

**Human Rights, Student Movement
And
The Role of Religious Intellectuals: Post-Revolutionary Iran**

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Abstract:

During the past decades Human Rights movement in Iran has developed considerably and mobilized different layers of society including young population. This is thanks to many factors such as the universal human rights flow, intellectuals efforts and activists consistent and effective advocacy. In this dissertation, I have assessed the role of Iranian religious intellectuals among the student movement in 90s to develop a new approach in regards to Universalism and Relativism debate. Religious intellectuals in the framework of the Islamic state could communicate with religious layers of society through student movement and flourished a new space of dialogue and debate towards human rights. Their interpretations have inspired the religious strata of Iranian student movements to develop the Human Rights discourse in their respected organisations since the 1979 revolution. These religious leaders have led to dialogues and discussions relating to the meaning of being Muslim and facing to the modernity by building the concept of 'faithful life'. They laid the ground work for the reconciliation between Islam and modern concepts, such as Human Rights.

My approach to explore their role entails the shifting debate from either universal rights or relative culture to the context of Muslim countries. I have suggested that going beyond the duality clash of either Universalists or Relativists could be a way forward. Therefore, Exploring the quality and circumstances of human rights progression historically from the bottom-up move in these contexts must be considered. Context explicitly is where, the changing process through productive dialogue of peoples and lives are happening.

Key words: Human Rights; Religious Intellectuals; Student Movement; Universalism; Relativism.

*Dedicated to Bahareh Hedayat, Milad Asadi
And
All student prisoners in my country,
Iran
Toward the hard way of Freedom and Human Rights*

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Chapter I: Introduction

The major human rights universal instrument was adopted by the United Nations General assembly over 50 years ago in 1948. The Universal Declaration on Human Rights claims universal rights for all mankind in different parts of the world. The rights cross unevenly many cultural borders despite the diversities of the world and give humans some kinds of rights because of their similarities as people who are living on the earth. Kofi Annan, previous secretary General of United Nations states:

All people share a desire to live free from the horrors of violence, famine, disease, torture and discrimination. Human Rights are foreign to no culture and intrinsic to all nations. They belong not to a chosen few, but to all people. It is this universality that endows human rights with power to cross any border and defy any force. Human Rights are also indivisible; one cannot pick and choose among them, ignoring some, while insisting on others. Only as rights equally applied can they be rights universally accepted. (Annan, K. 1999)

Meanwhile, it has been many, many years since the time that the first document was adopted by only 48 countries, but human rights discourse penetrates even faster than its legal circles to societies. Human rights is becoming a 'culture' and nowadays more people define their rights by it, despite many critiques which accuse this culture of “being excessively individualistic in its orientation.” “Similarly, the historical circumstances surrounding the genesis of the Universal Declaration are rehearsed.”¹

The drafting committee which prepared Universal Declaration as well as General Assembly that adopting the UDHR could not in any aspect viewed as a International community representative.²

However, by passing many years from human rights institutionalization, some scholars are seeking for demonstrating and extracting each discourse of variant cultures and contexts related to rights And document that how human rights existing in different

¹ Ulrich, 2001, p. 195.

² Idem

culture.

Question of Relativism/Universalism

What does we mean precisely by 'universal' human rights? Why universal? As George Ulrich states the universal notion could entail two meanings, which are the scope and applicability of rights and, secondly, the validity of them. The scope of it means the rights can be applicable in everywhere and “Universal in the sense of belonging or applying to all people everywhere.”³ Their validity could be achieved after implementation around the world.

The universalists, who usually insist on this notion of human rights, argue that human rights are inherently and intrinsically for mankind and do have roots in nature hence they are natural rights. “Despite their apparent peculiarities and diversity, human beings and societies share certain fundamental interests, concerns, qualities, traits and values that can be identified and articulated as the framework for common culture of universal human rights.”⁴

This is the explicitly critical point towards human rights as natural rights, which usually critics argue are based on a particular philosophy and belong to a particular culture - Western culture-. “[H]uman rights are based on Western values that are at odds with African, Asian or Islamic values. To support this claim, the genealogy of human rights thinking is traced back to the European Enlightenment (Hobbes, Lock, Rousseau, the French Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen, the American Bill of Rights, etc)”,⁵ Universalists believe that these are primary rights, because of their necessity to be fulfilled to preserve human dignity. Therefore, the countries which adopted the human rights have a duty to accomplish and protect them.

