

Populations), the GPID primarily addresses the struggles and needs of IDPs. Among other things, it dictates that national authorities are ultimately responsible for their IDPs (Principle 3), demands the prevention of arbitrary displacement (Principle 6.1), and outlines the requirement of protection and assistance during displacement (Principle 7). Furthermore, Section V directly addresses the issues of return, resettlement, and reintegration. Yet perhaps the most important aspect of the GPID is that it once again authorizes in Principle 3.2 the right for IDPs to ask for and receive international aid.⁶⁵ This is a reassertion of the same rights outlined in the 'The Declaration of International Law of Principles on Internally Displaced Persons (2000)' – signifying a continuing conversation between the intermingling of international human rights frameworks and domestic sovereignty.

The Responsibility to Protect (R2P) (2001)

The Responsibility to Protect is a comprehensive report released by the International Commission on Intervention and State Sovereignty. It responds to the question "[If] humanitarian intervention is, indeed, an unacceptable assault on sovereignty, how should we respond to [it?]"⁶⁶ The R2P addresses the issues and concepts behind policy challenges; the meanings of sovereignty and the emerging responsibilities of states to protect, prevent, react, and rebuild; the question of authority and military intervention; and viable ways forward. Most importantly, it addresses the need for a reconfiguration of our preconceptions regarding 'human security',⁶⁷ and sovereignty as a dual responsibility: both respecting the sovereignty of other states while simultaneously remaining accountable to and responsible for its citizens.⁶⁸ Unfortunately, R2P is not a codified international law, but instead serves a function similar to the UDHR: the establishment of firm guidelines and definitions, and advocacy for sustainable change.

⁶⁵Deng, 2006, 222.

⁶⁶ Responsibility to Protect, Article 1.6

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, Articles 1.28 and 2.23

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, Articles 2.2 and 2.14

No Place for a Lady:

Political Institutions and Women's Rights in Iran and Saudi Arabia

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INTRODUCTION

Images and representations of the Middle East as a homogeneously oppressive and inhospitable place for women are prevalent in contemporary Western media. While it is true that gender equality in the Middle East is nowhere near the level it has reached in the West, it does not necessarily follow that all Middle Eastern women experience the same degree of inequality within their respective states. While women in Iran are repressed compared to Western standards, they enjoy more rights and freedoms than their Saudi counterparts. The disparities in women's rights between these countries are a result of a myriad of cultural, religious, ethnic, and economic factors. This essay will focus on the comparative effect political institutions have on gender equality in Iran and Saudi Arabia. It will conclude that women in post-revolutionary Iran enjoy comparably more rights than women in Saudi Arabia, because a higher access to their government allows a push for reform from within the country, while pressures on the Saudi government to reform come overwhelmingly from the United States.

This essay will begin with a discussion of the accomplishments women as political actors have achieved in Iran and Saudi Arabia. These will be presented as "effects" or evidence of advancement in equality within these two states. It will follow with a discussion of the political structures of Iran and Saudi Arabia, examining

these institutions as the "cause" of differences in women's rights. This second section will also explore the aspects of each political structure that have (or have not) allowed Iranian and Saudi women to pressure their governments to reform, and will discuss the role played by other actors in demanding reform in the interest of women's rights. In exploring the connection between political institutions and gender equality, this essay does not employ the use of theory. While a theory would provide a certain framework to this comparison, constraints on space do not allow for a comprehensive adaption of theory without losing key points included in this paper. Furthermore, comparisons between these two states and the West are intended to demonstrate that, while the paper concludes gender equality is greater in Iran than in Saudi Arabia, the situation of gender equality in both states is extremely inhospitable compared to what women in the West enjoy.

