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The Influence of Cultural Violence on Women's Access to Education in Afghanistan, Algeria,
and Iran

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ABSTRACT

Women have faced barriers to equality in nearly every stage of society throughout history. Among the many restrictive issues women are consistently seeing in the region of the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) are roadblocks on nearly every path to equitable, meaningful education. Widely recognized as one of the most important rights a state can provide, the right to education is vital for advancement and innovation—and yet, it is continuously being denied to half of the population in numerous states. The negative effects created as a result of these educational restrictions speak for themselves, and yet women remain systematically restricted from attending class alongside their male counterparts. One of the main barriers to equality in education is violence, which can take a number of forms. In some states, violence has become so normalized that it is nearly enshrined in their culture, creating an extremely toxic environment for those who bear the brunt of this violence.

This thesis will argue that cultural violence has pervaded specific states in MENA and has led to the restriction of education for women. By comparing case studies of Afghanistan, Algeria, and Iran, this thesis seeks to expose culturally violent elements that are present in the sociopolitical environments of these states through the comparison of each state's education system and their legislature surrounding education and women's rights. Using both historical and contemporary examples, the analysis finds that there are substantial culturally violent elements at play that have restricted and continue to restrict women's ability to receive equitable, meaningful education in each of these states. Because of these findings, policy recommendations are included with the goal of improving gender equality and education access in Afghanistan, Algeria, and Iran alike.

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Introduction

There is no doubt that women's rights are human rights—but not everywhere. This harsh truth has led to movements across the world advocating for the rights of women and girls, so much so that even the United Nations (2015) has made “gender equality” the fifth of seventeen Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which are “a shared blueprint for peace and prosperity for people and the planet, now and into the future,” (United Nations). The fourth SDG involves education, describing quality education as “inclusive” and “equitable for all.” Though it is disappointing that goals like this must be recognized and enforced on an international scale, it is important that all states make efforts towards attaining these developments for the betterment of their citizens and the international community. While all United Nations member states have theoretically made a commitment to these Sustainable Development Goals—including gender equality and quality education—the follow-through on this promise has remained inconsistent. Women's rights issues are seen on the global stage constantly; in nearly all modern states the female population faces challenges in achieving gender equality, making it a serious global issue in need of solutions.

The region of the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) is comprised of twenty-one individual states and is home to almost half a billion people with a combined population sitting at over 493 million (World Bank Group). In MENA, there lives a range of cultures, languages, religions, beliefs, and histories: people of all walks of life call this part of the world home. Because of the rich natural resources—specifically oil—the international community pays special attention to this region and its current events; after all, there are important economic relationships between states in MENA and the rest of the world. Recently and historically, the MENA region has faced significant conflict with states both inside and outside of the region;

most notably, the American war in Afghanistan, the ongoing Israel-Palestine conflict, and Syria reaching its tenth year of internal conflict (Geneva Academy). These issues carry great economic, political, and humanitarian weight for both the states in which they take place, as well as the states involved directly or indirectly in the conflict.

Issues such as violent conflict carry influence far beyond the battlefield and can result in long-term effects for innocent civilians; however, violence is not always physical. Throughout history, we have seen countless examples of violence that have nothing to do with weapons or wars, but instead harmful speech, politics, and even culture. Cultural violence falls under this category, as it is a form of violence that can take many different shapes and affects civilians around the world. With noteworthy examples in the MENA region, cultural violence has particularly strong roots in interference with female education. Unfortunately, stories have long been shared related to the denial of education to women in states across the region, for reasons often dubbed “religious” or “cultural,” but which have extremely detrimental effects to women and the states they inhabit. Cultural violence is often at the core of these harmful policies that deny equal education access, and it has become critical that this violation of rights ends its time as global news stories and begins a new era as a researched and resolved issue for the benefit of all women and the states they call home.

As populations of democratic societies read and view stories of women far away being barred from education for overtly sexist reasons, the issues feel shocking and often upsetting—yet there is a level of dissociation due to distance. In reality, these barriers to freedom are much more connected to individuals across the world than one might think: the denial of freedom in one sphere is an attack against the institutions of democracy everywhere. It is important to not only be aware of the injustices occurring in the Middle East and North Africa, but to find the

cultural basis of these attacks on women so that democratic institutions across the world know how to better protect the human rights of women from any distance as well as hold perpetrators of inequality responsible. Similarly, it is critical that the governments perpetrating cultural violence are aware of the issues, effects, and required remedies. As stated, states in the MENA region are much more interconnected with the economies and politics of Western governments than one might think, making the issue of women's education in these states one that should be on the forefront of human rights research. For this reason, I have chosen to focus my research on the influence of cultural violence on women's access to education in Afghanistan, Algeria, and Iran: three prominent states in the MENA region.

There are countless factors that contribute to the choices that have created unequal education systems in these three states, yet cultural violence encompasses the primary issues. Cultural violence is a widely debated and increasingly important topic on the global stage; however, defining cultural violence is not a simple task. Galtung (1990) famously defines cultural violence as "any aspect of a culture that can be used to legitimize violence in its direct or structural form," yet he makes an important distinction between cultures with violent elements, as opposed to inherently violent cultures (p. 291). This is a crucial distinction, as I believe very few, if any, cultures are truly violent at their core, but rather maintain certain practices that have evolved into violence or are viewed as violent through the ever-changing international lens. As Galtung explains, cultural violence can function in a number of ways in a society; one specific way being "changing the moral color of an act from red/wrong to green/right or at least to yellow/acceptable," (p. 292). This distinction is important, as actions that may be "green" in the United States, such as slaughtering cows for food, would be considered absolutely "red" in certain regions of India. It should also be noted that norms change within states themselves: it

was once “red” for American women to wear skirts above their knees or cut their hair short, but now both of these things are absolutely “green.” While both of these examples are harmless, it is important to point out that cultural differences that may be seen as violent in one place but not in another are not the issues at hand in this research; instead, we will be exploring issues that are far less flexible and have general consensus—usually from the United Nations—regarding the presence of an unacceptable level of violence.

Galtung explains that violent acts impact the fundamental needs that all human beings have, including survival needs, well-being needs, identity or meaning needs, and freedom needs (p. 292). The sum of these needs equates to normal requirements for life that all people share: the ability to survive, healthily and happily, in an accepting society, with protected freedoms that allow us to live and thrive. While these are broad requirements, they are reasonable to expect in a modern state. I believe it is generally acceptable to expect the government or governing body of a state to protect these needs to the fullest extent for all of their citizens. The issue of cultural violence emerges when a government or its population begins protecting customs, traditions, or actions that have become harmful to a sect of the population, thus no longer protecting the fundamental needs. Cultural violence is much more pervasive than it might seem; so much so that many of us experience it in our daily lives and think nothing of it. One simple yet easily overlooked example given by Galtung is that of language, and how languages such as Italian, Spanish, and French, “make women invisible by using the same word for the male gender as for the entire human species,” (p. 299). This is something that many native speakers of these languages may not realize, or even find violent, but the culturally violent element can certainly be seen, as half of the population is seemingly excluded from mankind. Galtung also gives much

more obvious examples, such as cultural violence in religion, which is the foundation of many exclusionary educational policies.

Galtung's definition and examples of cultural violence are broadly applicable to this topic as-is, and I plan to further utilize his ideas to highlight the policies, norms, and laws in place as a result of a state's culture that deliberately limit the opportunities, freedoms, or rights of a specific group—women—for the purpose of my research. Though cultural violence takes many forms throughout every modern society, Afghanistan, Algeria, and Iran all face unique challenges in tackling cultural violence while upholding cultural systems that perpetuate it. Regardless of modern strides towards equality, all three of these states currently maintain culturally violent practices and institutions that continue the cycle of inaccessible education, and thus fail to provide the universal human needs (as proposed by Galtung) to their female populations. In the eyes of the international community and the United Nations—to which all three states belong—these longstanding policies are unacceptable and unproductive.

In response to Galtung's argument supporting cultural violence, it is important to note the various sub-categories of violence that have been formed across human rights research. Salmi (2000) divides forms of violence into four categories: direct ("deliberate injury to the integrity of human life"), indirect ("indirect violation of the right to survival"), repressive ("deprivation of fundamental rights"), and alienating ("deprivation of higher rights"), all which encompass tactics used in culturally violent societies (p. 6). Each of these categories can be connected to the restriction of education across Afghanistan, Algeria, and Iran, and it should be noted that these categories are all connected through their shared foundation of cultural violence, as the deprivation of these rights proposed by Salmi is always a deprivation of the basic human needs proposed by Galtung. As I will discuss, these violent conditions are or were present in all three

states, which consequently contributed to the limitations of women's access to education in each state.

In direct relevance to this topic, Salmi (2000) sheds light on the important relationship between education and violence, stating: "in some countries, schools are violent environments and the education process, or lack thereof, are important determinants of violence. At the same time, education can be a powerful instrument to reduce violence and improve the human rights situation in any given society," (p. 8). By creating this connection, Salmi brings critical ideas to the forefront of his research: namely, the importance of education in reducing violence, and the inverse effect that can occur if education is not available. With this simple idea, Salmi takes the ideas of Galtung a step further by making the connection between violence and education, and further specifying the forms of violence at play in various societies. As he continues to shed light on the connections between each form of violence and its relationship to inaccessible education around the world, we can see the clear distinctions between these different methods of violence and their resultant effects on education access.

Direct violence, as defined by Salmi, can devastate school systems through the destruction of school buildings, a sense of life-threatening fear instilled in students, and actual instances of death in school. Salmi references a fact that will be later explored in further depth: children in Afghanistan face direct violence on their walks to school because of buried landmines from past wars (p. 10). These forgotten landmines have killed children long after the end of conflict, making education for children in Afghanistan highly unsafe, and thus, inaccessible. An interesting form of indirect violence as proposed by the author is that of illiteracy; Salmi argues that illiteracy as a result of a state's denial of education to its children places a severe handicap on them, and even cites the fact that illiteracy can be life-threatening as it reduces a person's

ability to take care of themselves and access important health resources (p. 12). Illiteracy is something that plays a huge role for women in the MENA region, as many states like Afghanistan maintain a female literacy rate of just 23%, clearly showing the presence of indirect violence (World Bank Group). Inequality before the law would be an example for Salmi's definition of repressive violence, which is something that is certainly restricted in certain states in MENA. As we will see, Algeria's government once ratified the Family Code which falls under Sharia Law and destroyed women's rights efforts for a period of time in the state. This complete disregard for equality was a clear example of Salmi's repressive violence, leading to a huge step back for Algerian women. Lastly: alienating violence. Issues such as "social ostracism," "cultural repression," and "living in fear," all fall under this category which represent issues seen in societies all around the world. During the Algerian civil war, Algerian women were certainly living in fear, making it hard or impossible for them to attend school. In Iran, women are often socially ostracized in the classroom, making it nearly impossible for them to participate and gain a meaningful learning experience. Evidently, alienating violence is restricting these women and their ability to access education in their home states.

Salmi's ideas paint a vivid picture of the different forms violence can take across a range of cultures and societies. By expanding on the basis that Galtung created with his theory of cultural violence, Salmi has thoroughly connected his own concepts of violence to education issues around the world—all of which can be tied closely to the issues seen in Afghanistan, Algeria, and Iran. Now that we have established that there are clearly violent tactics at play—supported by the ideas of both Galtung and Salmi—we can further analyze the issues of education accessibility to women and understand the finer factors involved in the cultural violence plaguing these states.

For education to be considered accessible, I argue that it must be equally attainable to all people of a state regardless of gender, race, socio-economic status, sexual identity, religious affiliation, or any other personal factor. Educational institutions must also be safe to attend—physically and emotionally—and staffed with qualified instructors. Lastly, the right to education must be protected and upheld in enforced law for all groups. Because education is the key to development, advancement, and innovation, (among many other benefits) it is a keystone in the framework of any nation. The adverse effects of unprotected education rights span across social institutions, economies, and beyond, inevitably bringing negative side-effects which can be seen clearly on the global stage as countries share and expand their own education systems. As part of this research, I will be shedding light on the historical and contemporary issues affecting Algeria, Afghanistan, and Iran, as well as examining the culturally violent institutions that uphold widespread inability to access equitable education in these states.

These three states provide a unique spectrum of women's rights issues due to their histories and individual cultures. Though all three states are dominated by Islam, Afghanistan and Algeria are dominated by Sunni Islam, while Iranians are popularly aligned with Shi'ism. By comparing the influences of the two different sects present in these states, we gain insight into key differences in sects of Islam, a sense of how these two major branches of Islam interact with the educational policies and legislation of each state, and see the differentiations in women's rights under each sect. Though the fundamental beliefs of each state are in harmony, the evolution of policies due to key differences between Sunnis and Shi'ahs in combination with the histories of each country have led to significant variations in the rights available to each citizen—male or female. It is also important to research how the unique cultures of each state interact with the religiosity of their government and how this translates to education access, as

each state faces its own challenges in balancing traditional values alongside equality, yet a solution may present itself inside the interaction of these factors.

Alongside the religious similarities and differences, each of these states is geographically unique, with Algeria seated on the north coast of Africa, and Iran and Afghanistan sharing borders with each other and numerous other Middle Eastern states. These geographical differences will allow us to compare the differences presented across the region, as well as see if geography plays any significant role in the culture of each state. The influence of neighboring states also cannot be ignored, as we will see the unique relationships across states in the region play a role in women's expectations as a member of their own society. Each state has certainly earned a unique history through their location; especially Algeria, which was colonized alongside fourteen other North African nations. Differences like these are important to address when discussing the individual cultures of each state and their histories within the MENA region—even though the region is intimately linked within itself, there are also huge roles that have been filled by outside actors.

Afghanistan, the first state involved in this research, has long been the topic of news coverage and international shock regarding the rights of their women. Afghanistan's tumultuous history involving the Taliban and the group's culturally violent customs in the name of Islam have generated a unique set of issues for Afghans, specifically their female population, as violence against women became a popular practice under Taliban rule. Education has not always been limited to Afghan women, however. In fact, "the 1960s and 1970s were the most socially progressive time period within Afghanistan's history," marked by expanding educational opportunities and women having the ability to pursue education, vote, and hold office, making them essentially equal to men under the law (Adkins, 2016, p. 106). This period held great

promise for the citizens of Afghanistan as positive social and political progress were widespread in all corners of society. Unfortunately, Afghanistan's flourishing education system collapsed in the mid 1980s after a war between the Mujahideen—an Afghan nationalist group—and the Soviet Union, fought to prevent the spread of communism within Afghanistan. The long-term effects of this period are still coming into focus, but one thing is certain: the cultural violence that was perpetrated by the Taliban destroyed Afghan women's rights and their ability to access education.

