

LRP

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Language & Literature

11 December 2020

Religious Identity in Relation to Gender Identity

Imagine 10,000 people being injured or killed by the Taliban in 2019; that happened. It happened because of the Taliban's interpretation of the Sharia Law. Now imagine having religion used against you based on your gender identity. This is what happens to Parvana in *The Breadwinner* by Deborah Ellis and what also happens to other people all around the world, including people under the Taliban's rule. Religions can be interpreted in many ways and because of this sometimes people use different interpretations to discriminate against people of other genders and other aspects of said person's identity. Religious identity means your religious beliefs. In greater depth, your religious identity plays a part in your morals and beliefs regarding what is right and wrong. However, your religious identity should not be used as a way to judge or discriminate against other people. Based upon this, your religious identity does not need to contribute to how you feel about other people's gender identity.

Religious and gender identity can be in conflict depending on people's interpretations of their chosen religion or the religion imposed based on where they live. It all comes down to how you read into the information taught as part of your religion. Some religions believe that women do not have the same rights as men; others believe all are created equal. The definition of religious identity is how your faith guides your morals and plays a key role in your choices and beliefs of what is right and wrong. In relation, your gender identity is what gender you identify as. You can be born as one gender but feel like you are the other. Gender is who you feel like

you are meant to be physically. Not everyone is born into the body they feel they belong in. These are the definitions of religious and gender identity.

In *The Breadwinner*, religion is used by the Taliban as a way to force women to feel less than men. Purely using their gender as the reason, women can't go outside without a man to escort them which is unjust and unfair. "You must be covered up! Who is your father? Who is your husband? They will be punished for letting you walk the street like that!" The Taliban acts upon their interpretation of the Sharia Law. They interpreted the law as literal and not figurative. Some of the restrictions put in place by the Taliban include women having to be escorted by a man, women not receiving an education, women not being allowed to have a job, and women not being allowed to go outside without wearing muted colors and they have to wear a burqa. In *The Breadwinner*, Parvana encounters a woman out without a burqa. "'Where is your burqa?' She looked around but couldn't see one. 'Are you outside without one?' The woman nodded. 'What are you doing outside without a burqa? You can get in a lot of trouble for that.'" *The Breadwinner*. For being outside without a burqa a woman could be beaten or whipped. "If you have a better idea let me know. Otherwise, this is what we are going to do. We'll wait until it gets very, very dark. Then we'll head back to my place together." *The Breadwinner*. The woman also does not have a burqa and women can't be outside without one so the Taliban's rules are already being broken for starters. Parvana is also taking this person through the streets after curfew. If caught, Parvana and this woman probably would have been shot and killed, all because of what time they are outside and for not wearing clothes that they were told to wear. It is morally unjust for someone to not be allowed to go somewhere without a man. It is also morally unjust for someone else to deem what is acceptable for women to do and wear, just as it is unjust to deem what women can and can't do. Women and men should both get to pick what

they do and what they do not do. All of these rules were based off of one interpretation of a religious law and, in our culture, most do not openly argue that women are not equal. Religion can be used as a way to demean someone's gender based off of the authority's interpretation of said religion's teachings.

Religion should not be used in relation to how you feel about gender identity. If you do connect the two, religion should be used to build up and support people's gender identity not tear them down. Parvana's father raised her to believe that she could do anything and that she was strong and powerful regardless of the fact that she was female. "The word Taliban means religious scholar but Parvana's father told her that religion was about teaching people how to be better human beings, how to be kinder." *The Breadwinner*. This interpretation is very different from the Taliban's. This is important because nowhere in her father's definition does it say anything about gender or who this applies to because it should be equal to all people. The Taliban say women can not do anything without a male escort. The Taliban is a part of the same religion as Parvana and her family. However, Parvana's father recognized that he interpreted their religion differently and found that women had value beyond their value to men. Religious identity is what you believe is moral, just, and right. Religious identity should help you act on your morals, not tell you to judge certain people. Our religion has evolved over time but the prevailing message is about love. You should be able to do what you want, have an education, go where you want, and dress as you want... that is not an option for Parvana and other women under the Taliban's rule. In our religion, we teach that Jesus is about love for one another and that everyone has a value. Jesus did not exclude people. The word "catholic" means universal and that universality where everyone is welcome is part of our faith and its core teachings. Everyone should feel loved and accepted and be free to be who they truly are without fear of

judgment from others so long as they are kind, loving, and abide by basic moral teachings. We should not use religion as a tool to judge others. Imagine having to pretend you are a gender that does not align with your gender identity. That is what Parvana had to do and that is what lots of people have to do because of the fear of being judged and persecuted.

Gender should not be used as a basis to discriminate or tear down someone. On top of that religion should not be used as a tool to do so. This is exactly what happens in *The Breadwinner* by Deborah Ellis. The Taliban use their interpretation of Sharia Law as a way to demean and discriminate against women in Afghanistan. Other religions throughout history have been used as an excuse to discriminate and tear down people based on their gender identity. However, this is contrary to the core tenants of our faith; your religious identity does not need to define how you feel about other people's gender identity.