WOMEN AS POLITICAL ACTORS IN IRAN AND SAUDI ARABIA

Iranian women suffer under an oppressive government that discriminates against them based on their gender.¹ They are required by law to wear a headscarf in public and lose custody of their children after the age of seven, at which point the father becomes the sole legal guardian.² However, Iranian women enjoy unregulated access to the labour force, uninhibited mobility, high education, and low birth rates.³ While a high degree of gender discrimination exists in Iran, conditions for women are worse in Saudi Arabia. Saudi women are prohibited from leaving their homes without a male family member, have high

birth rates relative to the region, and despite an impressive level of education, are deeply restricted in their employment opportunities.⁴ The conditions of gender equality in these two states will be compared through a discussion of political participation, economic participation, and autonomy in the private sphere.

Political participation is paramount in the struggle for gender equality. Iranian and Saudi women's ability to form interest groups, committees, Islamic associations, and participate in neighbourhood mosques are viable indicators of their rights. In Iran, women have a history of political participation, having played a role in the Iranian Revolution of 1979 and more recently in the reformist movement of the early 2000s.⁵ They have also established various successful, independent NGOs and human rights networks based on the values of Islam.⁶ Furthermore, Iranian women have asserted their presence in the public media, publishing a number of feminist journals and newspapers as well as creating their own news stations.⁷ This presence in various spheres of public life is a crucial tool in Iranian women's struggle for gender reform, and as such indicates the level of women's equality in Iran.

The parliamentary elections of 2000 marked a notable success in terms of female representation in Iranian politics. The Sixth Majlis saw 13 women elected into parliament under a wide-sweeping reform movement headed by former President Mohammad Khatami.⁸ As a result of this political

¹ Hisaw Nakanish, "Power, Ideology, and Women's Consciousness in Postrevolutionary Iran," in *Women in Muslim Societies*, ed. Herbert L. Bodman and Nayereh Tohidi (London: Lynne Rienner Publishers, Inc., 1998), 88.

² *Ibid.*, 86.

³ Janet Afary, "The Human Rights of Middle Eastern & Muslim Women: A Project for the 21st Century," *Human Rights Quarterly* 26, no. 1 (2004): 118, <http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/hrq/summary/v026/26.1afary.html>.

⁴ Afary, 2004, 111.

⁵ Elaheh Koolae, "The Prospects for Democracy: Women Reformists in the Iranian Parliament," in *On Shifting Ground: Muslim Women in the Global Era*, ed. Fereshteh Nourae-Simone (New York: The Feminist Press, 2005), 203.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 204.

⁷ Rebecca Barlow and Shahram Akbarzadeh, "Prospects for Feminism in the Islamic Republic of Iran," *Human Rights Quarterly* 30, no. 1 (2008), 33. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20486695>.

⁸ Mehrangiz Kar, "Women and Civil Society in Iran," in *On Shifting Ground: Muslim Women in the Global Era*, ed. Fereshteh Nourae-Simone (New York: The Feminist Press, 2005), 224.

presence, these 13 women were able to form a bloc within parliament and achieved a number of reforms: women's dowers were exempt from taxation, a system of financial support for widows was implemented, the minimum age for marriage was raised to 13 for girls, and women's custody rights over their children were extended until the age of seven.⁹ While the reformist movement has subsided since the Sixth Majlis, female presence in parliament will be reflected permanently in parliamentary records as public evidence of their struggle against repression.¹⁰ Although women remain repressed under the Iranian government, it is evident that they have access to the public sphere, an access which is invaluable to their struggle for rights.

In contrast, the Saudi Arabian public sphere is a realm acutely inaccessible to women. Women are legally unequal to men, are not allowed out in public without a male chaperone, and are unable to drive.¹¹ This diminished mobility for women is a barrier to their participation in the politics (both formal and informal). Nevertheless, Saudi women are not entirely secluded to the private sphere. A number of Saudi women are doctors, business women, teachers, professors, and intellectuals in spite of significant barriers to their mobility.¹² Saudi women are also responsible for the creation of a number of NGOs and charitable organizations such as the Khadija bint Khuwailid centre, started by women, which gives educational presentations and confidence-building classes to their peers.¹³ In 2011, women were awarded the right to vote and run for office in provincial parliaments, and a number of women have been appointed

to the Consultative Council.¹⁴ However, unlike the female parliamentarians in Iran, the Saudi women who sit on the Consultative Council are there on appointment by the King, and are members of a small elite class of women who do not represent the female population of Saudi Arabia.¹⁵ In fact, the apparent "advancements" in women's rights in Saudi Arabia are overwhelmingly attributed to external pressures on the government to reform.¹⁶ This point will be discussed in detail later.