Facing similar issues with the international community, Iran has faced countless interferences over the past century, leading to a chain of revolts that birthed their theocratically-based government currently in power. The powerful influence of Islam in their democratic government has cultivated fascinating laws and cultural norms, especially regarding Iranian women. Even though great strides were being made towards improved education throughout the 20th and 21st centuries, Iranian women were not able to participate, emphasizing a historically segregated system of education for women in Iran. Even when advancement presented itself in their society, Iranians were not favorable to modernizing their sociopolitical practices. A combination of outdated gender norms, strong religious influence, and an unbending traditionalist mindset has barred Iranian women from equal opportunities inside and outside of the classroom for generations, and an end does not seem near.

Differing from Afghanistan and Iran, Algeria's tumultuous history as a French colony contributes greatly to their government's approach to rights, legality, and education. For 132 years (1830-1962), Algeria was under France's control alongside fourteen other North African nations. Under colonial rule, Algerian women were frequently tossed to the side. By the time of independence, Algerian women were extremely far behind compared to the rest of the developed

world, which would prove to have long lasting effects across Algeria: a common yet devastating reality for many ex-colonies. One of Algeria's colonial counterparts, Tunisia, was able to bounce back relatively quickly by embracing education as a top priority immediately after gaining independence; however, even though Algeria took a similar approach, the language barrier instilled by French teachers (who had returned to France) destabilized their system further as their post-colonial policy favoring Arabization was to teach exclusively in Arabic. Similarly, Islamic terrorism in the 90s destroyed schools, killed teachers, and scattered populations, further contributing to Algeria's struggle towards achieving a stable, fruitful educational system (Akkari, 2008, p. 92). The unique sociopolitical position of Algeria has birthed an equally unique approach to education, especially in comparison to Iran and Afghanistan.

It is important to emphasize that all three of these states are members of the United Nations and have thus made the commitment to SDGs four and five: quality education and gender equality, both of which are widely considered fundamental human rights. These specific SDGs are vital to protecting marginalized groups through the advancement of women's rights and the expansion of education across all modern societies—if these goals are not universal, then progress and equality cannot be universal. Though many modern states face challenges in freely protecting certain key rights, the challenges faced by Afghanistan, Algeria, and Iran are especially interesting due to the heavy importance put on culture and tradition, which is not generally seen across the world. All three of these states represent differing historical and contemporary issues in their respective governments and cultures, yet they are also tied through their overarching religious beliefs and geographical position, leading to fascinating similarities and differences in their respective approaches to education and equality.

Methodology

From here, we will further explore the histories of each state to gain crucial background information on their past and present governments, institutions, and policies. Knowing the context behind the current position of each nation regarding women's rights and educational policies is key to understanding the development of these issues. Alongside each unique history, comparisons will be made between these states and their political and geographic counterparts, allowing light to be shed on which key differences are caused by cultural violence, and which may have a different source. In line with this idea, the definition of cultural violence as previously defined by Galtung, as well as the sub-categories of violence as proposed by Salmi will be applied to each state to determine if specific policies and ideologies are perpetuating cultural violence. Various cases of education restriction will be examined to determine whether cultural violence is the factor causing the restriction of women's rights or not. Important statistics such as enrollment, attendance, and literacy rates will be used to compare education accessibility across all educational levels to provide a holistic review of the true impact of cultural violence on each state's system, as well as used to create comparisons domestically and internationally as a source of perspective. Similarly, important recent events regarding violence, terrorism, and human rights violations will be addressed in order to accurately show the various forms cultural violence takes across these nations contemporarily.

Certain intersectional factors influence cultural violence more strongly than others, especially in the MENA region, including religiosity of the governing body and population, reigning political system, history of colonization, lasting effects of wartime, and much more. It is important to note that cultural violence can take many forms, but the result it produces is almost

always the same: limitation of rights, injustice, and instability on both small and large scales.

Addressing cultural violence in this part of the world is not only important but necessary, as the MENA region is comprised of around half a billion people whose lives and rights deserve protection. Given that the main demographic that suffers from cultural violence is women, it becomes not only morally important but globally timely, as we in the global community can no longer stand by and watch as atrocities against women continue to take place. The limitation of human rights—especially one as important as the right to education—is never justified, and women throughout history have faced this inhumanity time and time again. It is for that reason that the cultural violence that victimizes them needs to be brought to light so that our world can progress together towards, humanity, equality, and justice.

Chapter 2: Afghanistan

Afghanistan is a multiethnic Middle Eastern state with a population estimated to be just shy of thirty-five million people. With borders touching Pakistan, Iran, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, and China, Afghanistan is a host to numerous ethnolinguistic groups outside of its native Pashtuns. The harsh landscape and brutal climate have led to few Afghans choosing to settle in the daunting mountains and deserts in the south and southwest regions of the state; instead, most of the urban population lives in or between the cities of Kabul, Afghanistan's capital, and Chārīkār, a city to the northeast, with the farming and rural populations settled along the rivers that flow throughout the landlocked state. Climate change has played a substantial role in Afghanistan's recent weather patterns, as the already-drastic temperatures across the country have been recorded reaching even more extreme highs and lows than ever before (Allchin, 2023).

Daily life for Afghans revolves tightly around religion and has varied significantly for Afghan men and women throughout history. Most Afghans are Sunni Muslim of the Hanafi branch, with the rest of the population following other sects of Islam, excluding a small percentage of Hindus and Sikhs (Allchin, 2023). Sunni Islam is one of two primary branches of Islam, differentiating their beliefs from the second branch—Shi'ah—by supporting who they believe as the rightful successors to the Prophet Muhammad: the first four caliphs. Sunnis also tend to accept the leadership of Islam to be earthly figures appointed through political deftness, rather than determined by divine order, yet maintain beliefs in an omnipotent God. The overarching belief held by Sunnis is that “a Muslim who sincerely performed his religious duties as prescribed by God in the Qur'an, and as explained and taught by his prophet, is assured of a

place in heaven,” (Zeidan, 2024). Though Afghanistan is home to numerous other sects of Islam, the vast majority of the state follows similar sets of both religious and moral codes, including lawmakers and citizens alike.

Regardless of the differing branches of Islam the population may follow, virtually the only religion found in Afghanistan is Islam; nevertheless, the various interpretations of the Quran’s teachings are what distinguish the various regimes seen throughout Afghanistan’s history. The differing levels of Islamization found in the governing bodies dictated the clothes the public wore, the restriction or legalization of alcohol sales, whether men could shave, whether women must cover their hair, and countless other social norms. In fact, many forms of entertainment or public celebration have teetered between acceptable or illegal depending on the religiosity of the government in power (Allchin, 2023). For generations, Afghans have seen their personal lives significantly impacted by the beliefs of those in power; in fact, daily life in Afghanistan has oscillated considerably in recent history—dependent on the strictness of the regime.

Though Afghanistan is full of rich history and cultural diversity, Afghans have faced seemingly unending trials. Afghanistan’s tumultuous history of invasions, war, and conflict—all on both international and domestic scales—has resulted in widespread upheaval that has stretched across generations (Eggerman & Panter-Brick, 2010, p. 72). Regime change is a common theme throughout Afghan history, and it has rarely been peaceful. Most recently, power struggles between the Taliban and the weak Afghan central government have resulted in significant violence and social strife that has pervaded the international community. Starting in 1996, the world watched as the Taliban has gone in and out of power on numerous occasions, bringing violence and devastation with it each time. Though attempts at peace negotiations have

been made, the Taliban and its Sunni Islamic fundamentalist ideals have continued to wreak havoc on Afghan society, culture, and citizens (Center for Preventative Action, 2023).

The Taliban

The Taliban—Pashto for “students”—is well-known in the international community for its extremist policies, staunch fundamentalist beliefs, and violent tendencies. As stated by Amiri and Jackson (2021), the Taliban’s central goal was “restoring Islamic purity and values,” which they attempted to achieve through various methods, including reforming the Afghan educational system (p. 8). Clearly, by taking on the humble title of “students,” the Taliban was attempting to ameliorate themselves to the public while proving their devotion to Islam by identifying themselves with a modest name that ironically implies youth and a desire to learn. From 1996 through 2001, the Taliban controlled 90% of Afghanistan until the US invasion that ousted them from their position of primary power. This invasion occurred because of the Taliban’s ties to al-Qaeda and their willingness to protect Osama bin Laden, the leader of the 9/11 attacks, forcing the United States to invade in retribution for bin Laden’s horrifying acts of terrorism that occurred on American soil in 2001 (Maizland & Laub, 2021, p. 1). After the successful invasion, the Taliban was no longer in control of Afghanistan’s government but still maintained power and influence in numerous regions across the state.

Though this invasion was successful in decreasing the Taliban’s overall influence at the time, their reign of terror is nowhere near finished. After the US-led invasion of Afghanistan, there have been numerous instances of fatal violence against both civilians and security forces, leading to the death of over 46,000 civilians and 73,000 Afghan troops and police officers since

2007 (Maizland & Laub, 2021, p. 2). With the gradual removal of American troops from Afghanistan came a parallel increase in the Taliban's power: the Taliban is currently more powerful than at any point in the past 19 years. Because of this dangerous turn of the tide, the United Nations created the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) in 2022, stating that "UNAMA's vision is for a stable and prosperous Afghanistan that lives at peace with itself and its neighbors, where the rights of all the people of Afghanistan are upheld, without discrimination," (UNAMA, 2023). Clearly, the international community is making significant efforts to aid the people of Afghanistan as they navigate the problematic power struggle in their home state.

The Taliban's consistently violent actions over the past three decades portrays the heartbreaking reality of cultural violence in Afghanistan. In line with Salmi's (2000) sub-categories of violence, the Taliban consistently falls under the category of direct violence. The Taliban is deliberately causing injury to the integrity of human life through murder and massacre, shown clearly as they have taken over 110,000 lives just since 2007. Because they believe that their fundamentalist beliefs bestow them with the right to commit these heinous acts, it is clear that the Taliban is exploiting the culture in order to justify mass violence upon the Afghan population. Unfortunately, direct violence is not the only form of violence used by the Taliban in their political strategy, as we will see that their educational policies encompass numerous other forms of violence.

Taliban Educational Policies

Alongside the Taliban's fundamentalist belief system comes their radical policies which are especially oppressive towards the female population. Under their rule, the Taliban barred

women from working, mandated that women could only leave the house when accompanied by a close male relative, forced women to wear full-coverage burqas outside of the house, banned women from riding bikes or motorcycles, and even restricted women from wearing shoes that would make noise—like high heels (Noury & Speciale, 2016, p. 825). As oppressive as these policies were, the Taliban maintained an even harsher stance on two crucial sectors: health and education. Noury and Speciale (2016) explain the segregation of men and women in the healthcare system: in 1997, Afghanistan's Ministry of Public Health mandated that health services in Kabul only be offered to women at one hospital, which was severely underequipped to treat patients. Furthermore, the Taliban's restrictive approach to education barred girls and women from receiving any type of quality learning. Their laws led to the closure of many all-girls schools, restricted schools from teaching any girls older than 8 years old, and forced curriculum to revolve solely around teachings from the Quran (p. 825). Restrictions like these have had long-term effects on Afghan society, even going so far as to severely diminish their economic success. Sadly, these strict, tyrannical policies are just a few examples of the grim reality of living as a woman in Afghanistan under Taliban rule.

As the Taliban dominated Afghanistan, it became clear that they had neither a plan nor resources to run an effective education system. Because of their unswerving commitment to gender segregation under the guise of religious purity, Taliban officials argued that the new government “simply could not support female education,” due to the requirement of female-specific buildings, female teachers, discreet transportation for female students, and boundary walls between boys' and girls' schools (Amiri & Jackson, 2021, p. 9). Unfortunately, the cost was too high for the Taliban to shoulder after years of war, thus leading to thoroughly inaccessible education; in fact, during the 2000-2001 school year, only “29% of boys and less

than 1% of girls were enrolled in primary schools,” (Amiri & Jackson, 2021, p. 8). The effects of such poor education access would come to fruition twenty years later: according to the World Population Review, as of 2023 only 52.1% of Afghan men and 22.6% of Afghan women are literate (World Population Review). Clearly, the shockingly low enrollment rates held highly detrimental long-term effects on basic human capabilities of Afghan citizens, like restricting their ability to read and write their native tongue. Though the Taliban is steadfast in their commitment to Islamic purity, their ineffective commitment to education has led to harshly negative effects in Afghan society that will continue to impact citizens for generations.

These abysmal literacy rates are exactly what Salmi was referencing when he discussed his definition of indirect violence: violation of the right to survival. The necessity of being able to read and write cannot be understated, as it is a key aspect of navigating any society. With literacy rates so low in Afghanistan, there is a real threat posed to the populations ability to access healthcare, such as reading medicine labels, follow directions safely, and—obviously—educate themselves on important domestic and global issues. If the population cannot be informed, they cannot be safe from issues of poverty, disease, or simple accidents. The indirect violence caused by the Taliban’s refusal to provide accessible, meaningful education has resulted in low literacy rates across the entire population, leading to significant risk for all.

After 2001, the Taliban’s approach to education began a series of significant changes. In 2006 they introduced a revised code of conduct, which included the forbiddance of working as a teacher because it “strengthens the system of the infidels,” (Amiri & Jackson, 2021, p. 10). The Taliban believed that educators who taught outside of the scope of Islam were encouraging divergent thinking, and thus made it temporarily illegal to teach. Due to the implementation of this policy and the harsh system of punishment that followed, “nearly one student or teacher was

killed per day on average in 2007,” leading to the closure of about half of all schools in Afghanistan due to violence (p. 11). This display of direct violence that both students and administrators experience has contributed to the low enrollment data that has persisted for decades in Afghanistan. The Taliban’s education system quickly became unsustainable for clear reason—if teachers cannot legally teach and both students and teachers are under threat of death for attending school, then there is no hope for a functioning society.

After this period of violence and tumult, the Taliban amended their educational policies yet again. As of 2015, the Taliban became more invested in encouraging schools to teach “modern education alongside religious education,” thus attempting to bring their school system into more contemporary practices (Amiri & Jackson, 2021, p. 13). While their policies may have been mildly updated, the overarching morality behind their system has not. Though the Taliban maintains the stance that secular and religious topics should be taught in conjunction, they also believe that “inappropriate and inaccurate subjects such as anti-jihad topics, immoral and anti-religion topics related to Muslim women, and subjects derived from infidel laws” should all be prohibited from being taught (Amiri & Jackson, 2021, p. 19). This creates a strict limit on certain subjects—particularly history and biology—which makes it difficult to accurately provide education on modern topics. Evidently, students in Afghanistan who are able to access education are receiving a very limited form of schooling under the Taliban’s restrictive policies.

