

This thesis examines how Afghan women from the professional social class have negotiated the patriarchy in that country and claimed their agency and public life during different political regimes. Resisting the Western representation of Afghan women as passive victims, it uses the life story method, based on interviews with a wide range of women in public life during the period of US-sponsored democracy and intervention, to analyse the complex factors involved in enabling women to access public life. From a historical sociological viewpoint it examines the shifts in the forms of patriarchy and their sustaining gender regimes from 19th century to the present, and draws on Walby's six structures of patriarchy in order to understand how those shift affected the ability of women to access public life and employment. Those structures – culture, religion, education, employment, family – are explored through the experiences and life histories of my interviewees. The thesis also pays attention to the involvement of external, foreign actors in the affairs of Afghanistan and the impact of those interventions on the possibility for women's agency and participation in professional and public life through different political regimes. It thus challenges a simplistic view 9/11 was a watershed moment for women's empowerment, and notes that the economic issues, an aid-dependent economy and political regimes, security and safety, poverty and psychological trauma, corruption and power struggles among different forces (local and foreign) in many ways undermined women's prospects in public life. The finding of the research shows that the rights and position of women in Afghanistan have fluctuated over the last 100 years depending on the patriarchal cultural, political and religious ideology and practice of the political regimes, and in no small part due to the influence and interference of external actors in the country.

Key words: Afghanistan; professional women; public life; gender regimes; political regimes, patriarchy; external actors; political economy; culture

Dr. Soe Myat Nwe's book "Pathways To Public Life For Professional Women In Afghanistan: Negotiating Shifting Patriarchal Political Regimes And Gender Regimes" is a unique academic study by a Myanmar scholar on Afghanistan focusing particularly on the situation of the women through the various phases of Afghan history from the monarchy to Communist era and subsequent Taliban rule culminating on the two first decades of the American war and military occupation of the country.

The study is based on interviews carried out in Afghanistan in 2011 and 2013 and on personal experiences while living in Kabul with her family. The book is particularly valuable for its non-Western perspectives coming East of Afghanistan, from a citizen of a country that also has been the target of both British colonialism and American cold war strategies.

The book gives food for thought on how post-colonial multi-ethnic and multicultural states struggle with challenges to nation-building, gender equality, higher education and socio-economic development.

Dr. Marja-Leena Heikkila-Horn,
Asst. Prof.
Mahidol University International College (MUIC)

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Pathways to public life for professional women in Afghanistan: Negotiating shifting patriarchal political regimes and gender regimes

Soe Myat Nwe

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