Another indication of women's rights in Saudi Arabia and Iran is the degree to which women participate in the economy and have economic independence from male family members. While conditions in both countries fall short of Western standards of gender equality, the situation in Iran is marginally better than in Saudi Arabia. This is because restrictions on employment for Saudi women are numerous, due to national policies of gender segregation.¹⁷ This issue is compounded by the influx of foreign workers who compete with women for jobs and who are willing to work under more dangerous conditions for less pay than Saudi females.¹⁸ Their access to employment is diminished by prohibitions against women working in positions involving "supervision of foreigners, interaction with male clients, or regular interaction with Saudi government officials."¹⁹ Because Saudi women face barriers from participation in the economy, their ability to support themselves to exert any form of autonomy over their own

⁹ Koolae, 2005, 205.

¹⁰ Kar, 2005, 225.

¹¹ Mai Yamani, "Challenge of Globalization in Saudi Arabia," in *On Shifting Ground: Muslim Women in the Global Era*, ed. Fereshteh Nourae-Simone (New York: The Feminist Press, 2005), 81.

¹² Amelie Le Renard, "'Only for Women': Women, the State, and Reform in Saudi Arabia," *The Middle East Journal* 62 no. 4 (Autumn 2008): 611. www.jstor.org/stable/25482571.

¹³ Caroline Montagu, "Civil Society and the Voluntary Sector in Saudi Arabia," *The Middle East Journal* 64, no. 1 (Winter 2010), 72.

¹⁴ Le Renard, 2008, 620.

¹⁵ Le Renard, 2008, 620.

¹⁶ Montagu, 2010, 71.

¹⁷ John Willoughby, "Segmented Feminization and the Decline of Neopatriarchy in GCC Countries of the Persian Gulf," *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 28, no. 1, (2008), 184. <http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/cst/summary/v028/28.1.willoughby.html>.

¹⁸ Willoughby, 2008, 184.

¹⁹ Eleanor Abdulla Doumato, "Education in Saudi Arabia: Gender, Jobs, and the Price of Religion," in *Women and Globalization in the Arab Middle East: Gender, Economy, and Society*, ed. Eleanor Abdella Doumato and Marsha Pripstein Posusney, (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner, 2003), 245.

lives is diminished; consequently Saudi women are largely at the economic mercy of their male family members.

Employment in Iran declined significantly for women following the Iranian revolution, which espoused traditional, private sphere societal roles for females.²⁰ Still, the ability for Iranian women to participate in the economy is higher than that of their Saudi counterparts. This is not only due to fewer barriers to Iranian women's mobility, but also to the quality of education available to them. In Saudi Arabia, the education system is run by the religious establishment and as such mainly teaches students about Islam.²¹ This education does not equip graduates with the skills necessary to compete in the contemporary job market.²² Women in Iran have been able to participate meaningfully in the economy thanks to their more marketable education, and to their ability to study abroad.²³ Because Iranian women have access to higher quality job preparation, their ability to earn their own living and free themselves from dependence upon male family members is greater than that of Saudi women.

Finally, the conditions of women's lives within their homes and families indicate the level of women's rights in Iran and Saudi Arabia. Iranian women have the legal right to control their personal lives through prenuptial agreements, access to divorce laws, family planning, and contraception.²⁴ In Iran, women are responsible for themselves and have the right to self-determination in aspects of marriage, education, and employment.²⁵ Conversely, Saudi women

must have permission from their legal guardians (husbands, brothers or fathers) in order to pursue an education, employment or even to carry personal identification cards.²⁶ Furthermore, Saudi women are subject to harassment from the religious police even in their own homes, as these forces retain the right to enter private residences in the interest of enforcing piety and the proliferation of Islamic values throughout the Kingdom.²⁷ The legal prohibitions on Saudi women's ability to exercise autonomy over their own lives even in their own homes illustrates the comparative strength of women's rights in Iran over Saudi Arabia.