Women’s Education

Historically, the Taliban’s approach to education has severely limited all Afghans and their ability to access quality learning, but no group has been as harshly excluded as Afghan

women. As discussed, at the start of Taliban rule many all-girls schools were closed, girls were forbidden from attending school past age 8, and their instruction was exclusively religious topics. After their ousting in 2001, the Taliban shifted their methods from oppressive policies to outright violence to deter women from attending school: there were multiple instances of acid thrown in the faces of girls walking to school, as well as gas poisonings in all-girls' schools that caused dozens to become dangerously sick (Noury & Speciale, 2016, p. 825). This torture and maltreatment are aggressive examples of the Taliban's use of direct violence in their attempts to display their misogynistic beliefs about the value of Afghan women. Unfortunately, the Taliban's aggression towards women was just as strong after their fall from power, and they did everything possible to continue their sexist reign of terror from the streets.

More recently, the Taliban has adjusted their stance to be extremely vague and make no guarantees for the education of women in Afghanistan at all. In fact, since their return to power in August 2021, they make no reference to female-specific education and make no commitment to providing and protecting equal educational rights in any of their policies (Amiri & Jackson, 2021, p. 24). Though there are statutes in the Quran that advocate for equality among men and women, the Taliban disregards these statutes to further their political agenda and continue expanding the gap between men and women in Afghanistan. As seen during their first term in power, the Taliban has strict expectations in place for rules that must be followed in order for women to attend school; however, their administration makes no effort to institute these practices, thus forcing women to forgo education. With a combination of ambiguous laws and unattainable practices, the Taliban can continue disregarding female education and is under no legal obligation to improve the accessibility of their system under their current regime.

Since the Taliban's reseizing of power in Afghanistan, Afghan citizens have seen their rights and freedoms gradually disappear. Girls' secondary schools have been closed indefinitely, women are restricted to jobs in healthcare—treating exclusively other women—or primary education, girls' sports have been outlawed, and no female Afghan can travel any distance by herself. When asked about the restrictions on women's travel, the spokesman for the Taliban's ministry stated: "A woman is a helpless and powerless creature. If a woman goes on a journey alone, during the journey she could face a problem that she cannot solve by herself," shedding light on the misogynistic, debased view of women held by the Taliban's administration (Goldbaum & Zucchini, 2022). Crediting the creation of these laws to the helplessness and powerlessness of women is a clear show of the Taliban's complete lack of respect for Afghan women and ignorance of their abilities, so by continuously taking away their power, they can ensure the women of Afghanistan remain compliant and defenseless during each regime cycle. The lack of rights in combination with the fear instilled by the violent tendencies of the Taliban creates an extremely toxic sociopolitical environment for women, ultimately leaving them as powerless as the Taliban views them.

These policies and mindsets are a textbook example of Salmi's definition of repressive violence: deprivation of fundamental rights. Much farther than solely the scope of education, the restrictions created by the Taliban have taken nearly everything from women, going so far as to restrict a woman's ability to walk outside of her own home alone. This deprivation of rights is harmful to all aspects of a person's life, and similarly limits the ability of women to find any meaning at all in her societal standing. By giving Afghan little to no rights, the Taliban has weaponized the law in order to repress their civil, political, and social mobility, thus keeping half the Afghan population in a state of constant deprivation.

Through their political influence, the Taliban has restricted women's rights inside and outside of the classroom. Between the end of the first Taliban rule and the beginning of the second, men and women alike enjoyed personal and educational rights and freedoms, as the current Afghan constitution states that "education is the right of all citizens of Afghanistan," which is a stance the Taliban has not publicly endorsed, (Amiri, 2021, p. 24). Though the Afghan government endorses equal access to education, the powerful presence of the Taliban and their adherence to harmful fundamentalist religious values undermines the ability of women to achieve the same access to education as men. The Taliban is actively continuing their cycle of cultural violence in Afghanistan against the will of the legitimate Afghan government, and by refusing to endorse equal education opportunities, created a government in support of sexism and limited rights. Because of their strong ties to Islam, support for these fundamentalist practices is varied, yet the international community looks on as Afghanistan falls victim to another era of Taliban power.

McClendon et al. (2018) cite that "religion is a more significant predictor of a country's gender gaps in primary, secondary, and tertiary enrollment than democracy and other political factors," noting that certain women's rights are especially limited in majority-Muslim states (p. 4). Though this is a complicated and layered statistic, there is a simple correlation between Islamic governments and cultural violence against women, largely due to the heavy influence of religion in many central governments across the Middle East. In countries like Afghanistan where the law is especially influenced by religion, beliefs rooted in traditionalism and sexism have been perpetuated through certain interpretations of the Quran and play crucial roles in the protected rights of both Muslim men and women. Gender norms are often clearly defined in religious texts, therefore rigidly structured in the laws of states with strong religious ties.

Globally, religion serves as the basis of many governments around the world; however, in few modern places is religion still as pervasive as in Muslim states. As we've seen, the Taliban's fundamentalist government made Islamic beliefs the core of their practices and laws, yet they also used religious practices to perpetuate cultural violence. Amiri and Jackson (2021) explain the Taliban's process of using mosques and madrasas combined with strict religious instruction in schools to further indoctrinate children and recruit them to their cause (p. 18). By using religious teachings to continue the cycle of violence, the Taliban forces young Afghans to equate Taliban laws with the word of their god, therefore justifying their violent, unjust practices by exploiting Muslim beliefs. The Taliban's use of religion in their education system allowed them to rationalize their actions and guarantee support from devout Muslims, thus ensuring the cycle of cultural violence would continue.

The Taliban has committed countless violent acts in the name of Islam, yet their culturally violent practice of obstructing Afghan women's access to education is especially noteworthy because of the lack of foundation in Islamic practices. In virtually no other Muslim state are women restricted from education to this extent; in fact, compared to Iran and Algeria—both having majority-Muslim populations—Afghanistan's female primary school enrollment rate has been consistently 20-60% lower since 2000 (World Bank Group). This statistic directly conveys the detrimental effect the Taliban has had on Afghan society, as even though Muslim states tend to have lower female educational attainment rates, Afghanistan is consistently lower because of the harmful practices instituted by the Taliban. Because of the fundamentalist group's culturally violent influence in Afghanistan, Muslim women are at a severely increased disadvantage in terms of education access due to the group's invasive power and their implementation of ultra-conservative laws. Their use of violence and fear tactics in conjunction

with religious affiliation has created an exceptionally oppressive state for Muslim women, as they feel unsafe attending school and even more unsafe advocating for their own rights.

Part of the raging cultural violence in Afghanistan is tied to physical violence as a result of the numerous wars that have occurred on Afghan soil in recent years. One of the most heartbreaking consequences of the decades of war and violence experienced in Afghanistan is the death toll that forgotten landmines continue to take, as Afghanistan is known to have many forgotten mines buried in areas where conflict reigned. During times of war, educational buildings were often used as camps or bases, thus leading to the burying of mines around the perimeter of schools. In consequence, Amiri and Jackson (2021) note that children represent the majority of victims of unexploded ordnance in Afghanistan (p. 23). The authors suggest different solutions to increase accessibility to education in Afghanistan—one idea is to remove buried landmines around schools so that children are no longer accidental victims of these weapons. The devastating fact that children are the number one victim of these weapons means that their lives are at constant risk, even just travelling to school. Long-lasting effects of violent conflict like this do not just inhibit children from going to school but inhibit them from feeling safe and pose significant threat to their lives. Salmi (2000) used this same example when discussing his definition of direct violence caused by a state; clearly, if students are at risk of serious injury or death on their commute to school, it cannot be said that their education is accessible. It goes without saying that the threat of danger at school is a substantial deterrent that limits all Afghan children's access to education, not just the female students.

The fundamentalist culture that has been instilled upon the Afghan people by the Taliban has also re-instilled traditional gender roles to an egregiously heightened level. As McClendon et al. (2018) explain in their research, the expectation for women to become wives and mothers at

very young ages often leads to families seeing “little need to invest in their daughters’ education,” leading to the termination of female education early on from both the government and their own families (p. 4). By eliminating opportunities for women to attain higher levels of education and elevate their status above simply “homemaker,” the traditionalist culture that has reappeared in Afghanistan continues to perpetuate cultural violence inside family units. In 2021, UNICEF’s Executive Director made a public statement addressing the alarming conditions for women in Afghanistan, stating that “UNICEF estimates that 28 per cent of Afghan women aged 15–49 years were married before the age of 18,” drawing attention to the growing rate of child marriages, followed by the fact that “most teenage girls are still not allowed to go back to school, the risk of child marriage is now even higher. Education is often the best protection against negative coping mechanisms such as child marriage and child labour,” (Fore). The Taliban’s chokehold on Afghanistan’s society has caused cultural violence to skyrocket and for the abuse of women to become acceptable in the name of Islam. Their extreme limitations on women’s education have pushed Afghanistan into a traditionalist society that values gender roles to an extent that would be considered illegal in many Western states, leading to shocking rates of child marriages and child labor.

The form of cultural violence perpetuated by the Taliban is that of oppression, physical violence, and fear through the exploitation of Afghanistan’s vastly popular religion: Sunni Islam. As a result of forcing their sexist, fundamentalist policies onto the population, women’s rights have become virtually obsolete. By using the Quran as a weapon against women, the Taliban has reset the culture of Afghanistan and turned it into an extremely hostile environment, leading to the oppression and disrespect of half of their population in the name of God. Their practices have manipulated a culture once rich with diversity and history and turned it into a landscape of

violence and fear by forcing young girls out of school and marrying them off to live the rest of their lives as mothers and wives, doomed to the confines of their homes, regardless of what their personal hopes and dreams may be. This frightening reality for Afghans has evolved into long-term issues for not just women, but the whole population.

Consequences

The inaccessibility of women's education paints a grave picture for the future of Afghanistan. As previously stated, Afghanistan's literacy rate ranks as the fifth lowest in the world, sitting at a shocking national average of 37%, which is a reality that wreaks havoc on Afghanistan's ability to develop and progress as a nation (World Population Review). This statistic can be tied to the violence that has plagued Afghanistan for decades; Noury and Speciale (2016) found that low levels of education due to long-lasting wars left permanent damage on the population, leading to a "poverty trap," (p. 828). Research shows that simply ending the wars in Afghanistan was not enough to lead to an improvement in education access. The effects of such low levels of educational attainment during wartime created a cycle of poverty, and thus, continued impediments to education—also known as a poverty trap. Poverty is a serious deterrent to not only accessible education, but successful education; without the resources to pay teachers and fund learning, even if children can physically go to school every day, their schools may not be providing a meaningful learning experience.

In conjunction with the poverty trap that Afghanistan is clearly experiencing, it is also proven that child marriages are far more likely to occur when education levels are low. Noury and Speciale (2016) found that "a one standard deviation increase in the number of years of

exposure to the Taliban occupation while of school age reduces the age at first marriage by about 0.2 years, which represents a 1.2% decrease compared to the mean value for the control group,” (p. 837) Basically, this research proves that for every additional year of exposure to Taliban rule women are increasingly likely to get married younger and have more children. States with poor economies and poor levels of education have much higher fertility rates and an increased risk for child marriages which greatly affects women’s quality of life as they are no longer free to pursue academic and professional pursuits, but rather must focus on family rearing. While motherhood is a vibrant and noble pursuit, it should be taken on when a woman is ready, and far past her childhood. With the combination of a highly uneducated population and the inability for women to contribute to the workforce the poverty trap that Afghanistan finds itself in will likely last for far longer than the Taliban hopes.

It has been proven that Muslim majority states tend to have larger gender gaps; however, “country income is strongly associated with increases in Muslim women’s education: richer countries have seen larger increases, on average, in Muslim women’s education levels than poorer countries,” (McClendon, 2018, p. 21). Income and education go hand in hand: when women have improved access to education, families can earn higher wages, and economies improve. Richer states have the resources to provide better educational opportunities for Muslim women, and the Taliban certainly does not have the resources to provide for its women, creating a bleak future for both the educational and economic future of women in Afghanistan. In 2022, UNAMA highlighted the reality of the economic hardships in Afghanistan in an article that states “six months after the takeover by the Taliban, Afghanistan is hanging by a thread. Over half of all Afghans face extreme levels of hunger... And some families are selling their babies to purchase food. The Afghan economy is enduring a bitter winter of its own. There is a danger that

the currency could go into freefall, and the country could lose 30 per cent of its GDP within the year,” (UNAMA). The economic reality created by the Taliban’s takeover has led to complete destruction of Afghanistan’s infrastructure, leading to a widespread economic insecurity. By continuing to withhold education from women, this reality will only extend farther into the future, and the economic consequences of the culturally violent practice of oppressing women will be wildly exacerbated.

Conclusion

Access to education for all citizens of a state is considered a human right, and even one of the United Nations’ top Sustainable Development Goals. Education provides unlimited opportunities to grow as both a person and a global citizen, making it a highly important element of any modern nation. Afghanistan’s lack of equal education access has created a destructive environment for all its citizens—not just their oppressed female population. The influence of the Taliban has created a toxic, culturally violent situation for all Afghans through their exploitation of Islam: the most popular religion in Afghanistan by a wide margin. By forcing their fundamentalist policies upon the general public and using terrifying, violent measures to enforce them, the Afghan population has no choice but to assimilate or face potentially fatal consequences.

Though the Quran supports equality among mankind, the Taliban’s policies and actions are anything but equal. Their use of violence, weapons, and intimidation to execute their ideals have led to numerous instances of horrific acts—particularly against women. As stated, many of their approaches to public policy involves direct violence, which has resulted in the massacre of

thousands over the course of the Taliban's two reigns of terror. Direct violence deters women who are simply sitting in class and children who are peacefully walking to school, all because the threat of acid being poured on them or unseen bombs exploding is a true reality for Afghans. Their schools are inaccessible because it puts students' lives and wellbeing at stake just to travel to them—it's as simple as that.

Alongside the direct violence polluting Afghanistan's society are displays of both indirect and repressive violence. Against the stance of the legitimate Afghan government, the Taliban refuses to endorse women's education, and has even gone so far as to outlaw it on various occasions, thus restricting a fundamental human right. With this comes the universally low literacy rate across both men and women, leaving only about a third of all Afghans able to read and write their native language. Because of the harsh repressive violence restricting education—and many other civil rights—and the rampant direct violence, indirect violence seen in the low literacy rate naturally follows. The combination of all three of these sub-categories of violence as proposed by Salmi further emphasize the cultural violence consistently seen throughout this state and symbolize the universal importance of education for a society.

