey has come the furthest with the highest involvement of women's social mobilization, which has led to liberation, and free will of gender roles for the women, in a country dictated greatly by religious edicts. This further shows that not only through women's mobilization embedded in all aspects of society, in the form of organizations, pamphlets, etc., but also attending to all women lives of society is what makes it more powerful in prescribing gender roles in a society so heavily dictated by religious edicts. Women's mobilization took shape in all different forms and tailored to the needs of all women, leading to its success in trumping religious edicts in prescribing gender roles in Turkey.

2.2 Case Study: Iran

The question of women's gender has always been one of the most complex and controversial issues in Iran since the 1979 revolution and the establishment of the Islamic rule of the country. After the reign of the Pahlavi dynasty from 1925 to 1979 was characterized as secular and "modernization" of Iran²⁰. The 1979 revolution replaced the dynasty with Islamisation, anti-Westernisation, and a close link between religion and the state. The establishment of the Islamic Republic not only led to the governance of the religious jurist (yelayat-e faqih) but also changed the daily life of Iranians in both the public and private sphere²⁰.

It is imperative to begin this case with the outcome or rather the gender roles that were the result of the women's social mobilization and religious edicts in Iran. "A number of both secular and Islamist women refused to return to the kitchen after the 1978-1979 revolutionary process and continued their activities in the social, cultural and political fields. In 2008, 34% of the total numbers of professional and technical workers were female (UNDP 2008: 42). According to the latest census published by the Statistical Centre of Iran (SCI), in 2006 female participation in the workforce was 17%, of whom 32% were engaged in agriculture, another 32% in industry, and the remaining 36% in services (SCI 2007: 137)".

"Women comprised 16% of the combined number of legislators and senior officials. They continued their active participation in the Parliament (majles), the Bureau of Women's Affairs, the Women's Cultural and Social Council, urban and rural councils and municipalities and acted as consultants on the "affairs of women" (omur-e zanan) in different ministries and as advisors to the President in various field". It should also be noted that many other women have remained active in such fields as teaching, research, university instruction, educational administration, medicine, sports, cinema, theatre, the arts and architecture, journalism, social work, law, business, trade, community services, etc.

One of the women that led the rise of women's mobilization is Shahla Lahiji, who was the first woman publisher in Iran, and published several great literature about the life of working-class women who lost everything in the war and felt that they in the end were betrayed by the Islamic state to which is given their full support²⁵. She came to the forefront at a time that fatwas were given deliberately to make the women seem weaker in comparison to men, in the workplace, education, law and society as a whole. Lahiji is one of the leading figures that showed the importance of religious edict not controlling her gender practices. She through this organized a group of women who were work together on women issues and published material on it. Due to the popularity of her book and the published material on women issues, this became important social and political issues throughout the society. In this period Muslim feminist gradually changed their position to the state they had given their support to in the previous periods. The published material covered an array of issues, including issue of divorce, custody of children, etc.²⁵.

The success of this mobilization is evident in the majles (parliament) who according to the sharia law article 115 of the constitution said, women could not become President, in that same year, nine women ran for presidential elections, forcing the state to admit to its own limitations. This was at a time that it was projected that a female could never be in the judiciary system. Subsequently, an NGO known as Payame challenged many of the Ulema (Islamic religious scholars), over their objections to women standing for President. President Khatami and a number of the clergy were sympathetic to their demands. This led to the first round elections of nine women elected to the majles and in the second round, two more women were added to the list²⁵.

Another example in the strength of women mobilization on gender roles is of an indigenous-women's organization of 137 women. In different ways they are engaged in poverty alleviation and income-generation activities in particularly female-headed households. They have played a key role in connecting professional women with poor women. This alleviation of poverty has encouraged many women to stand up for their rights. In the 1980s the Ulema conservatives were dominant but over the following years of demands of the modification of the Islamic law, has had significant effect and is solely based on debate and grassroots involvement of the women. This is evident in the case of education, regardless of the condemning of higher education for women. The level of women education has risen to 52%, the highest it has ever been in recent times.

Iranian reality has indeed highlighted the importance of women's participation by illuminating how their social interactions have challenged the initial Islamic state policy of gender discrimination and inequality through a dynamic process that brought about "undoing gender" but it is not enough, as there are still several societies throughout Iran, where gender roles are dictated in accordance to religious edicts, by these very powerful clergy figures, whom are deeply entrenched in the legal system and very effective in maintaining these roles.

2.3 Case Study: Afghanistan

Afghanistan is the least successful in effective women's social mobilization in comparison to the other case studies, mentioned above. Before going into the current day status of women and their gender roles in this society, it is imperative to give some background and understanding of the build up of this mostly Taliban-driven society.