POLITICAL STRUCTURES OF IRAN AND SAUDI ARABIA

This section will address the effect of political institutions on the differing conditions of women's rights in Iran and Saudi Arabia discussed above. It will begin with an examination of the effect women's access to their governments has on their rights and freedoms. It will follow with a discussion of the degree to which pluralism in the Iranian and Saudi political systems affects women's rights. Finally, it will conclude with a discussion on the effect of both internal and external pressures for reform on Iranian and Saudi conditions of women's rights.

The Iranian political institution, while powerful, does not enjoy the same degree of monopoly over political power as the Saudi equivalent. It is made up of a number of different branches; there are two official armies, two judicial systems, and six central legislative institutions all influenced by various groups.²⁸ Women in Iran have been able to take advantage of this fragmentation by politically supporting the reformist faction of

²⁰ Valentine M. Moghadam, "Women's Economic Participation in the Middle East: What Difference Has the Neoliberal Policy Turn Made?," *Journal of Middle East Women's Studies*, 1 no. 1 (Winter 2005), 117.

²¹ Doumato, 2003, 245.

²² *Ibid.*

²³ Afary, 2004, 118.

²⁴ Ziba Mir-Hosseini, "The Conservative Reformist Conflict Over Women's Rights in Iran," *International Journal of Politics, Culture, and Society*, 16 no. 1 (Fall 2002), 39.

²⁵ Mir-Hosseini, 2002, 118.

²⁶ Le Renard, 2008, 617.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 214.

²⁸ Kazem Alamdari, "The Power Structure of the Islamic Republic of Iran: Transition from Populism to Clientelism, and Militarization of the Government," *Third World Quarterly* 26, no. 8, (2005), 1292.

Iranian politics in order to demand personal rights and freedoms of their government. A more unitary political institution would not present the same opportunity for women to fight for equality, since a reformist faction would not exist. Roksana Bahramitash noted that "as a result of their support for the reform movement, women gained space to study, organize, develop a gender-based analysis, and create a vocabulary of resistance."²⁹ This is especially evident in the aforementioned Women's Bloc of the Sixth Majlis, whose specific accomplishments in parliament were evidenced in the previous section. The success of this movement on account of this political pluralism continued into the Seventh Majlis, albeit considerably diminished after several reformists were barred from running in subsequent elections. Women's economic well-being was protected in government-implemented microcredit plans geared toward the eradication of women's poverty.³⁰ Bahramitash also noted that it would be "difficult to imagine that a major rollback could occur without massive political upheaval and resistance against the new president."³¹

The Saudi Arabian political system, on the other hand, is much more homogeneous than the Iranian political system. This homogeneity contributes to its inaccessibility compared to the Iranian system. Power remains in the hands of a single ruling family and is shared, to a certain extent, with the Wahhabi religious institution (or, the Ulema).³² This co-dependent relationship between the Saudi Monarchy and the Ulema is essential for both; the Ulema publicly endorse the legitimacy of the Saudi Monarchy as ruling in accordance with the principles of Islam, and in exchange they are allowed to control various public services such

as schools and hospitals.³³ The political situation in Saudi Arabia has existed this way for the past 50 years, making the Saudi government unwilling to implement reforms contrary to the beliefs of the Ulema for fear of causing political instability.³⁴ This unity among the Saudi political elite creates a significant barrier to women's ability to successfully petition their government. Unlike in Iran, there is no reformist faction of the Saudi political environment that represents the interests of Saudi women.