The range of tactics used to create the culturally violent environment found in Afghanistan has reduced the female population to an unimportant margin of society, used only for childbearing and homemaking, usually beginning at very young ages. This devastating reality has pushed Afghanistan back decades in terms of development. With the Taliban's second reign of terror in full swing, their current economic situation is downright dire, affecting thousands of starving, freezing families with no end in sight. The poverty trap caused by decades of war and conflict is exacerbated by the Taliban's unsustainable political practices, leading to the misery of the vast majority of the population with no tangible solution. Quality education is key to

advancement, therefore the more the Taliban restricts the education accessibility in Afghanistan, the more egregious their standard of living will become. Oppressing half of their population is an unsustainable practice in the modern world, and the international community watches on as Afghanistan's infrastructure crumbles alongside their gender rights. The brief era of peace and prosperity in between the two Taliban eras further contrasts the disastrous situation Afghans currently find themselves in, making their reality all the more painful as current generations have experienced a brief time of peace and progress. Though there have been numerous efforts from powerful states around the world and the United Nations itself, Afghanistan will be unable to amend their current economic and social crisis until they eradicate the rampant cultural violence and make equal education access a reality for all citizens.

Chapter 3: Algeria

Located in North Africa with a coast touching the Mediterranean and land stretching into the Sahara, Algeria is a geographically diverse country home to equally diverse cultures. With a population of over 46 million citizens—and almost 3 million of these citizens in the capital, Algiers—Algeria is an important piece of the greater Arab world and has a rich history intimately intertwined with Islam. It is widely known that Algerian culture has been significantly impacted by their long history as a colony; in fact, because of the 130 years of colonial rule under France, “a transient, nearly rootless society has emerged, whose cultural continuity has been deeply undermined,” (Brown et al., 2024). This phrase acutely describes the impacts of colonialism and the loss of individuality that many states face after generations of life under rule by a foreign state, which was certainly the case for Algerians. In fact, Arabic only became the national language of Algeria in 1990, though French is still widely spoken and taught (Brown et al., 2024). Though it is taking time to accomplish, Algeria is making strides towards reclaiming their customs as an Arabic state by pushing out the lasting influence that French colonialism has left on the country and its people.

Algerians are widely Sunni Muslims. This religious unity creates valuable connections among citizens and the wider Islamic community, allowing Algerians to find allyship in their common religious beliefs. In contrast to many Muslim-majority states, Algeria’s government has encouraged secularity, which has led to significant backlash from fundamentalist groups in the region. These clashes in ideology have led to violent events on occasion, but the government has maintained their position and continues to push for secular modernization (Brown et al., 2024). Algeria’s government has undergone many transformations since their independence, but they currently follow a semi-presidential system that is comprised of multiple parties. They use a

democratic system to elect both local and national officials, with Islamic parties usually gaining the most social traction. Though there has been a push since the later 20th century towards secularization, there is still significant influence of Islam in the Algerian government (Brown et al., 2024). Regardless of their government's push towards secularization, many Algerians remain steadfast in their faith and push for Muslim influence in government and law.

Algerian infrastructure has been under construction since their independence, but one of the primary areas of concern is their education system. Since earning freedom from colonialization, education in Algeria has been made compulsory for all children from ages 6 to 15, though the literacy rate is still unfortunately low. French is still a popularly used language for Algerians; however, in efforts to reclaim national identity, the Algerian government has made Arabic the official language of instruction for all higher-education institutions. This is part of the government's policy of "Arabization:" putting heavy emphasis on restoring Arabic values and customs by moving away from the heavy influence left by France during their colonial era (Brown et al., 2024). Though the effects of colonialism have and will continue to extend for generations, the conscious effort towards taking back their identity as an Arabic nation is a positive step for Algerian society and will benefit future generations in their search for personal and cultural identity.

French Colonization in Algeria

From the 8th through the 16th century, Algeria was under the control of numerous dynasties; however, this passing of power ended in 1830 when the French took over. The French invasion commenced a long and tumultuous history of colonization with side effects stretching

into the 21st century (Brown et al., 2024). Unlike France's other colonies, "Algeria was annexed and made officially a part of France in 1848," creating unique circumstances for the original inhabitants (Choi, 2016, p. 201). As a result, Algeria quickly became a "settler colony," which is a special type of colonialism in which populations invade a colony and consequently displace the original inhabitants. As Choi (2016) explains, "the ultimate goal of settlers is to replace the existing native society by eradicating its peoples and cultures," which is especially harmful as it pushes populations out of their homes—typically by force—and away from their families, cultures, and traditions, leading to a harsh sense of displacement, and possible death (p. 202). This tactic has been seen numerous times throughout history, specifically seen in the Americas with the resultant genocide of indigenous populations, portraying the inhumane yet widespread tactics used by powerful European settlers to gain majority in their new colonies. It goes without saying that France's approach to colonizing Algeria created cultural and political tension that would lead to extraordinarily high tensions during the long period of colonization.

When the French arrived in 1830, the current inhabitants of Algeria were not willing to fold without a fight. A long and brutal battle ensued that the French were not expecting upon arrival; however, after a grueling seventeen years, the Algerian military fell and France took control (Choi, 2016, p. 202). Once the transformation was final, life as a colony was far from idyllic for Algerians. As Brown et al. (2024) note: "French colonists modernized Algeria's agricultural and commercial economy but lived apart from the Algerian majority, enjoying social and economic privileges extended to few non-Europeans." By separating themselves politically and socially from the Muslim majority, the French could continue their efforts to take full control of Algeria and one day create a European-majority population. One of their major tactics employed to try to achieve this goal was refusing to grant Algerians French citizenship and full

rights, which meant they could not benefit from the protection of French laws as instituted in Algeria yet were subject to French punishment if caught breaking these laws (Choi, 2016, p. 203). This tactic kept the native inhabitants under the thumb of French jurisdiction and created an exceedingly unjust society; after all, without any protected rights, Algerians were essentially left to fend for themselves as their freedoms were pulled out from under them. This was just the tip of the iceberg regarding tension between the two groups, as the French struggled to dominate the country, while the Algerians pushed to regain sovereignty and equal rights.

It should come as no surprise that women were especially disadvantaged by French colonialism, as their already-limited role in a Muslim society deteriorated even more under colonial rule. It was not an uncommon practice for women to be disinherited from their families in order to preserve property, as fathers were expected to give land when marrying off their daughters. Either way, disinherited or not, a woman's primary role was to birth sons. As Heggoy (1974) explains, "a daughter was less desired for many reasons; she eventually joined another group by marriage, so her contribution was lost, and she might dishonor the group by losing her virginity before marriage," (p. 450). This harsh reality depicts the low stature of women in Algerian society: they were simply a means of creating more men. In Muslim societies, a woman's purity is of the utmost importance to her family, putting a great deal of social and psychological pressure on daughters. This pressure, in combination with feeling unwanted in their family units, actually pushed Algerian women to encourage their husbands and brothers to fight against the French when tensions got high. It is believed that the women saw the reality that no change could occur with respect to their own position in society as long as Algeria was threatened by this foreign presence, leading them to "shriek encouragement to their men and hurl curses at the foreigners" during conflicts (Heggoy, p. 451-452). Even though women were not

widely respected, they still supported their male friends and family with the goal of a better future for all Algerians. After over a century of conflict and growing tensions and both sides of Algerian society now united against the French, it was only a matter of time until conflict would rise to a peak.

The Algerian War for Independence

In the midst of World War I, Algerians began mobilizing. The movement for independence began between the years of 1914-18 and “gained momentum after French promises of greater self-rule in Algeria went unfulfilled” following devastating French losses in World War II (Britannica). Shortly after the end of the second World War, the Algerian Front de Libération Nationale (FLN) began making moves. Forming in 1954, the FLN’s major goals were “independence, economic development in a socialist state, non-alignment, and brotherly relations with other Arab states” (Front de Libération Nationale). The FLN was considered a radical Muslim movement, yet it united thousands of Algerians under a common goal: achieving an end to the culturally violent acts France had long been committing. In 1954, that goal began the lengthy and bloody process of being attained as the Algerian war for independence commenced under the guidance of the FLN. As a guerrilla war was waged on the colonizers, Algeria began to seek diplomatic recognition from the UN in order to internationally establish their sovereignty once independence was achieved, thus showing a confident mindset.

Meanwhile, in an attempt to arouse the sympathies of Algerian women, the French began widespread efforts to encourage female enrollment in primary and secondary schools, leading to a 40% increase in girls’ attendance. Similarly, there was a massive effort to expand women’s

political rights, so in 1958 Muslim women voted for the first time in Algerian history (Heggoy, 1974, p. 453). These western advancements did not please the FLN, as their goals did not include the expansion of women's rights; in fact, they were notably outspoken in their belief that the education being provided was drawing women away from Islam, as it was taught in French and thus not affirming Arabic values. Regardless of the FLN's feelings towards these western advancements, Algerian women embraced the newfound freedoms they were given, even if they still supported the overarching Algerian cause. Leaders in the FLN gradually realized they could attract more women to the fight against the French by promising improved rights post-independence—and it worked. Women not involved in combat began acting as spies, carrying messages for the rebel cause, and aiding the FLN in their military gains (Heggoy, 1974, p. 454). This dangerous choice to help the rebels was worth it in the eyes of Algerian women: for them, the light at the end of the tunnel encompassed both Algerian independence, and improved women's rights—or so they believed.

With Algerians creating an increasingly united front against their colonizers, conflict between the two groups intensified. Though the French military was leagues more advanced, the brutal ferocity of the battles “sapped the political will of the French to continue the conflict,” leading to a 1959 declaration from Charles de Gaulle that Algerians had the right to determine their own future (Britannica). This declaration ended the majority of the violence and allowed Algeria to officially become an independent state in 1962. In the midst of the collapse of numerous French colonies, this was certainly a win for Algerians, but a significant loss for the French. Celebration undoubtedly ensued the Algerian victory; however, the death toll of over 1 million and the eight long years of battle would not be soon forgotten by either side of the conflict.

Over the course of the Algerian War, it has been reasoned that around 11,000 women joined the fight for liberation, though it is argued that this number is harshly underestimating the true figure (Leonhardt, 2013, p. 49). Either way, many Algerian women were active in both combat and social strategies aimed at recruiting more women to the movement for independence and the push towards improved women's rights (Turshen, 2002, p. 890-1). Their efforts paid off in the long run: in the postwar era, women's rights slowly but substantially improved. By the mid to late 90s, women gained full citizenship rights and "46 percent of primary and 50 percent of secondary school students were girls," as well as half of graduates from universities (Turshen, 2002, p. 891). Though this is an impressive jump from the 2% literacy rate Algerian women held at the time of independence in 1954, the improvements were slow to appear (Heggoy, 1974, p. 451). Unfortunately, the promises made during the war were not taken very seriously by those in power, leading to the continuation of a struggle for women's rights.

Immediately following the end of the war for independence, women were not granted the rights for which they fought alongside men. The FLN's promises of post-war freedoms and liberties for women were not backed by action in a newly independent Algeria, and traditional Islamic values—particularly the wearing of a veil—were reinstalled. As Heggoy (1974) explains, the hopes of Algerian women were likely unrealistic, because "the revolution itself was fought for contradictory reasons." Algerian men were pushing for an autonomous, Islamic society where they could practice their religion and continue embracing traditional Muslim values, whereas Algerian women clearly hoped to achieve expanded rights, improved education, and political influence (p. 454). With two harshly conflicting viewpoints on the meaning of a truly independent state, it is no surprise that women's rights did not thoroughly improve until decades after Algerian independence.

Cultural violence was a keystone of French colonialism in Algeria, as the French deliberately oppressed the native inhabitants of their once-colony and used settler colony strategies to attempt to evict Algerians from their homeland. Lasting for well over a century, the stain of cultural violence on Algerian society would not soon be forgotten. Heggoy (1974) cites Jean-Paul Charnay's hypothesis that by denying native Algerian men their pride, they were forced to "assert themselves even more strongly in the family circle: the only area of free expression open to them," (p. 450). As a result of this forced submission, Algerian men took their personal and societal frustrations out on their wives and daughters, who were the only figures in colonial society still beneath them. Unfortunately, this led to direct violence in the home, as domestic violence became a normal part of Algerian women's lives. As proposed by Salmi (2000), this deliberate injury to women and their lives was extremely harmful and reinforced ideals of inferiority. Because of the French's cultural violence towards Algerian men, Algerian women ended up facing harsh direct violence inside the home.

Cultural violence against women was further exemplified by the legislature's adoption of the Family Code in the midst of Algerian women gathering a petition of one million signatures in protest of its statutes. As Turshen (2002) explains, "the code made all women minors in education, work, marriage, divorce, and inheritance; and it guaranteed polygamy to men. Also, men could divorce unilaterally and could evict their ex-wives from their homes. Sharia law, which is based on the Koran and other sources, defined inheritance: men were entitled to twice as much as women," (p. 894). This inherently culturally violent code of law is a direct reflection of Muslim men's traditionalist approach to codifying gender roles, as well as the long-term effects of needing to reinforce their superiority after generations of oppression by the French. Unjust policies like the Family Code persisted in Algerian society under the Chadli

administration (1979-1991), as “Chadli was known to make compromises with Islamic opponents to stay in power, compromises that sacrificed women’s autonomy,” (Turshen, 2002, p. 895). Sexist legislation like the Family Code falls directly under Salmi’s ideas regarding repressive violence, specifically the deprivation of women’s fundamental civil, political, and social rights. Taking away women’s power in marriage, education, and work gives them little to no influence in any societal spheres, making their lives ultimately dependent on men. Even though colonization was decades gone, women were still facing significant cultural violence in their own homes. Evidently, this longstanding tradition of female oppression was detrimental to gender relations and legislative equality in Algeria, but the Civil War on the horizon was poised to change Algerian society forever.

The Algerian Civil War

Over the course of the 1980s to 1990s, political tensions in Algeria were strained to say the least. With multiple groups competing for power, Chadli was removed from office by his own military and replaced by Mohamed Boudiaf in 1992. Only six months later, Boudiaf was assassinated, leading to years of extreme violence and savage conflict between recognized Islamic terrorist groups and the government. These terrorist groups “promised to revitalize patriarchy and male subjectivity” in response to unmet expectations created by the Algerian war. An independent Algeria promised “an economically viable nation based on Algerian, not French, values,” but this promise remained unfulfilled decades after independence had been gained (Bartlett, 2018, p. 473). One of the main reasons for the feeling of dissatisfaction among Muslim men in Algeria is due to the “unattainably high ideals of masculinity” as advertised by

fundamentalist groups, as Islamic leaders at the time of independence who had centered their religion as the core of a free Algeria and did not similarly emphasize the importance of economic and political developments (Bartlett, 2018, p. 473). These unattainable ideals were exemplified by legislature like the Family Code: attempts at severe reductions in women's rights faced harsh backlash that would render them ultimately ineffective. Because Algerian women were so staunchly opposed to these impositions and strongly desired to become a valuable part of the national economy, the conservative men of Algeria were unable to gain the universal political strength they hoped to achieve by instituting male-empowering laws such as the Family Code. It is no surprise that fundamentalist Muslim men were frustrated with the post-independence state of Algeria, as the government was attempting to juggle economic development and religious stagnation at the same time.