From the beginning of the Soviet invasion from 1979-1989, most women did not have equal status. At that time, a few urban women enjoyed basic rights; to be educated, to work, to dress in whichever manner they pleased, but this was only about 15 percent of the whole population, which was also the percentage of the urban population at the time; the rest of the female population, whom were populated in the rural areas, suffered a great deal, especially with domestic violence and little freedom⁹.

Furthermore, Afghanistan was under the rule of President Burhanuddin Rabbani, who was a Northern Alliance leader, under whose rule the first laws of suppressing women were passed⁹. Rabbani misused Islam as a tool to gain control and legitimacy over the Muslim population. Rabbani didn't have any other acceptable ideology for Muslims that could convince them or that would enable the Taliban to rule the country. In addition to the military and financial support Rabbani had from other countries, the Taliban also needed a moral tool to suppress the people; so far, religion has been the best⁹.

Because of Taliban rule, Afghanistan has always been a male dominated and conservative society. Many of the women occupying the rural areas have never had the opportunity to get out of their villages and provinces⁹. The urban areas are like the capital; Kabul is more socialized especially in women's rights. The situation of women in Afghanistan was never something one

could be satisfied with; the evidence presented in this chapter will further validate how religious edicts, paired with low social mobilization of women, has led to an overbearing presence of gender roles which often stifle them.

Afghan women have always been marginalized and accorded subordinate status in most provinces in Afghanistan. This being said, there are some notable improvements of gender roles of these women. Currently there are 27 percent of the seats in the National Assembly and 25 percent of seats in the Provincial Councils controlled by women. Further, a Ministry for Women's Affairs has been established to lead gender equality initiatives. Also, in the social side of things, women make up 26 percent of civil servants and 21 percent in private media companies" (Kaur and Ayubi 2009). Many of these gender roles shifts are being achieved at the local level directly impacting communities. Women who traditionally have been restricted by their clergymen in their societies are stepping out of their doors. Women that had never been consulted on community issues are being included to design and implement projects to address their problems. An example of this is the National Solidarity Program, which has achieved 24 percent participation of women in the Community Development Councils.

"Dar al-Fatwa (Institute of clergy) in Kabul discusses what Islam requires of its followers. As advisors to the Supreme Court Justices of Afghanistan, this assembly of mullahs can issue a religious decree, or a fatwa, that can both condemn an apostate to death, or help free women from the bonds of tradition through a more accurate interpretation of the Qur'an and sharia law"²³. This stark difference of liberties exemplifies the importance of a Fatwa and its power in shaping a society. Through the denying of education for women, illiteracy and the lack of female education in Afghanistan make it nearly impossible for women to progress without help. This lead to the social mobilization of women to go to the head of the Afghanistan Islamic Scholars Council, in which a man named Fazel Manawi, helped urge the mosque for the worship of about thirty women, who attend Friday prayers. Sunnis the majority Muslims in Afghanistan, typically do not allow women into the mosque²³. Through this mobilization, it has involved women in religious discussions that will help change attitudes. Due to this mobilization, there are now an estimated twenty mosques that have women members. Manawi believes the practice is finding wider acceptance and the number will increase with time.

In response to the denial of education for women, Afghan Women's Educational Centre (AWEC) came to rise. AWEC is an example of a very successful organization, constructed by Afghan women for the women of Afghanistan, forming in 1991. Their vision is establishing an environment, where women and children can have their human rights without any violence and discrimination. They focus on strengthening the civil society with advocacy for democracy, justice, and most important, gender equality. AWEC, has been able to implement 18 projects from the beginning of their construction, this including projects like facilitating a process of rehabilitation for women prisoners while there are in captivity and assist with their reintegration back into society (2005). With many of their success, they still have a long way to go. With being able to only implement 18 projects since 1991, and not being able to effect larger populations, AWRC is not completely successful in trumping religious edict in prescribing gender roles for the women of Afghanistan.

There are still several women all over Afghanistan that have their gender roles dictated by religious edicts and clergy figures of their villages. Much of the women's mobilization percentages are still very small in numbers and majority of the changes are felt in Kabul, the capital, which is urban and more modern, and only acknowledges a small number of women. This excludes the many women that encompass much of the rural areas, which are greatly populated like Herat, and Kandahar and whom are deeply plagued under the dictation of religious edicts in prescribing their gender roles. Overall, the women's social mobilization in Afghanistan is weak in effectiveness and have achieved little success in being fully entrenched in all aspects of society in relation to religious edicts, which prove not only to be embedded in all parts of society but prove to be more successful in being able to dictate and maintain gender roles for women of Afghanistan.