Probably, the most pointed critique towards the notion of universal human rights were being provided by anthropologists. Some anthropologists argue that each country’s laws are based on its particular culture. Thus, the cultural values differ in society from each other and the external culture outside of society cannot be imposed in the name of

³ Ulrich, 2001, p. 198.

⁴ An Na'im, 2009, p. 70.

⁵ Ulrich, 2001, p. 195.

universal human rights. Jack Donnelly comments this “culture is the sole source of the validity of a moral right or rule. Particular cultural values, so it follows, should under no conditions be supplanted by universal moral values, for example, conceptions of human rights.”⁶ They assert that the cultural *diversity* should be considered.⁷ Each culture has particular meaning for goodness and badness. They stresses “the dignity inherent in every body of custom and... the need for tolerance of conventions though they may differ from one's own.”⁸ So, if we accept such a rule in various cultures, moral values could be different and changeable. Therefore, the universal human rights as cross-cultural values or rights does not exist. If we need for share values, it should not be imposed ones but must be authentic. “in accordance with the logic of cultural relativism, The shared moral values must be authentic and not imposed from the outside.”⁹

Some anthropologists have the major critiques towards the constituted roots and origin of human rights. cultural relativists argue human rights has disputed origin and are not authentic according to genuine root of each culture. The setting in which these documents were constructed was the post World War II era, in which some western countries took the lead in writing such an instrument, as “what they perceived as the ethnocentric extension of absolutist Western values.”¹⁰ The states that were coming out of inhuman actions, atrocities and genocide of world war, were seeking for a way to legalise human behaviours to prevent such a brutality in future. The rights of people towards states would be accomplished and preserved, so that, consequently, another world war would never happen again. So, they decided to write and adopt some instruments with legal language for mankind according to common grounds and values. Some experts also conclude that “International human rights is the world's first universal ideology”¹¹

Meanwhile, the constituted philosophy of these rights was mostly the rational theory and positivist philosophy, which did not include many cultures and societies in building them. The enlightenment period which western countries passed, was totally alien for

⁶ Cf. Wilson, 96, p. 2.

⁷ Naraghi, 2007.

⁸ Cf. Herskovits in An Na'im, 2009, p.72.

⁹ An Na'im, 2009, p.73.

¹⁰ Wilson, 96, p. 2.

¹¹ Cf. Weissbrodt in Wilson, 96, p. 10.

other peoples and societies, and the western countries do not have the right to impose whatever they thought to other people around the world. “Universalism critique of Human Rights since Human Rights are inseparable from the mentality of the enlightenment are the product of a particular society after World War two”¹²

Moreover, the issue will become more complicated when we refer to the context of the cultures that anthropologists argue have values that are different, which include Islamic, African and Latin American countries. In fact, the various context of these countries, (mostly in this dissertation the Muslim ones) is the place that cultural relativists argue most frequently in regards to universal human rights and perceive a critical approach towards the Western states and the *imperialism culture* that they have imposed.

But many facts that are happening in these Islamic countries such as people’s movement and struggles to achieve a democratic and civil state lead us to a forward process in way of democracy and human rights. It shows that human rights discourse is to some extent crossing the cultural borders and becoming institutionalized slightly.

After the June 2009 disputed election in Iran and the emergence of the Green movement, as well as one year after the Arab countries’ movement of revolutions in Tunisia, Egypt, Syria and Libya, the question of what if some classes and part of Muslim countries are struggling and seeking for democratic states based on rule of law and human rights standards? Is it still possible to debate cultural relativism? Whether we could still deny or neglect existing common values between humans? How could we argue in regards to universal values and relativism debates on Islamic countries after these tremendous events? Considering all of this, each side of the whole debate are speaking about the realities and do have some important arguments and, yet, face challenges.