As this frustration mounted and the war took full form, widespread violence wreaked havoc upon Algerian society. Turshen (2002) states "an estimated 80,000 to 100,000 people lost their lives in terrorist acts carried out by competing armed terrorist groups in their bid for state power," describing the terrifying conditions Algerians found themselves living in (p. 896). The more the government intervened, the bloodier the conflict got: massacres began occurring in towns, roadblocks were set up to stop and kill citizens, women and girls were kidnapped to serve as slaves to the terrorists. One particular group, the Islamic Salvation Front (FIS), was calling for drastic legislation change, including expanding the protection of schools from "non-Islamic influences like coeducation and mixed groups in school lunchrooms," and increased gender segregation among adults by discouraging women from joining the workforce and separating public services by gender. One of FIS's most extreme laws was the legalization of killing women and girls not wearing their hijab (Turshen, 2002, p. 897). These drastic measures were clearly

meant to attain the unrealistic level of masculinity desired by fundamentalist Muslim men by destroying the rights of women politically and socially. Combining the historical culture of Algerian men's assertion of themselves over women at home with the extremist conservative ideals found in these terrorist groups created a terrifying state for women living in Algeria. Though policies proposed by the FIS such as legalized murder were not codified into national Algerian law, they were enforced by the powerful fundamentalist groups fighting for power during the civil war, leading to the murders of innocent women and girls in public with uncovered hair alongside other unspeakable atrocities that befell kidnapped women and girls during this period.

The underlying culturally violent tendencies of men in Algeria became widely known during this civil war as the widespread abuse of women ran rampant. The speed with which fundamentalist groups began targeting women during the conflict shows that they were they real target all along. Almost immediately after conflict had begun, groups like the FIS began kidnapping women and girls, forcing them into sexual and physical slavery, and regularly threatening their lives. These heinous acts fall directly under Salmi's sub-category of direct violence, as the lives of Algerian women were constantly being targeted and viciously attacked. Without any sociopolitical protection, women in Algeria were at constant risk for directly violent acts like kidnapping, torture, rape, and murder from powerful fundamentalist groups fighting for power, leading to an incredibly culturally violent environment. Needless to say, education was not on the forefront of anyone's mind; after all, it is unreasonable to focus on educational rights when one's life is at stake.

Alongside the blatant direct violence occurring at the time, Algerian women also had to face repressive violence. Most of the policy changes these groups pushed for were heavily based

in gender discrimination, especially targeting the separation of schools by gender. By using Islam as the basis for these changes, terrorist groups like the FIS were exploiting the common religion of Algeria in order to discriminate against women and push for further empowerment of men. In their use of repressive violence, terrorist groups in Algeria were able to further limit the rights of Algerian women in an attempt to further their sexist agendas. These actions would certainly qualify as culturally violent, given that their aim was to exclude women from rights freely given to men in Algerian society in order to reach the unrealistic standard of masculinity they were trying to attain.

Though cultural violence can manifest itself in many ways, the acts of the Islamic fundamentalist groups during the civil war era clearly depict a culturally violent basis to their belief system, as their main goal was to take power through violent conflict of which women were the primary victims. The basis of this belief system can be seen through conservative social attitudes towards women, particularly when it comes to wearing hijab. As Leonhardt (2013) explains, the veil came to symbolize “the dignity and validity of all native customs coming under attack (relating to women) and the need to affirm them as a means of resistance to Western domination,” (p. 47). As discussed, Algerians have historically been opposed to the infiltration of Western ideals due to their painful history with colonialism, thus giving the wearing of hijab a sense of cultural significance outside of the scope of Islamic modesty, but also a sense of personal identity within the Muslim world. Unfortunately, wearing hijab can also symbolize traditionalist mindsets that are harmful to women’s rights within Islamic societies, as the wearing of a veil can be seen as supporting the tradition of rigid gender separation by representing the more fundamentalist side of Islamic practices (Leonhardt, 2013, p. 47). During the war for independence, wearing hijab was seen as an act of rebellion against the French attempting to

force Western ideals onto Algerian society, but during the Civil War it was worn for fear of one's life. This shift in mindset shows a transition from pride in one's culture to fear of violence. As we can see, the violent acts in the name of Islam resulted in a culture shift for Algerian women during the Civil War.

By choosing to target women in this way, groups like the FIS exploit their faith in Islam to allow for the extreme abuse of women in an attempt to take control and boost their own sense of masculinity. The power that Islam holds over the Algerian population made this a terrifying situation, as a piece of shared culture that was supposed to ignite unity and peaceful Arabization across all Algerians became a weapon used against women who share these beliefs. As the civil war raged on for eleven years, it became clear that the underlying issues created by colonization were not as far under the surface as one might think; after all, generations of mistreatment by the French were less than 30 years past. The Algerian civil war did not create issues of gender inequality and cultural violence for its population, but rather allowed these horrific issues to come to the surface in a brutal, bloody manner. These violent acts go hand-in-hand with the continuation of women's depreciated status in Algerian society, and this status is maintained by one particular issue: unequal access to education between men and women.

Women's education in Algeria

Across Muslim-majority states, there is a consistent trend of women not achieving their full educational potential. As McClendon et al. (2018) found, "the measures of educational attainment, religion, and controls vary from study to study, the basic findings are consistent: countries where Muslims make up a larger share of the population have lower female attainment

and wider gender gaps, on average,” (p. 3). Unfortunately, this finding rings true in Algeria, as their female population has faced low attainment and wide gender gaps due to cultural violence both during their time as a colony and as an independent state. The effects of cultural violence as perpetuated in Algerian society have severely diminished women’s ability to succeed, and though it has been over sixty years since gaining independence from France, Algerian women’s progress in attaining equal access to necessary resources has been slow-moving.

During the era of colonization, Algerian women were extremely limited in their educational opportunities. The tension between French colonizers and Algerian men was already at a peak by the early-to-mid-1900s, and as Algerian nationalists were growing in popularity and influence, the idea of Algerian daughters attending French schools was Algerian fathers’ worst nightmare (Heggoy, 1974, p. 451). Given that female education was already an unpopular idea, the colonizers’ efforts towards ameliorating themselves through the expansion of freedoms to women made the multiplying French schools seem cancerous rather than advantageous to the Algerian public. Western ideals were seen as the enemy, therefore Western schools were the voice of the enemy, making it no surprise that women were not allowed to be subjected to what was surely seen as Western brainwashing. This mindset is what kept Algerian women out of schools and in the home for generations, leading to the vast majority—98%—of women to be illiterate by the time of liberation. As discussed, Salmi lists illiteracy as a primary example of indirect violence. With such a high illiteracy rate in Algeria, it is clear that indirect violence was occurring, as their women would be completely defenseless in any situation necessitating simple reading or writing. This unfair inaccessibility to basic human needs is a clear sign of the indirect violence that was occurring at the time. Whether it was fathers or the government perpetrating it, indirect violence was obviously occurring.

It is established that women expected the freedoms promised during the fight for independence to become reality immediately following the war; but, as we know, this did not happen. The new Algerian government was focused on reinstilling Arabic values, and less concerned with the advancement of women, thus leading to a lack of true advancements for women. There is proof, however, that advancements were being made in the post-colonial state: in 1987, the female literacy rate rose from the original 2% to 36%, and by 2002 it would hit 60% (World Bank Group). Currently, the female literacy rate in Algeria sits at 75%, which is about 4% higher than the global female literacy rate and is certainly a positive jump from the post-war statistics (World Population Review). Unfortunately, education developments hit a lull in the 90s through the early 2000s due to the raging political instability as a result of the Civil War. The political and social conflict limited the ability of the central government to continue its efforts towards improved education access, and the cultural violence perpetrated by terrorist groups like the FIS caused many women to fear for their public safety.

Conclusion

As the political situation in Algeria has oscillated throughout the past century, we have seen evidence of direct, indirect, and repressive violence in multiple different aspects of their society. The direct violence perpetrated during both the Algerian War and civil war has deeply affected Algerian women's sense of safety, as the government and terrorist organizations alike allowed for acts of violence against them to become commonplace. Similarly, the indirect violence immediately following the Algerian War has had long-term effects in limiting literacy across the country, leading to a host of problems for women who were unable to access

education and must navigate the world without the ability to read or write. Similarly, the repressive violence that harshly limited women's ability to attend school throughout the 20th century was a clear example of unfair restrictions on women's rights and further continued the cycle of cultural violence throughout the state. These forms of violence severely limited Algerian women's ability to attain meaningful, accessible education, thus making them second-class citizens in their own homeland long after the end of colonization. Given the universal importance placed on education, it is inherently problematic that women in Algeria have faced these massive barriers throughout the past century.

Though education access was profoundly limited to Algerian women throughout and for years after the end of colonization due to culturally violent laws and norms, it is important to note the impressive gains that have been made since the early 2000s. As Guedjali (2022) cites, school enrollment for Algerian women has steadily increased since independence, starting at 36.9% in 1966 and reaching 97.6% in 2019 (p. 117). This jump is largely due to the legislation passed by the Algerian government that protects and promotes women's right to education, which was key to their social and political development as a gender. Ironically, "in terms of educational success... the observation that girls do better than boys has been confirmed for several years now," which is shown in Algerian national educational attainment tests that are regularly dominated by female students (Guedjali, 2022, p. 117). This type of academic success confirms the importance of gender equality and improved education access. By opening up the classroom to women, the Algerian government can now see statistically how important it is to educate both sexes equally.

One of the most crucial elements of improved education access is a push for improved education quality, rather than solely focusing on the quantity of students attending school. As

Boutayeba (2019) acutely describes, it is important for a state to offer quality education, not just for the students' sakes, but because "education is both the seed and flower of economic growth," (p. 35). This is especially relevant to Algeria, as their GDP growth rate hit a significant spike in the early 2000s and has much more closely matched the average world growth rate starting in 2010, when the effects of their civil war began to diminish (World Bank Group). This shows that as education and social issues begin to balance out, other sectors of society can follow.

Unfortunately, Algeria is still on the poorer end of the economic spectrum, as the average monthly income is 327 per capita, which is a fraction of the average monthly income of 6,398 in the United States (WorldData.info). Boutayeba explains that growth in Algeria has been stagnant for some time now because "the quantity of education alone is not enough to have an economic impact on growth. Instead, the quality of education is the effective driver of economic growth," and Algerian education is ranked at the bottom for education quality on an international scale (p. 43). Though Algeria has certainly been enjoying higher numbers of students attending school, the quality of the education provided is not meeting the demands of an increasingly competitive economic market, rendering their education system weak.

The cultural elements that have historically reduced women's ability to access education in Algeria have subsided in modern days. As explained, there have been massive improvements in the literacy rate as well as school attendance across both genders, proving that efforts to attract students have been successful. With the civil war in Algeria's rearview mirror and increasingly equal legislation coming to the forefront, it is clear that efforts towards equality are being made. Currently, Algeria's most pressing issue focuses on the expansion of quality education, as that is the most widely accepted method of achieving economic improvements and the best way to compete in the international community. Cultural violence has certainly not been eradicated in

Algerian society, but its effects are felt significantly less in the 21st century as women are increasingly present in both the classroom and society.

Chapter 4: Iran

The third MENA state to be discussed in this research is Iran: a country with a wealth of culture, history, and ethnic diversity. Like Afghanistan and Algeria, Iran has endured a long history of sociopolitical issues, especially contemporarily. With significant turmoil between Iran and certain Western states, their political dealings have been spotlighted on an international stage. Unfortunately, one major issue faced by Iranians is their approach to putting massive importance on religious beliefs and traditional customs rather than encouraging progress throughout their society. This system has resulted in significant cultural violence, specifically in the educational arena.

Formerly known as Persia during its time as part of the Achaemenid Empire, the state now known as the Islamic Republic of Iran dates back as far as 550 BCE, thus having thousands of years to develop the intricate history and culture it maintains today. In fact, the official language of Iran is still Persian—or Farsi—almost 100 years after its renaming, symbolizing the lasting influence of the Persian Empire. As of 2024, Iran is home to a population of 87.5 million and shares borders with Azerbaijan, Armenia, Turkmenistan, Pakistan, Afghanistan, Turkey, Iraq, and bodies of water including the Caspian Sea, the Persian Gulf, and the Gulf of Oman. It should come as no surprise that Iran's location has facilitated the state's interactions with its neighbors over the centuries, leading to conflict and friendships alike (Mostofi et al., 2024). With such close proximity to numerous states and trading routes, Iran enjoys a culturally diverse population with the predominant ethnic group being native Persian speakers; however, these native Persians are of various backgrounds themselves, with widespread Turkic and Arab influence and numerous minority influences, such as Armenian, Assyrian, and Jewish groups (Mostofi et al.).

The harsh Iranian landscape has pushed inhabitants to settle primarily along the perimeter of the state, with most choosing to live in the north-west region, near the capital, Tehran, and the Caspian Sea. Most ethnic groups choose to stick together, united by their linguistic and religious commonalities.

As stated, Persian is the most popular and official language of Iran, though “dialects from three language families—Indo-European, Altaic, and Afro-Asiatic—are spoken” with about 75% of Iranians speaking a variant of the Indo-European languages, creating a very diverse language profile across the population (Mostofi et al.). There also exists a strong influence of the Arabic language on the Persian lexicon, even though efforts were made in the early 20th century to eradicate Arabic influence. These efforts were ultimately unsuccessful, and Arabic influence continues to stretch across linguistic and religious sectors of modern Iran. In this vein, over 99% of Iranians are Muslim, with the vast majority following Shi’ism: a branch followed by only 10-15% of Muslims globally (Blanchard, 2009, p. ii). Iran is one of few Muslim states with a Shiite majority, making their socio-political reality unique in comparison to other states in the region, as a Sunni majority is more commonly found in Middle Eastern Muslim states. The main differences between these two branches of Islam “are rooted in disagreements over the succession to the Prophet Muhammad... and over the nature of leadership in the Muslim community,” though they otherwise follow the same core religious beliefs (Blanchard, p. 1). Religion is extremely important both socially and politically in Iran; their modern government is a theocratic democracy which will prove to be crucial to the policies enacted domestically and abroad.

