Women's Roles

The role of women in society has been an important topic of philosophy for many centuries. Plato deals with it at length in his classic work Republic. Women have a different set of roles and rights depending on the country in which they live. Reading Plato’s Republic one might think that Plato admires women and for him there are not too many differences between men and women; however a closer look at the Republic shows that Plato recognizes and accounts for gender roles in his city. In the Republic Plato talks about different roles for women, which vary from being guardians to being prizes for young solders. The film Osama depicts people’s life under the Taliban regime in Afghanistan. Women under the Taliban regime were living in a condition of oppression where they were considered objects and prizes to be given and used. In my paper I will argue that both Plato and the Taliban view women as sexual, reproductive machines who are inferior to men, and that both Plato and the Taliban treat women as sexual objects and prizes who are too emotional to make good rulers.

Reading Plato's Republic it seems easy for one to think that for Plato there are no significant differences between men and women. For Plato, a female’s sexuality and mothering are not significant differences and do not disqualify women from taking roles as guardians. Plato says, “Women share by nature in every way of life just as men do, but in all of them women are weaker than men” (5.455d). So, Plato believes that men and
women are the same in everything that they do, with the only exception being that
women by nature are physically weaker than men. And so he adds, “But the lighter parts
must be assigned to them because of the weakness of their sex” (Book V. 457b). It is
clear that Plato assigns the same responsibilities to both men and women as guardians,
with the exception of giving them physically lighter jobs than he gives the men. Also,
since Plato does not see any significant differences in sexuality between men and women,
he believes guardian women should “strip” for physical training. For example, Plato says,
“Then the guardian women must strip for physical training, since they’ll wear virtue or
excellence instead of clothes. They must share in war and the other guardian’s duties in
the city and do nothing else” (Book v. 457b).

One can see that for Plato a woman’s sexuality and mothering are not significant
enough to prevent her from contributing to society in the same way that men do. Also, he
says, “That all these women (guardians) are to belong in common to all the men, that
none are to live privately with any man, and that the children, too, are to be possessed in
common, so that no parent will know his own offspring or any child his parent” (Book V.
457d). For Plato, it is extremely important to have children come from guardian parents,
but he does not care about the birth mother being the primary caregiver, in that he says it
is not necessary for parents to know who their kids are and vice versa for kids to know
who their parents are. Plato writes, “And then, as the children are born, they’ll be taken
over by the officials appointed for the purpose, who may be either men or women or
both, since our offices are open to both sexes” (Book V. 460b). It is clear that Plato
doing the job, even a man. Reading the *Republic* it is clear that the differences between men and women are insignificant.

However, taking a closer look at the *Republic*, one can see that in reality Plato believes women are inferior to men and treats them as prizes and sexual objects. Although Plato allows women to be guardians, he views them as sexual objects and prizes and thus limits them to that role. For example, Plato says, "And among other prizes and rewards the young men who are good in war or other thing must be given permission to have sex with the women more often, since this will also be a good pretext for having them father as many of the children as possible" (Book V. 460b). It is clear that Plato uses women in his city to reward his young men and that he considers them sexual childbearing machines. Also, Plato says, "Then you, as their lawgiver, will select women just as you did men, with natures as similar to theirs as possible, and hand women over to the men" (Book V.458d). Obviously, Plato believes women are inferior to men in that he hands them over to men since they are the lawgivers. Only an object can be handed over, so with such language Plato proves that he does not view men and women exactly the same and that he believes women to be inferior to men in reality.

Similarly, the Taliban also views women as inferior sexual objects and prizes to be handed over to men. The Taliban want women for their sexuality and for the most part women to them are prizes or rewards that can be given to men. In the film *Osama*, when the young girl Osama (played by Marina Golbahari) is arrested after pretending to be a boy, the judge forgives her under the condition that she be wedded to an old Mullah (Muslim religious teacher). This scene shows that the young girl is treated as an object and robbed of her childhood, as well as her womanhood. The young girl is used as an
object given to the Mullah, who simply asks the judge to forgive her and hand her over to him: she is his prize. When the Mullah asks him for her forgiveness and hand in marriage, the judge simply smiles and hands her over to him. It is so clear that women and their destiny are in the hands of the Mullahs and the judges, who are all men, and who can do with the women as they please. In Osama's case, she is abused by the judge and his unjust decision and of course she is also abused by the old Mullah who is her new husband. Just as Plato uses the women in his city as rewards for the young soldiers, Osama is given as a reward to the faithful soldier of Islam who is the old Mullah.

According to Islam it is a good deed to have as many wives as possible, so in the Taliban's eyes the decision was "just" and fair. One can see this belief in practice in the scene when we are introduced to the old Mullah's two other wives: although the judge knows that the old Mullah already has two wives, he still weds Osama to him because it is a good deed and blessing to have many wives. Also, one should keep in mind that the Mullah is the one that others look to for guidance in their religion, so when they see him wed three women they will want to follow in his steps so that they too can be true followers of Islam. Since the Mullahs and the judges are the guardians of the city, they can do whatever they want. Another scene in the movie shows the old Mullah's other wives sharing their own stories of abuse at the hands of this man and the system that supports him. These stories support the fact that women were only used for sex and bearing children under the Taliban regime. Overall, Plato's view and the Taliban's view of women are similar: in both cases women are used as prizes of pleasure that bear the next generation of guardians or Taliban leaders.
Secondly, according to Plato, women are inferior to men because they are emotional thinkers and emotional thinkers do not make good rulers or judges.