Another explanation for the differences in women's rights in Iran and Saudi Arabia is the degree to which women in each country can influence their governments. The Iranian political system is accessible to women, although not to the extent it is to men.³⁵ While the Revolution of 1979 deeply restricted women's individual rights, their political rights remained intact and their votes equal to those of men.³⁶ Indeed, Article 20 of the Iranian constitution enshrines both sexes' right to protection under Iranian law and states that women's rights must be respected "in conformity with Islamic Criteria."³⁷ This stipulation has opened the door for Iranian women to argue for their rights both within a religious and political context; indeed Islamic feminism was an integral aspect in the success of the Women's Bloc of the Sixth Majlis.³⁸ Iranian women have demonstrated their ability to influence the national politics of Iran through their role in the reformist movement of 1997 and 2000; their votes were essential in President Khatami's victory.³⁹ Moreover, Iranian women

²⁹ Roksana Bahramitash, "Iranian Women During the Reform Era (1994-2004): A Focus on Employment," *Journal of Middle East Women's Studies* 3, no. 2 (Spring 2007), 96.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 100.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 102.

³² Yamani, 2005, 82.

³³ Rashed Aba-Namay, "The New Saudi Representative Assembly," *Islamic Law and Society* 5, no. 2 (1998), 236.

³⁴ John Willoughby, 2008, 189.

³⁵ Koolae speaks about the offices afforded to the women's bloc of the Sixth Majlis, noting that all thirteen of them shared the same office and were not provided with chairs, desks, or even a door. While it is incredible these women were able to have their voices heard in Parliament, there obviously remain a number of barriers to equal participation in the Iranian political system.

³⁶ Koolae, 2005, 204.

³⁷ Barlow and Akbarzadeh, 2008, 37.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 18.

³⁹ Kar, 2005, 217.

benefit from the existence of a relatively free press and their ability to form interests groups for the purpose of pressuring their governments.⁴⁰ These various opportunities for Iranian women to influence their government have contributed to the previously discussed differences in women's rights between Iran and Saudi Arabia.

Saudi women, on the other hand, do not have the same opportunities to pressure their government. The Saudi constitution specifies that the sources of government authority lie not in the support of the population but in the Qur'an and the Prophet's Tradition, and that laws are both created and amended by royal decree.⁴¹ The Consultative Council, the only national governmental institution in which Saudi citizens may participate, is composed of appointed and elected members of Saudi elites and has only the power to make recommendations to the king, who ultimately retains supreme authority and can dissolve the council at any time.⁴² The most direct access to the Saudi government is through consultations with a local prince, in which the Saudi people have the opportunity to ask favours of their government but certainly not to demand rights.⁴³ This limited form of access is much more restricted for women than it is for men.⁴⁴ Furthermore, women's ability to pressure their government is prohibited by restrictions on the press and by strict government control over all organizations.⁴⁵ It is true that there is a thriving culture of NGOs in Saudi Arabia, however, these groups must be endorsed by a member of the royal family, who ensures they remain divided and ineffective by discouraging regional or national integration.⁴⁶ These factors have restricted the ability of Saudi women

to develop networks or interest groups for the purpose of pressuring their government.

It does not necessarily follow that the Saudi government is exempt from pressures to reform. Indeed in the years following 9/11 the Saudi ruling class faced pressures from the international community, mainly the United States, to reform their domestic political situation and increase the individual rights and freedom of all its citizens.⁴⁷ The nature of these external pressures varies significantly from the aforementioned domestic pressures exerted on the Iranian government. The United States knows that, due to the nature of the relationship between the al-Saud family and the Ulema, aggressive attempts to change the domestic situation in Saudi Arabia would be more likely to create resentment and political instability than it would be to succeed.⁴⁸ Because the United States is dependent on Saudi Arabia for its oil imports they are unwilling to create a situation of instability that could cause disastrous fluctuations in the global prices of oil.⁴⁹ The result is superficial changes on the part of the Saudi elite instead of wide-sweeping or meaningful reform. Caroline Montagu notes, "The (Saudi) officials have no choice but to make changes, as they want to appear to be changing. However, the changes are not far reaching but touch the surface only. It is foreign influence that matters, not the Saudi grass roots."⁵⁰ Herein lies a key difference: pressure to reform in Iran comes from forces within the country itself, forces who are fighting for their own rights and freedoms, and whom (we can surmise from the rhetoric of a number of these reformist groups) are not willing to compromise or give up their fight for equality. Pressure to reform in Saudi Arabia comes from the United States, which is interested perhaps more in the stability of the country and of the global price of oil than