The Iranian Revolution

Like most states in the MENA region, Iran has faced its share of political tumult both historically and contemporarily, leading to a complicated system in the modern state. The current government was born after the Iranian revolution, which occurred from 1978-79 following significant international interference in the region. In 1921, the United Kingdom instituted a monarchy in Iran and made Reza Shah Pahlavi king, which began a series of power struggles that Russia, the UK, and the United States all had a hand in. Years after a coup staged by the American CIA and British M16, Mohammad Reza Shah—still considered part of the Pahlavi regime—launched the “White Revolution,” which was “an aggressive modernization program that upended the wealth and influence of landowners and clerics, disrupted rural economies, led to rapid urbanization and Westernization, and prompted concerns over democracy and human rights,” (Afary, 2024). Reza Shah’s connection to the United States in combination with a loss of fundamental Islamic values was extremely unpopular with the Iranian people. This “White Revolution” touched all political, economic, and social corners of Iran, leading to widespread disapproval from Iranians as their political voice and socioeconomic standing diminished. Even though the Iranian economy was booming, the population’s widely traditionalist, conservative values were no longer being represented in the regime that was pushing for swift modernization. Unhappy with the lack of representation and the unwanted value-shift in the government, public friction grew and thus began the Iranian revolution in 1978.

Students and youth led the demonstrations and the government quickly turned against them, leading to the murder of many protestors; however, this only further fueled dissension among the population, as “martyrdom played a fundamental role in religious expression,”

(Afary). As months passed the revolution grew, eventually leading to strikes in both the government and oil industry. On February 11, 1979, the Iranian military declared neutrality, which essentially ousted the Pahlavi regime and opened the door for Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, a popular figure of the revolution, to take power. He declared Iran an Islamic Republic and “a return to conservative social values was enforced,” leading to changes in many of the existing laws, including the voiding of the Family Protection Act, which guaranteed certain rights to women in marriage (Afary). This effectively eradicated the social progress that had been made in Iran during the Western-backed Pahlavi regime, as Iranians were not in favor of the “anti-Islamic” policies enacted by the old regime. Though the policies that had been in place were generally intended to increase democracy and equality among Iranians, the public clearly viewed Westernization as an eradication of their own belief system, ultimately leading to the downfall of the sociopolitical advancements made during the “White Revolution.” By the beginning of the 1980s, a new constitution was in effect and the theocratic government seen in modern Iran was born.

Iran’s theocratic government is a unique system that places high emphasis on the importance of Islam. Their system has a president, whose term in office has no limit, and must be a “native-born Iranian Shi’ah,” (Mostofi et al.). The president’s duties are very important as they appoint many different positions throughout the government, though the president themselves wins office through election. One of the most important branches of the Iranian government is their Council of Guardians, in which half of its twelve members are experts in Islamic canon law, and the other half nominated by a Supreme Judicial Council. The Council of Guardians reviews legislation in order to make sure that laws are legal civilly as well as up to the standards of Islamic law; if not, the law will be struck down. More broadly, there are a wide range of political

parties, but they are “institutionally weak,” because the Iranian constitution “guarantees freedom of association but does not permit parties that oppose the existing system of government or the state ideology that underlies it,” meaning that political parties are not influential in the same way as in most Western governments, and the Iranian government is rarely, if ever, challenged (Mostofi et al.). Interestingly, because of the lack of political parties, most candidates gain popularity through personal ideologies and personality traits. The three “camps” are principalists, reformists, and centrists, which represent the spectrum of political ideologies in Iran.

Principalists focus on protecting conservative values and emphasize “the need to safeguard Iranians from corrupting and foreign influences.” Reformists follow a more liberal approach and place importance on international cooperation. Centrists fall somewhere in the middle, often referred to as “moderates,” (Mostofi et al.). These three ideologies portray the range of ideas followed by Iranians in their post-revolution state and symbolize the importance of Islam both in the government and general population. Keeping in line with many other Muslim-majority states, the political influence of Islam post-revolution would prove to have significant effects on Iranian women and their political and social standing.

Women in Iran

As Keddie (2000) so acutely explains, “Iran may have claim to more surprising political changes in the past century than any other country existing continuously during that period. Among these changes have been notable alterations in women’s roles and status,” (p. 405). Because of the turbulent political shifts from dynasty to monarchy to theocracy, Iranian women were constantly facing sociopolitical changes throughout the 20th century, including the forcible

removal of veils, the institution of the Family Protection Act, joining the work force—and then the reversal of all of these laws. During the reign of the monarchy under Reza Shah Pahlavi, wearing the veil in public was illegal, the influence of religion in education was reduced, and education was encouraged for Iranian women (Rezai-Rashti, 2015, p. 471). Fifty years later, the government began taking steps backwards from modernization. From 1980-83 the Iranian constitution was rewritten, and women were defined solely by their familial and homemaking duties, and “unreformed Islamic law was instated,” which reintroduced “polygamy, free divorce for men but not for women, and an eventual minimum age of 9 for female brides,” among many other drastic legislation changes (Keddie, p. 410). As discussed, these fiercely traditionalist values were reinstated in the wake of the “White Revolution,” in order to reinstate what was considered to be traditional Islamic values but were often very harmful to women and their rights. As a result of this change in legislation, the modernized policies instituted by Pahlavi were nullified and many women were forced to leave government and judiciary jobs and the wearing of hijab was mandatory once again. Keddie posits that “veiling has become perhaps the central symbol of the Islamic Republic; the veil and ‘proper veiling’ have become definitional symbols of a woman’s faith and loyalty,” showing the lofty importance put on a key Islamic practice that has stretched well into the 21st century (p. 410). These post-revolution changes in both social custom and enforced legislation emphasize Iran’s culture shift during the late 20th century, specifically regarding the massive step away from the Westernization that occurred during the “White Revolution.” Though this shift towards increased Islamization is what many Iranians fought for during their revolution, it had harsh limiting effects on women’s rights.

One of the most important aspects of Iranian women’s involvement in revolutionary and post-revolutionary politics in Iran was that it “altered the consciousness of many women... about

their political potential,” consequently encouraging them to not idly accept the dampening of their sociopolitical power (p. 413). This was especially evident in their use of the women’s press, which was decades older than the revolution, as well as their shift into the private sector when removed from their positions in the public sector. It was clear that Iranian women—while still respecting tenants of Islam—were not going to lie down and accept the removal of their rights: they were going to continue their sociopolitical involvement, one way or another. One main example of their success was Khomeini and his regime endorsing girls’ education—only when the small number of coeducational schools met the new standards of such a place—as well as emphasizing the importance of women in the public sphere (p. 413). Whether or not Khomeini’s administration really enforced these egalitarian values, the rights of women were not totally demolished in post-revolution Iran as a result of the female population’s push to remain socio-politically relevant.

Women’s Education in Iran

Many public institutions were affected by the Iranian revolution; unsurprisingly, the education system faced severe negative impacts across both genders in Iran. Higher education institutions particularly suffered immediately post-revolution because “tens of thousands of professors and instructors either fled the country or were dismissed because of their secularism or association with the monarchy,” thus leading to mass understaffing and an inability to attract students (Mostofi, 2024). Because of the highly conservative government that was put in place directly following the conflict, educators who were associated in any way with the pro-West monarchy or anti-Islam teachings were forced to leave their positions, even though their

knowledge was invaluable. As a result of the failing education system, the female literacy rate in Iran was at just 24%, compared to 48% for men (World Bank Group). As Salmi (2000) would argue, this is a clear example of the indirect violence occurring at the time, as this dangerously low literacy rate placed a significant handicap on Iranian women as a result of the government's inability to provide equal education. Though the male literacy rate was similarly poor, it was still double that of the female rate, showing a clear imbalance in the educational system during the postwar era.

As we've established, Khomeini and his administration claimed to hold female educational values in high importance, though he believed strict Islamic laws must be enforced in order for women to attend school alongside men. Similar to the unrealistic expectations set in Afghanistan, Khomeini wanted to create an educational system that would keep male and female students completely separated, as he believed that was crucial to upholding fundamentalist Islamic ideals (Keddie, 2000, p. 13). Consequently, "women became the signifier of culture and tradition" in post-revolution Iran, which quickly eradicated the Western feminism that had taken root under the modernization efforts, thus changing the status-quo of what was expected from women inside and outside of the classroom (Rezai-Rashti, 2015, p. 472). As Rezai-Rashti (2015) explains, Islamization became a top priority for Iran immediately following the war, and the first area of reform was education. With subjects such as Islam, revolution, and gender roles now part of school curriculum, it was clear that a much more traditionalist approach was in effect (p. 472). Education, especially at the primary level, holds great power over young minds, making this a surefire method to move away from decades of Westernization and reclaim Islamic values. While these changes were taking place, Khomeini maintained his stance that female education was important—especially after the meaningful contributions women had made during the war.

With that being said, women were encouraged to participate in society as “their primary role was to use...education to the benefit of their families—to be a good mother and wife,” (Rezai-Rashti, p. 473). This blatant contradiction was asking women to follow traditional roles while embracing modern practices, which was nearly impossible for many women.

Though education was not barred to Iranian women, it was certainly limited. One of the primary policies of the newly formed Islamic Republic of Iran was sex segregation both inside and outside of the classroom. In public, men and women were not permitted to walk alone with each other unless married or having a “religiously sanctioned relationship” such as being siblings. This policy extended openly throughout primary and secondary education but was not considered the norm in universities and beyond. In order to uphold the tenants of Islam, many universities barred women from male-dominated fields of study—specifically in technology and engineering fields—and restricted male and female students from attending the same classes (Rezai-Rashti, p. 473). As we can see, the postwar education reforms severely diminished accessibility for women in the classroom and was providing blatantly unequal opportunities among the two sexes. According to Salmi (2000), this inequality in education would be considered repressive violence and contributes directly to the cultural violence that is intertwined with Iran’s theocratic government, as it is restricting women from equality in the eyes of the law and society. Though this policy falls directly under one of Salmi’s forms of social violence, this education system was actually seen as an improvement to many Iranians (Rezai-Rashti, p. 473). The fact that extreme gender segregation and limitations on fields of study in higher education was seen as a positive change in the decades following the revolution symbolizes the conservative belief system shared by many Iranians, further reinforcing the widespread hatred of the modernization implemented during the “White Revolution.”

Even though these education reforms would undoubtedly be seen as a political step backwards in the Western world, post-revolution Iran saw a significant jump in literacy rate for both men and women: by 1986, Iranian women had a literacy rate of 41% and men had a literacy rate of 63%, showing a significant improvement (World Bank Group). Furthermore, attendance rates for girls at the primary and secondary level were growing, showing an increase in accessibility for younger students. Unfortunately, the percentage of women attending higher education decreased, most likely due to university closures following the war, as well as a decrease in trained faculty, as discussed. (Rezai-Rashti, p. 474). Even though Khomeini took a decidedly segregated and conservative approach to education, these trends show that the system being implemented was clearly working for younger generations. The increased literacy rates and improved accessibility for primary-aged children proves that the public was receptive to the conservative implementations in the 70s and 80s, as their Islamic values were once again being reflected in their education system.

Years after the Khomeini regime, a new president came to power in Iran: Muhammad Khatami. Running on a platform of liberalization, Khatami won the presidency in 1997 and would remain in power until 2005. Throughout the 90s there was a rise in women's higher education enrollments, and by 2011, "65% of bachelor's degrees in humanities, 69% in sciences, 62% in medical sciences, and 50% seeking master's degrees, and 38% of Ph.D. programs" all belonged to women (Rezai-Rashti, p. 477). These statistics are a huge jump from what was a 24% literacy rate less than forty years prior, showing massive expansion in education access for women in Iran. It is believed Khatami's regime faced so much success with his liberalized approach as opposed to the failed approach of the "White Revolution" because of his more gradual approach to reform, rather than "a radical shake-up of the system," (Rezai-Rashti, p.

478). This allowed him to increase female participation in education while being careful not to alarm any of his citizens with sharp detours from tradition. With that being said, Khatami's presidency certainly expanded educational opportunities for women, but did not ideologically affect the system. He primarily advocated for "tolerance, morality, and moderation," resulting in a system that "remained ideologically conservative and inward looking," which "totally ignored the spirit of coexistence and constructive exchange advocated by the President," (Rezai-Rashti, p. 478). Ultimately, Khatami's time in office clearly expanded educational access across the board but did not truly liberalize the Iranian educational system.

Though it has been established that education is politically protected for Iranian women, there exist cultural barriers that make education unequal among men and women in Iran. Roudsari et al. (2013) researched challenges regarding sexual health education (SHE) for female adolescents in Iran and stated "Asian cultures share disapproval of non-marital sex and taboos surrounding sexuality. This is the case in Muslim countries, particularly in relation to girls, because their chastity is denoting their families' honor," (p. 102). The shared Islamic beliefs across Iran in partnership with societal expectations surrounding women's "purity" places heavy emphasis on the importance of virginity, thus discouraging many parents and teachers from adequately educating their daughters about sex. Though this is the core issue of inadequate SHE, Roudsari et al. found numerous other reasons regarding parental and administrative hesitance in providing this education primarily stemming from anxieties that it will encourage adolescent sexual activity. Through their survey-based research, they found that "most adults believed that sexual knowledge, especially about sexual relationships, causes distortion and premature sexual activity before marriage," which, as stated, would be extremely detrimental to families and their socially perceived honor in Iran (Roudsari et al., p. 104). This is an interesting combination of

culture and religiosity in Iranian society as the two have come together to restrict a very niche aspect of the education system, thus resulting in restrictions on the education available to Iranian girls.

On the basis of Salmi's (2000) ideas, I would argue that this restriction on SHE is indirect violence on the Iranian female population, as it is a severe lack of protection against disease (specifically sexually transmitted diseases), as well as repressive violence, as it is restricted only from female adolescents and makes them inequal within the education system. This approach to SHE is not only culturally violent to Iranian women and their rights, but also extremely harmful to their ability to make safe, informed decisions about their bodies. Susheela et al. (2005) found that education is a key factor in decreasing risky sexual activities for adolescents in developing states, especially those living in rural areas, those who do not regularly attend school, and those who are married as teenagers (p. 329). All three of these identifying factors apply to a significant proportion of women in Iran, thus making it crucial that they receive this education to protect themselves and their reproductive health. Because there is such significant inaccessibility to this form of education, Iranian women are under unnecessary risk and thus victims of cultural violence perpetrated by both their society and religion.