Throughout the *Republic*, Plato points out that guardians must be educated and be lead by the rational part of their souls. According to Plato the soul has three parts, and he defines them in the following way: “We’ll call the part of the soul with which it calculated the rational part and the part with which it lusts, hungers, thirsts, and gets excited by other appetites the irrational appetitive part, companion of certain indulgences and pleasures” (Book IV. 440d). So Plato believes that one’s soul includes a rational part (desires truth and wisdom, and it is the ruler of the body), a spirited part (desires honor or glory), and an appetite-oriented part (desires meeting the needs of the body). Plato believes that a just person, such as a guardian or a judge, must follow the rational part of his soul.

The Taliban also value rationale (their own rationale of course) and look down upon emotions. They do not allow any emotions in the city, especially among the leadership. The Mullahs are the leaders of the Taliban, and since they are the decision makers, they are forbidden to follow their emotions and can only follow the strict law. For example, in the film *Osama*, there is a scene where Mullah Saeid comes to take all the young boys to the Taliban’s school to become Taliban disciples or soldiers. In this scene, when Mullah Saeid wants to take Osama, her employer offers him milk saying, “He is poor, Mullah Saeid here drink this milk and don’t take him.” However, Mullah Saeid drinks the milk and without any emotions drags Osama to the school. This scene
with raising the next generation of Taliban leaders, just like Plato's concerned with raising
the next generation of guardians. Another example of the Taliban forbidding the display
of emotions is the scene where Osama is being punished at school and she is hanging in
the well. In this scene, Osama is crying and calling for her mother out of misery. The
camera then shows three kids who are reading the Quran. One of the kids raises his head
and looks at the well and feels sorry for Osama, but having examples such as Mullah
Saeid as a teacher, he put his head back down and continues reading, not showing any
emotions. This scene shows that although men can feel emotions, but to be good Taliban
leaders they need to act emotionless. One can also point to another example in the scene
where the judge decides to wed Osama to the old Mullah. Here when Osama hears the
judge's decision, she cries and begs the judge not to give her away, but the judge just
looks at her without any emotional expression on his face and waits for the old Mullah to
take her away. Based on these examples, it is clear that the Taliban do not want or allow
any emotions in their city, especially among their leaders, which is similar for Plato who
does not value emotion as a quality of leadership. It is clear that the Taliban do not even
want to see emotions. The women in the streets must be covered, their faces hidden, and
a man must accompany them. If a woman is not covered, her face may express emotions
not pleasing to men. The film *Osama* paints a picture of a society that will not allow
women, who they consider emotional thinkers, to be its rulers.

The film *Osama* takes a stand very different than that of Plato and the Taliban.
they had the same experiences or they know somebody who went through them. Siddiq Barmak wants to show that it is wrong to use women as inferior sexual objects and prizes. He is very emotional about this issue and the society that it has created in his country of Afghanistan. In the scene where old Mullah and Osama are in the room before having sex, tradition says that the groom should offer the bride a gift. Mullah’s gift to his bride is that he lets her choose which lock she will have on her door. Barmak’s camera stops on the locks, and Osama looks surprised when Mullah shows her a different door lock and saying, “This one is especially for you.” It is so sad to see the Mullah treating a young girl as a sex object to be locked up at home. Also, Barmak throughout the film shows Osama playing with a jump rope. She is not covered in the traditional Islamic way, but surrounding her are many women who are covered. He repeats this scene over and over again, the first time being when Osama’s grandmother cuts her hair short and changes her to a boy. He then shows the same scene when she is being lock because the old Mullah finds out she is a girl who is pretending to be a boy and is present in the Taliban school. Finally, Barmak shows the same scene at the end of film when the Mullah is done having sex with her. The film ends with this image that for the filmmaker represents a loss of innocence and womanhood. Barmak wants to draw a picture of how the Taliban take away the childhood and womanhood of Osama and other young girls like her.

I disagree with the idea of treating women as sexual prizes who God has created simply to be miserable and emotionless. I think God has created all men and women equal, but with different functions. He has created the order and made man to rule over his wife, but with love, in the same way that Christ rules over His Church. It is necessary
to be obedient and respectful of a man's leadership, but at the same time one should remember that God also commanded men to love their wives and rule over them in love. I think the problem with both Plato and the Taliban's position is that they only care about what is good for their city and if that means giving women as rewards to young men to encourage them to do better at war, then they should do just that. Both Plato and the Taliban see the bigger picture and do not care about the details that might hurt citizens of their city. I disagree with the way that the Taliban men treat their women, taking away their happiness from them. The Bible teaches me to pray for such rulers and be obedient to the laws of the land, which I did when I was living in my homeland of Iran, which has a similar government.

The difference between all of these philosophies is love. Islam does not teach a person to love his neighbor as himself, respect his wife and treat her as he does his own body, and be willing to sacrifice and die for his bride. Only Christianity teaches love, which is the necessary element in defining gender roles. The most disturbing part of a Christ-less society is that the people call injustice justice. In the scene where the foreign woman is stoned to death and Osama is awarded to the old Mullah, the judge declares that "Justice has been done," and the men shout, "God is great!"

Brent: This paper developes and strongly supports a founding theory linking Plato's views to that of the Taliban.