⁴⁰ Mir-Hosseini, 2002, 41.

⁴¹ Aba-Namay, 1998, 244.

⁴² *Ibid.*

⁴³ José Antonio Sabadell, "Arabia Saudí: Religión, Seguridad y Petróleo," *Política Exterior* 16, no. 85 (January February 2002), 139.

⁴⁴ Sabadell, 2002, 139.

⁴⁵ Aba-Namay, 1998, 237.

⁴⁶ Montagu, 2010, 77.

⁴⁷ Montagu, 2010, 71.

⁴⁸ Ian Bremmer, "The Saudi Paradox," *World Policy Journal* 21, no. 3 (Fall 2003) 24-25.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 27.

⁵⁰ Montagu, 2010, 71.

in domestic humanitarian conditions. As such, conditions for women in Iran are comparably freer than conditions for women in Saudi Arabia.

CONCLUSION

Conditions of gender equality vary throughout the Middle East and are affected by a number of factors. This essay has demonstrated how the specific political-institutional differences between Iran and Saudi Arabia have contributed to Iran's comparatively more liberal conditions for women's rights. The Iranian political system is fragmented, allowing women to pressure their government for reform through supporting reformist factions. In Saudi Arabia, the Monarchy and the Ulema are closely tied and deeply dependent on each other, and therefore it is more difficult for Saudi women to pressure the government to reform. Iranian women are able to pressure their governments through participation in the political sphere, best illustrated by the role they played in the reformist victory in the 1997 and 2000 elections and the Women's Bloc of the Sixth Majlis. While Saudi women are allowed to vote and participate in politics, they are voting for and participating in an institution which, compared to the Iranian parliament, does not have much power. It is true that the NGO sector of Saudi society has made considerable advancements in the area of women's participation in the public sphere, yet the most effective pressure on the Saudi elite come from the United States. Because the Saudi government is not held accountable to its population, but rather to foreign actors, the changes it makes are superficially reformist and have no meaningful effect on actual conditions for women in Saudi Arabia. In Iran, pressure to reform comes from groups within the country who are unsatisfied with perfunctory government action. For these reasons, women in Iran have comparably more rights than women in Saudi Arabia.

Addressing Overpopulation:

International Aid Agencies' Violation of Human Rights in the Voluntary Surgical Contraception Campaign of Peru

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INTRODUCTION

During the 1990s, the United Nations held the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) in Cairo. One of the concerns put forward was the high rate of fertility in certain countries, which might impede their ability to supply citizens with "an adequate standard of living for themselves and their families, including adequate food, clothing, housing, water and sanitation."¹ Linked to the solution of this impending overpopulation crisis was the notion of gender equality, in which both men and women would jointly take part in the family planning process. Alberto Fujimori, the President of Peru, appropriated this notion when he introduced a new family planning program concentrated on providing contraceptives to all citizens. One of the methods proposed by the government was sterilization by tubal ligation, specifically promoted through the Voluntary Surgical Contraception (AQV – Anticoncepción quirúrgica voluntaria) campaign. The Peruvian government's approach to family planning was innately detrimental to goals of gender equality for the disenfranchised groups it aimed to help. In this paper, I will demonstrate that

¹ United Nations International Conference on Population and Development, Cairo, Egypt, 5-13 September 1994. *Programme of Action*, <http://www.iisd.ca/Cairo/program/p02003.html>