3. Conclusion

Under what conditions do the effects and endorsement of religious edict and women's social mobilization perpetuate and or maintain order of gender roles, either by prescribing or proscribing them? Women's mobilization and religious edicts is a complex relationship to understand, and this thesis contributes to understanding the links between these two factors. What makes the relationship more complex is its effect on gender roles and implication on the women in an Islamic driven society. Many scholars have examined the link between religious edicts on gender roles as sole causal factors in determining gender roles. These scholars overlook women's social mobilization. Other scholars have examined the relationship between patriarchal societies on gender roles, but overlook the relationship between religious edict and women's mobilization. Recently, some scholars have examined the relationship between women's mobilization on the construction of gender roles, but again exclude the implications of other factors on gender roles, which includes religious edicts. There seems to be a gap in the literature, examining the relationship between religious edicts impact on gender roles, in a society with any influence of women's mobilization. To fill in this gap and in contrast to other studies, this research examined women's mobilization in particular societies to find if they have anything to do with the building of gender roles by either influencing the effectiveness of their religious edicts and/or surpassing them in providing additional social space for women to deal with the construction of gender roles. Additionally, the relationship between women's mobilization and that of religious edicts was examined to determine the effects on gender roles. Through this relationship, there was nuance in the way to critique this relationship.

The argument is validated in Turkey, with women's social mobilization; the women are very effective in prescribing their gender roles. Purple Roof women's shelter and Pazartesi journal had a huge impact on the women and their mobilization in trumping the religious edicts this society. Turkey has come the furthest with the highest involvement of women's mobilization which has led to liberation and free will of gender roles for the women of Turkey.. In the case of Turkey, it supports the hypothesis in validating the point that both religious edicts and women's mobilization are powerful drivers in prescribing gender roles in society but if women's mobilization is greater in strength, it is more powerful in prescribing gender roles in the society.

Conversely in Iran, the Payame Non-Governmental Organization challenged many of the Islamic religious scholars over their objections to women standing as President. Also other NGOs, in different ways are engaged in poverty alleviation and income-generation activities in particularly female-headed households. The demand by the women for democratic rights in general and removing gender biases from the male-dominated structures of institutions is being shaped out but still not as strong in strength in comparison to the religious edicts, leading to only moderate change in prescribing gender roles by the women's social mobilization. This supports the hypothesis in demonstrating that there can be a moderate level of women's mobilization and this can lead to moderate control of gender roles by the women's mobilization.

Lastly, in Afghanistan, Afghan Women's Educational Centre (AWEC) is the dominating women's mobilization. This case study supports the hypotheses by further validating the point that weak women's mobilization in a society of high level of religious edicts can have little to no effect in prescribing gender roles, leading to the religious edicts having full control in dictating the gender roles in the society. These social movements are still not established and are weak in comparison to the religious edict and this is why in most cases little or no successful social movement had been able to prevail. In this case, the women's mobilization is weak in comparison to the religious edicts, so the women's mobilization has done the least in prescribing gender roles.

It remains a challenge to measure the different types of roles the women are trying to prescribe to themselves when doing so through the social mobilization. There seems to be great difference in what roles women see themselves to be suitable in a society. Another challenge is the lack of direct involvement with the women in these case studies and to truly measure the change in gender roles. For example, it might be successful in part of the country like in Afghanistan's case, but not in the country as a whole. Others might argue that in the case of Afghanistan, it might be different in the rural areas than in the capital of Kabul, but with the lack of research in rural areas, resorting to the mobilization in Kabul was suffice. Scholars may note that the cases do not function in the same format with their fatwas, i.e. Turkey not being an Islamic republic or that Afghanistan has a Loya Jirga (Province lead Parliament) but no other form of religious integration in their legal system. To account for this, the countries chosen might not necessary have the same jurisprudence but do have the same level of dependence on sharia law present, and this is prevalent in all three cases of Turkey, Iran and Afghanistan.

This relationship between the women's mobilization and religious edict is pivotal to understand because this relation affects many of the issue associated with gender inequalities issues in the Middle East and South Asia. In all three cases, Islamic interpretation is held with great importance and dominance, and this was the single factor prescribing and proscribing gender roles for women in these societies. The importance of this research illustrates and further validates the point, that regardless of the degree of dependency on Sharia law of a State, women's mobilization, if stronger in degree and formulation can trump this subscription of Islamic interpretation in dictating gender roles. The main conclusion being that women's mobilization influences the effectiveness of these religious edicts in surpassing them, providing additional capacity to deal with the construction of gender roles. Through the research presented it is evident that women's mobilization and religious edict are both capable of prescribing gender roles, but it is also very depended on the society, its being constructed or deconstructed in. Overall, the relationship between women and religion in these societies is changing day by day and needs constant attention and updating of information. Policy should go in the direction of the equality of women choosing their own gender roles. This research concludes further, that religion can be part of the legal system, but the interpretations of religion should not be, which inevitably leads to the perpetuation of proscribing gender roles, particularly for women.

4. References

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