Alongside these barriers to equal education lives the perpetuation of cultural roadblocks that are extremely restrictive in Iranian universities. The sociopolitical relationship between Iranian women and men has played a key role in women's ability to access higher education due to the lofty importance placed on traditional values. As Shavarini (2003) notes, "in 2003, of those passing the national college entrance examination, *kunkur*, 62 percent were women and 38 percent were men," showing a significant shift in the demographic of college students (p. 189). This impressive increase in female educational participation was not well received across the

public, leading to a debate on a potential quota in order to limit the number of women entering university, spearheaded by conservatives who argue “that women’s overall access to higher education is threatening traditional values, and if women continue to outperform their male counterparts educationally, it will threaten the sacrosanct family structure that forms the basis of Islamic society” (Shavarini, 2006, p. 189). Rather than celebrating the impressive accomplishments of their women, the Iranian government instead debated limiting their educational presence so as to protect the position of men in society. This hidebound mindset eventually came to fruition: gender quotas were codified into practice, thus placing limits on the number of women admitted to university (Human Rights Watch, 2012). By holding traditional values and outdated gender roles above the importance of women attaining higher education, Iranian conservatives have made it clear that their goal is to bar women from elevating their social and professional status through the benefits offered by higher education.

The conservative values widely shared throughout Iran are not limited to politicians. In classrooms, the high importance placed on maintaining strict Islamic values creates a difficult relationship between male teachers and female students. Because of this, being female “not only makes it difficult for [women] to discuss academic issues with their professors, but it also seems to act as an obstacle in classroom participation,” as Iranian women are unable to challenge the views of male professors, seek out individual help, or even ask questions without facing the risk of appearing disrespectful (Shavarini, 2006, p. 198). This pressure to remain silent and meek in educational settings is obviously harmful to Iranian women’s ability to obtain a meaningful experience in the classroom. If the ability to challenge ideas or ask questions is taken away, then the foundation of educational exploration disappears. On the flip side, because of the equal position among men, this is a problem that is unique to women solely for being female. This

sexism is clearly restrictive both to women's rights as well as their educational opportunities, making equal education ultimately inaccessible.

Though Iranian women can legally attend university and attain higher levels of education, the roadblocks created by their extremely formal relationships with male professors makes it impossible to garner the same depth of understanding of topics as their male counterparts. This inequal system falls directly under Salmi's (2000) research, further showing repressive violence in the Iranian education system. Because these protected norms are a direct result of the shared culture and religion of the state, this repressive violence would certainly fall under the umbrella of cultural violence, as the common culture of the Iranian people is being exploited as a method to oppress women. When the protection of traditional family roles becomes more important than a woman's right to access education, there is clear harm being perpetrated across the population. Women need support both personally and socially to attain their educational goals; unfortunately, Iranian women face obstacles from both of these sectors.

Consequences

As a result of the culturally violent practices throughout the education system, Iranian women describe their educational experiences in an interesting way. This primarily has to do with expectations surrounding their university attendance: sadly, women learn that "their 'intelligence' is not valued, much less respected... What is expected of them in college is entirely different than their male counterparts—expectations that are markedly inferior," (Shavarini, 2006, p. 199). The gender roles that many women attempt to challenge by earning their degree are still very much active inside the walls of Iranian universities, leading to a far less meaningful

educational experience. Combining the social pressure to act appropriately when dealing with male professors and the societal view of women in Iran has fostered an environment that women are allowed to be in, yet not allowed to truly benefit from. Without the expectation to learn and push academic boundaries, Iranian women clearly have far less access than their male classmates to the deeper knowledge that universities should aim to provide. Because of these uneven expectations, women “expressed a strong disappointment in how little academic knowledge they acquire in college. Their words describe their college experiences as having more to do with self-realization than with academics,” in Shavarini’s research (p. 198). The disappointment felt by these women shows the reality of the poor job done by their education system in providing them with a meaningful environment in which to learn and exemplifies the sad reality that these women are learning more social and personal skills rather than gaining knowledge. Though it is still a positive growth, it is not the type of knowledge that many of these women are truly seeking by attending college.

Shavarini describes the socially lacking personal lives of the women who participated in their study and explains that for many of them, college is the first experience they have interacting with people outside of their family (p. 196). With this opportunity to experience more of the world independently comes the aforementioned “self-realization” that many Iranian women say they’ve gained, alongside a clearer understanding of their role in Islamic society. Unfortunately, this understanding further augments the frustration already felt by many women in this state, frustrations widely revolving around “not being respected, not having rights, not being able to do what they dream about, and not marrying who they desire,” which is a reality that many Iranian women were not so painfully aware of before attending university (p. 200). This eye-opening experience for them, though not academically satisfying, encourages women to

participate more actively in society in hopes of finding a stronger sense of personal independence. Though it is still exceedingly challenging to integrate into Iranian society as an educated woman, there can be hope that the increasing number of educated women in Iran will one day lead to improved social and political positions for them.

Consequences of the culturally violent system in Iran do not just affect women. Alongside practices like gender quotas, discouragement from relationships with professors, and other political attempts to limit women's experiences in the classroom, it is also found that many areas of study across Iranian universities are barred to women. These "single-gendered" majors are typically those involving science, math, and technology, but some universities have also banned political science, accounting, and business-related majors to women. Though this is certainly detrimental to a woman's ability to follow her intellectual passions, it is also harmful to men: some "single-gendered" majors such as history, linguistics, and philosophy are off-limits to male students in order to preserve them for female students. Though it varies from school to school, some Iranian universities have anywhere from 43 percent to 100 percent of "single-gendered" majors (Human Rights Watch). This unfair practice severely limits both ends of the population from attaining their academic goals in the field they are most passionate about, leading to Iran losing thousands of potential accountants, historians, philosophers, and engineers solely on the basis of sex.

The evidence is clear: the consequences of this culturally violent education system affect both genders, though women face the most restrictions. Sexist restrictions, harsh gender bias, and harmful cultural norms have led to the imposition of gender quotas, "single-gendered" majors, less meaningful learning experiences, and ultimately inequal education access across the Iranian population. As a result of these practices, women are surely encouraged to participate more

actively in their society to facilitate change, but it is unlikely that conservative Iranian politics will fluctuate in their favor any time soon.

Conclusion

The Iranian educational system, particularly in higher education, maintains culturally violent practices that affect their female population significantly. Over the course of the state's history, there has been significant changes—both positive and negative—that have influenced an Iranian woman's ability to attend school. From the pro-West “White Revolution,” to the conservative movement following the Iranian revolution, to the liberalized Khomeini regime, and now a recent return to gender quotas and segregated classrooms, there have been massive shifts that have influenced a woman's ability to learn alongside male students. With constant shifts in access yet stagnation in conservatism, it is clear that women in Iran have a long way to go before their education access is equal to that of Iranian men.

As it has been established, both the Iranian government and social norms have fostered a culturally violent environment due to the repressive nature of many of the laws and rules surrounding a female student's ability to interact with professors, pick a major, and be accepted to a school. These barriers show an ultimately inaccessible system as applied to women and convey the unfortunate reality for women who seek to increase their social participation and intellectual capacity. Though there has certainly been an improvement in education attendance and access for primary and secondary schools, as well as a significant increase in female literacy rate (which currently sits at 85 percent), the Iranian education system cannot be considered equally accessible until all schools offer parallel opportunities regardless of gender (World Bank

Group). The system that is currently operating under the Islamic Republic of Iran is culturally violent and does not act with the wellbeing of all its citizens in mind, leading to a system that is ultimately harmful to Iranian society and its citizens.

Conclusion

Across this body of research, we have traversed the rich cultures and histories of Afghanistan, Algeria, and Iran. The deeply complicated and wildly interesting histories these states lay claim to are unique not only across the region of the Middle East and North Africa, but the rest of the world. Between the linguistic, ethnic, and cultural diversity found within the borders of these states and the fascinating sociopolitical situations, each of these three nations represented an important case study to be explored—and the results were similarly captivating. The influence of religion—particularly Islam—on states in the MENA region plays a critical role in the daily lives of each citizen and has shown to be a massively impactful factor in the educational systems of each of these case studies. Globally, religion plays a stronger role in governments than might be immediately obvious; after all, even culturally diverse, modern states like the United States cannot claim to be completely secular. While this is the case, it is exceedingly obvious that Islam plays a critical role in the governments of all three of these states, symbolized clearly in two of their official state titles: the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan and the Islamic Republic of Iran. While the People’s Democratic Republic of Algeria’s official state title may not include the word “Islam,” we have seen the obvious impact that Islam has had on both Algerian government and policies throughout this research.

Education is inherently important and is a universal right that must be protected across both sexes. As the United Nations succinctly summarizes: “Education is the basic building block of every society. It is the single best investment countries can make to build prosperous, healthy, and equitable societies,” (Education for all). This view is not a modern invention, as “Article 26 of the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights states that ‘everyone has a right to education,’” (United Nations). The importance placed on education in a modern society cannot

be understated, as it truly is the foundation upon which all else is built. Progress, innovation, opportunities, freedom, knowledge: these all cannot be had without equitable, accessible education. In a more concrete sense, factors such as economic viability and healthcare are intimately linked with education, as states with limited educational opportunities are found to have comparatively poor economies, shorter life expectancies, and higher levels of poverty (El Alaoui, 2016). It cannot be understated how important education is to all states and their citizens' potential for success.

With an underscored emphasis on the importance of education, a lack of meaningful, equitable educational environments in any society is cause for alarm. When a state is not protecting one of the most important human rights recognized across the world, evaluation of that state and its policies becomes necessary. This simple fact is the basis of this research. Time and time again, the marginalized group not receiving adequate education access is the same: women. The world has watched as women have fought for their right to education repeatedly throughout history, and though it is still imperfect in many places, the situation can only be labeled as dire in Afghanistan, Algeria, and Iran. Specifically in the Western world, the role of women in society has made explosive strides over the past century with millions gaining the right to vote, participating more actively in government and society, taking on important roles during wartime, becoming doctors, lawyers, and CEOs—many while being mothers—and many, many more accomplishments. Women's place in society has generally expanded past the home, and I would argue that the popular opinion of most Western societies is that women should do with their lives what they please—whether that be dedicating their life to their family, their god, or their work, women should ultimately be in charge of their own lives.

As we've established, the role of women in society is controversial across the MENA region. In some states, like Iran, "Westernized" policies such as expanded educational opportunities, increased female participation in government, and globalized economic policies are disliked to the point of revolution. Even though Iran was making strides towards a more liberalized state during their "White Revolution," the population was in harsh discordance because of their longstanding traditions and fundamental beliefs. This is a common theme throughout all three states studied in this body of work: commitment to tradition. Afghanistan's longstanding issues with the Taliban forcing staunch fundamentalist policies on the population shows the domination of traditionalist viewpoints in their government. Given that Algeria has a complicated past with colonialism, their focus on a return to Arabization emphasized the need to find commonalities within the greater Arab world as a newly independent state. Iran has consistently returned to traditionalist Islamic values after every period of liberalization, no matter how popular. This interesting trend shows the undeniable importance of tradition in all three states—so important it takes precedent over innovation at times.

The issue of tradition is brought up as it applies to stagnation. A stagnant government, a stagnant society, and a stagnant belief system are the enemy of progress. Positive change cannot be born out of stagnation, only action. Traditions are often very important for preserving cultural practices within families and communities, but tradition can become harmful when it interferes with progress. 100 years ago, women in the United States had very limited access to education because it was common practice for them to focus on finding a husband and raising a family rather than continue their studies. In 2023, it was found that more women were graduating college than men (Hanson, 2024). This shift is not the erasure of American culture, but rather the birth of a new era of progress across the population. American traditions were not lost as women

began chasing their education, and now the other half of the population could attain educational and professional excellence alongside their male counterparts. By refusing to remain stagnant, the American population is able to benefit from millions more engineers, doctors, lawyers, and businesswomen who also choose to have and support families.

The impact of tradition around the world holds interesting and unique consequences for each state. Within the scope of this study, it became clear that cultural traditions and beliefs directly impacted women's access to education in all three states both throughout history and contemporarily. Though there exist a range of similarities and differences among Afghanistan, Algeria, and Iran, they are all united through the cultural violence that has long stood in the way of women's progress in each respective state.

Findings

In all three states, the findings were consistent: cultural violence is prevalent and restricts women's access to education. To revisit Galtung's (1990) definition of cultural violence, there were certain criteria that acts needed to meet to be considered culturally violent, including an aspect of a culture being used to legitimize violence, changing the moral "color" of harmful acts, and impeding the fundamental needs that all human beings share. Similarly, Salmi (2000) developed the ideas of Galtung by proposing various sub-categories of violence that all contain important elements found in culturally violent societies. Throughout these case studies, the most widely found sub-categories as defined by Salmi were direct, indirect, and repressive violence. By refining the ideas proposed by Galtung, Salmi was able to further describe the finer aspects of cultural violence as applied to women in each of these states, allowing for a more descriptive

analysis regarding the violent acts and their effects. As a result, the findings of this study are further reinforced by the foundation laid by Galtung and Salmi.

In Afghanistan, the most significant factor impacting women on a daily basis is undeniably the Taliban. Over the past three decades, the Taliban has fallen in and out of power through the employment of force and fear, bringing destruction and violence each time. Their first reign of terror brought with it a range of culturally violent practices, falling under three of the sub-categories as described by Salmi: direct, indirect, and repressive violence. The Taliban's use of direct violence ("deliberate injury to the integrity of human life") includes nearly all of the examples provided by Salmi, including murder, massacre, torture, maltreatment, child rape, and kidnapping/hostage taking (p. 6). One of the most heartbreaking examples of this direct violence as applied to education is the Taliban's ignorance of landmines from forgotten conflict, which continue to take the lives of children on their way to school (Amiri & Jackson, 2021, p. 23). Children, the most innocent victims of the wars waged by the Taliban, are unsafe traveling to school because of the buried bombs along the way. This tragic reality is a painfully clear example of the reality faced by children in Afghanistan, showing just how unsafe and inaccessible their education is.

Another example of the direct violence waged against Afghans are the fundamentalist Islamic policies forced upon the population, one of the most sickening being the protection of child marriages. In 2021, during the Taliban's second reign of power, UNICEF brought attention to the alarming increase in child marriages, estimating that over a quarter of the Afghan female population was marrying before the age of 18. Because teenage girls were still barred from school, the risk of child marriage was and continues to climb (Fore). This exploitation of young girls not only restricts their ability to access basic schooling but creates a terrifying reality in

which they are expected to marry before truly maturing. As defined by Salmi, this is an obvious example of direct violence which infringes heavily on the rights of girls and denies them access to freedoms that any human should have.

Alongside the terrors of direct violence in Afghanistan lies the rampant indirect violence. One of Salmi's most prominent examples of indirect violence is a low literacy rate, as it proves a population does not have access to adequate resources to educate themselves and thus protect themselves against factors like poverty, hunger, and disease. "Illiteracy is potentially life-threatening because of its negative impact on the health of its victims and that of their family... World Bank researchers have underscored a clear correlation between girl education and mortality rates, especially child mortality," Salmi writes (p. 12). With Afghan women currently sitting at a literacy rate of only 23%, the indirect violence perpetrated by those in power is severely impacting these women and their ability to live safe, educated lives (World Bank Group). The reality of indirect violence is further reinforced by the "poverty trap" Afghan society is experiencing as a result of the constant wars and conflict occurring in the state. The extremely low levels of educational attainment and the constant wars have created a vicious cycle that keeps kids out of school, ruins the economy, and destroys the possibility of a prosperous future (Noury & Speciale, 2016, p. 828). By allowing this cycle of poverty to continue, the government of Afghanistan is passively allowing their citizens to struggle under the impossible weight of poverty, which is a burden that no government should allow their citizens to carry. Clearly, the indirect violence throughout Afghan society is ruining the population's chances of earning a meaningful education and elevating themselves out of their impoverished reality.

Finally for Afghanistan: the repressive violence. The repression of civil rights in Afghanistan is the fuel that runs the culturally violent machine in power. The most obvious

example of this repressive violence is the blatant denial of education to women on the basis of the ultra-conservative laws implemented by the Taliban. The fundamentalist mindset of the Taliban resulted in extremely harmful policies enacted upon women, leading to their inability to attend school for both political and supposedly-religious reasons. The harsh gender segregation, threat of violence, and unfair social rules have forced Afghan women back into the shadows during this second Taliban rule. This strain of cultural violence is especially harmful, as it is more psychological than physical, undoubtedly leaving a lasting impact on women and their perception of their gender. By repressing women's rights—specifically their right to education—the Taliban has shown their brutal, culturally violent values, and will unquestionably continue to repress the rights of Afghan citizens in order to remain in power.

The findings in the case study of the Afghan education system are clear: the system in power is culturally violent and extremely detrimental to Afghan women. The inaccessible education system is creating a poverty trap that is destroying both the economy and the lives of citizens, leaving little to no hope for improvements under the current regime. As long as the Taliban remains in power, it is certain that their fundamentalist policies will continue, wreaking havoc upon every corner of Afghan society.

A little over six thousand kilometers away, we explored the policies and history of Algeria. Since gaining independence in 1962, the Algerian education system has undergone a series of significant shifts amid mass restructuring, power struggles, a civil war, and efforts towards Arabization. Over the past century, the Algerian public has experienced cultural violence from the French, as well as their native government. Similar to Afghanistan, Algerians saw direct violence, indirect violence, and repressive violence, which all greatly impacted their education system and has left lasting scars across their society. The combination of all three types of

violence as proposed by Salmi created a culturally violent environment in which it was extremely difficult for Algerian women to thrive. Though there have been significant improvements in modern times, the long history of cultural violence will not soon be forgotten by Algeria.

Starting in the colonial era, Algerians faced harsh direct and repressive violence from their French colonizers. Repression under the law was widespread and resulted in Algerian men being forced down to a menial level in society, thus resulting in women being oppressed inside and outside of the home. Women were often seen as solely a means to birth more sons and a risk to family stature in the event that she lost her virginity before marriage, giving them little to no power over their own lives and a lack of self-importance. Education was massively inaccessible due to this social and economic repression; therefore, Algerians were not in school and unable to elevate their lowly colonial status. Because of this widespread repressive violence, tensions grew and the war for independence began, which largely resulted in one thing: more direct violence.

Direct violence throughout the Algerian war widespread and bloody. With constant battles and violent conflict during the eight years, the end of the war tallied a death toll of over 1 million between the two sides. With this extreme level of direct violence, it is no wonder that women had a literacy rate of only 2% by the end of the war; after all, education was not at the forefront of anyone's mind during this period. In the post-war era, repressive violence reared its head again as Algerian women expected significant social and political benefits from their involvement in the war, and yet the all-male Algerian government broke their wartime promises and maintained the socially oppressive practices of limited education for women and a reinforcement of the veil. These practices were extremely harmful to Algerian women and their ability to elevate themselves in a post-war Algeria, leading to very slow improvements in their

educational attainment (Heggoy, 1974, p. 451). The direct violence continued in full force during the Algerian Civil War as tensions between terrorist groups and the government hit a breaking point. Repressive violence accompanied the direct violence through fundamentalist legislature that was aimed at limiting the rights of women in order to keep them politically and socially impotent, all while women were the primary target of kidnapping and murder by terrorist organizations like the FIS. Once again, these horrific realities forced women back into the shadows of oppression and kept them away from the classroom, thus deterring them from accessing education.

Unlike Afghanistan, the terrorist groups in Algeria were defeated during their civil war, and progress in the education system has been formidable. In the years following the Algerian war for independence, female school enrollment was at a low 36.9%, but has drastically improved, rising to 97.6% in 2019 (Guedjali, 2022, p. 117). Even though the civil war posed a significant setback to the state and its population, Algeria rose out of some of the most pressing cultural violence inside their own borders and have turned away from fundamentalist traditions that were impediments to social progress. Now, Guedjali (2022) finds that Algerian national education attainment tests are regularly dominated by female students, and it is confirmed that girls generally do better than boys in school (p. 117). After decades of barring women from the classroom, Algerians can see that the error in their ways and have made conscious efforts to allow women improved access to education so that they may contribute to Algerian society as they please—as a mother, in the work force, or both.

Though Algeria has made impressive strides in expanding educational opportunities across both sexes, the issue now remains improving the quality of education. Education access has been generally improved, but access to quality, meaningful education is still lacking, leading

to stagnation in economic growth for the state (Boutayeba, 2019, p. 43). While many of the culturally violent issues that have plagued Algeria have found remedies in contemporary policies, there still remains a hole to be filled. I would not necessarily argue that the lack of quality education is an issue of cultural violence, but the economic effects of poverty can eventually revert to indirect violence as a result of an unprotective government, thus beginning the cycle of cultural violence once again.

Since gaining independence, Algeria has had to not only create an identity for itself, but also battle the raging effects of cultural violence left behind by French colonists. Over the past 62 years, Algeria has effectively attacked the culturally violent factors affecting women's access to education. Though improvements were slow to come, they emerged from a brutal civil war and founded policies in favor of equitable education, leading to massive increases in female enrollment and literacy rate. Work still remains, as the quality of the education provided by their government must be improved in order to truly improve the economic and social position of their citizens, but the raging culturally violent factors that limited education throughout the 20th century have significantly diminished. For this reason, I posit that Algeria has faced a long history of cultural violence, but the impressive improvements in educational policy and attainment have shown a massive decrease in violence and increase in accessibility. Compared to Afghanistan and Iran, Algeria is undoubtedly the least culturally violent in their contemporary approach to education.

Similar to Afghanistan and Algeria, Iran has a long history of conflict; however, Iran's conflict has been largely internal. Because of political interference from the West, Iran has faced significant instability as they have attempted to balance their own culture and customs in the scope of the everchanging global community. The installation of the Pahlavi monarchy in the

early 20th century began a series of power struggles that ultimately led to the “White Revolution,” which birthed an era of Westernization that aggressively disrupted the daily life of Iranians and led to largescale disapproval from the public. The widespread unpopularity of these modernization efforts mainly stemmed from the diminishing sociopolitical power of Iranians, and their desire to preserve more traditional Islamic practices rather than embrace Westernism. After revolting against the Pahlavi regime, Iran proved that they preferred to guard their longstanding practices rather than institute modern changes. Because of this commitment to tradition, Iran has unfortunately fostered culturally violent practices and faces indirect, and repressive violence, particularly in regard to their educational practices.

Women’s education in Iran is technically politically protected, yet there are still significant barriers that ultimately render the system inequal. The policies and restrictions on Iranian women’s sexual health education is a clear example of both indirect and repressive violence, as it is a deprivation of their fundamental right to equal education and a severe lack of protection against potential diseases (Salmi, 2000, p. 6). This glaring inequality in their education system has the potential to have extremely harmful impacts on girls and their health. Though it has been proven how important SHE is for living a healthy, safe life, cultural perceptions on the importance of a woman’s virginity in Muslim cultures has fostered an unfair expectation that women should not be educated about sex in order to discourage them from engaging in it before marriage (Roudsari et al., 2013). This cultural barrier to equal education greatly increases the risk of potentially harmful sexual activities, and disproportionately puts female Iranians in danger. Denying girls access to accurate SHE only increases the risk of sexually transmitted disease and unwanted pregnancy and does not stop them from engaging in sex (Susheela et al., 2005). By unfairly targeting women and restricting their ability to make

informed decisions about their bodies, the cultural expectations placed on women in Iran restricts their access to education and results in indirect and repressive violence. This is an issue only faced by women, so their educational rights are being significantly repressed as they are discriminated against solely for their gender.

In line with the idea of gender restrictions, women in Iran have a very difficult time accessing a meaningful college experience because of the cultural barriers in place between male teachers and female students. As Shavarini (2006) found, female college students in Iran “seem to become socially savvy, although not necessarily academically astute. Nearly all respondents expressed strong disappointment in how little they learn in college,” with the main obstacles to their education being unqualified professors and not being taken seriously because of their gender (p. 197). These obstacles are significant, and it’s clear why these women are disappointed with their university experience: for many, it’s their first time being away from home. Though many of the respondents in Shavarini’s study expressed that they gained an improved understanding of the world and a desire to participate more actively in society, they did not feel as though they gained meaningful academic knowledge. Because of their inability to challenge ideas and seek out extra help, most Iranian women must take what their professors provide at face-value and seek deeper insight elsewhere. This lack of depth in their college experience portrays the unfortunate reality that only women face in Iran, as their male counterparts do not have to worry about the cultural pressures of appearing meek and complacent in front of male professors.

The culture in Iranian classrooms is undoubtedly harmful, but the perpetuation of sexist legislation that allows for these harmful norms to continue is arguably more so. The institution of gender quotas and “single-gendered” majors across Iran harshly restrict women from following

the academic field they desire. Rather than encourage the high number of Iranian women seeking to further their education, the government instituted gender quotas to ensure they were not outnumbering men. Similarly, the implementation of “single-gendered” majors greatly reduces a woman’s ability to follow her academic dreams, and limits opportunities across both sexes. These oppressive policies in combination with the behavior norms in classrooms leads to a culturally violent education system, with an emphasis on repressive violence. Because the Iranian education system values traditional customs and norms rather than equal opportunity, women are left at a significant disadvantage in their educational career. Education is far less accessible to women as a result of the cultural practices and religious beliefs, thus resulting in an unjust system.

Iran’s education system—particularly in higher education—is blatantly violent, even if direct violence is not the primary issue. The combination of inaccessible sexual health education, restrictive classroom norms, gender quotas, and “single-gendered” majors has fostered an ultimately toxic system that prevents women from accessing the same valuable level of education as men solely on the basis of gender. These examples of both indirect and repressive violence hold massively negative consequences for women, as their physical health is at risk, alongside their mental growth. Because the Iranian government chooses to protect harmful norms and traditions over the advancements of female students, the culturally violent system is preserved, and the potential for Iranian women to elevate their standing in society is severely diminished.

The findings of this research are clear: all three states have had or currently hold culturally violent educational practices. The combination of direct, indirect, and repressive violence across Afghanistan, Algeria, and Iran shows the preservation of culturally violent

traditions in the place of policies to advance their populations as a whole. Each state's history of unfair gender norms has fostered toxic education systems in the 21st century, leading to ineffective economies and stagnant progress. The GDP growth rates of all three states have been very low, with Afghanistan plunging to -20% growth in the past four years (World Bank Group). Algeria, the least culturally violent in their contemporary system, is the only state out of the three with a consistent GDP growth trend and good growth in the post-COVID years. Unsurprisingly, limiting education to half of the population has substantial negative impacts on the economy. These impacts should show the governments in each of these three states how important it is to provide accessible, meaningful, equitable education to all corners of their society, in order to truly foster growth and innovation. Education is at the forefront of many global issues, and for good reason. It is universally held that education is the keystone of progress, leading to stagnant states in its absence.

Policy Recommendations

These findings present the opportunity for each of these three states to address the systemic cultural violence present in their societies and make significant policy shifts in order to progress towards an improved future. Change must begin at the administrative level in order to functionally encourage cultural change, therefore my proposed policy changes will begin with Afghanistan and their governing body. Currently, the Taliban in power once again. It is obvious that this terrorist organization would not heed the policy recommendations needed to promote a more equal, accessible education system, so I believe that the policies of surrounding states and the United Nations must shift in order to encourage the ousting of the Taliban. While

organizations, like UNAMA, already exist to spread information and seek help against the Taliban, it is crucial that other organizations join in order to effectively combat this group and their terrorist agenda. International intervention is certainly warranted in a situation in which the lives of all citizens of a state are at risk, and it is a sad but true reality that all Afghan citizens are in danger as a direct result of the Taliban. In order to promote equality, safety, and improved access to education, the international community must commit to encouraging the removal of the Taliban from power in Afghanistan. Whether economically or diplomatically, this is my number one policy recommendation to improve the education accessibility in Afghanistan.

To follow this, the policy recommendation for Algeria involves less international cooperation; instead, I recommend a revitalized effort towards improved quality of education across the Algerian education system, starting at the primary level. This would entail an emphasis on quality, well-educated teachers, with a reevaluation of school curricula in order to best meet the needs of students across the country. While it is established that Algerian education is generally accessible, it is important to ensure that students are receiving improved quality education in order to gain the full benefits of a well-educated society. These benefits would eventually stretch as far as the economy, which would bring positive effects to all corners of Algerian society. In all, it has been established that Algeria's main issues no longer pertain to cultural violence and inaccessible education, but rather a lack of quality education on a national scale, leading to improved quality being the primary tactic for improvement.

The policy recommendations for Iran revolve tightly around reversing recent legislature that enforces university gender quotas, as well as eliminating "single-gendered" majors. Policies like this are inherently sexist and lead to repressive cultural violence that directly limits women's access to education, as well as men's. These are the two most direct forms of change that can be

immediately made; however, the culture inside of university classrooms will take much longer to adequately shift. Social and cultural pressures that have made it impossible for female students to access substantial depth and meaning throughout their university experience will need time to adjust with the changing needs of the Iranian population. The first positive step that the Iranian government can take is to address the need for women's participation in education by eliminating gender quotas and "single-gendered" majors, and then hopefully culturally violent atmospheres will begin to dissipate. Until it is recognized how crucial female participation in education is, Iran's society will continue to squander the untapped potential of women throughout their society.

Combining these policies with global awareness will cultivate more equitable, less culturally violent societies. Afghanistan, Algeria, and Iran all contain significant barriers in their education system that can be tactfully addressed in a number of ways, ranging from simple legislation changes to international intervention. These policy recommendations aim at not only increasing education accessibility, but also promoting equality by decreasing cultural violence across all three states. Cultural violence is a tangible issue that plagues every modern society to different degrees, but with awareness and action, it can be addressed in order to nurture equitable, just nations around the world.

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