While the universalists contend the common core values’ existence for humans apart from all sorts of differences such as race, religion, language and color, in contrast relativists criticise in regards to pivotal aspects of human rights issue and are trying to preserve and not ignore the cultural diversities in human rights globalisation.

¹² Wilson, 96, p. 4.

The globalisation process and intensifying communication transformation means that cultural and material dealings should not be forgotten, since nowadays an event in part of the world could engage and affect people universally. Moreover, “the declaration of a global culture of human rights is closely related to the historical process of globalization.”¹³

From one point of view the notion of globalisation clearly means: “due to increasingly rapid information and money exchange systems, we are experiencing a time-space compression, which accounts for a new global consciousness.”¹⁴

Shifting Debates to the Context

I think maybe the better step to exit the endless argumentation of universal human rights and cultural relativism is shifting to the context of debating countries and ask the crucial question of what is happening in the Muslim Countries context? I agree with Wilson argument that “as with most absolutist dualism, the universalist/relativist polarity is too totaling in its conceptualization” (Wilson 96: 3) Nowadays, we need to assess whether the universal human rights institutionalized in similar or different ways in these societies or not? The process as it is happening shows that in debating countries’ human rights is coming to a universal consensus, cross-culturally, despite all inherent differences. The similar interests, values and goals are gathering and shaping a new discourse.

Meanwhile, we need to consider that the abstract language of universal declaration opens ways to various interpretations for each culture. Hastrup states that “freedom of interpretation is a general feature of being human” Despite the fact that we are living under a nation-states or/and in some countries authoritarian states as well as we do have our own culture which surrounded us “but each individual understands the world from his or her own perspective. The self is a moving centre of attention towards the world, and he or she acts not on the basis of prescribed rules but on the basis of experience and

¹³ Hastrup(b), 2001, p. 10.

¹⁴ Idem.

practice.”¹⁵

What are the experiences and practices of pious people who are surrounded by a globalised world? Also, what is their understanding in regards to religious teaching which is facing modern concepts? Hastrup also comments that “there seems to be number of routes towards the shared goal”¹⁶ which I think is an utter reality if we look at the human rights institutionalization process. On the other hand, she also adds regarding universality assumption “we may get there by diverse routes, but in our shared desire to live free of violence, famine and so forth, we are on common ground. This is where the quest for Universality takes off.”¹⁷

The George Ulrich approach in one of his pieces is remarkable in that he perceives the validity of human rights is not because of its natural laws origin or even as moral project, but as a constructural process that will happen more and less later in other countries. He notes about the natural law theories’ weakness that “while natural law thinking has profoundly shaped our concept of human rights and provides a valuable paradigm for how to understand their structural function, it fares poorly when it comes to substantiating their universal validity.”¹⁸

In constructivist approach which is based on Habermas and Rawls theory, he argues human rights should be consider as a historical process in western countries which can happen suddenly or gradually in other countries after or during modernization period.

In his view human rights from the below and, in context of countries, historically would be experienced in contrast with the moral project theory. “The very notion of human rights, along with the specific normative standards and underlying values, needs to be embraced and asserted from below-indeed at all levels in the given political system-everywhere in the world.”¹⁹

The moral project approach perceives human rights as ethic values and attempts to assert that these standards embedded inside documents which exist in different cultures

¹⁵ Hastrup, 2001 (a), p. 16.

¹⁶ Hastrup, 2001 (a), p. 1.

¹⁷ Idem.

¹⁸ Ulrich, 2001, p. 205.

¹⁹ Idem, p. 221.

and religions as moral standards. Thus, the issue could be covered and conveyed in religious books or texts or local cultures. An Na'im has more and less the same approach towards human rights and argues that the cultural universal legitimacy of human rights can be achieved by internal cultural discourse and cross culturally dialogue. He stresses "I believe that a sufficient degree of cultural consensus regarding the goals and methods of cooperation in the protection and promotion of human rights can be achieved through internal cultural discourse and cross-cultural dialogue." ²⁰

He means by internal discourse, the efforts has to be practiced in context to produce some kind of 'enlightened perceptions and interpretations of cultural values and norms'. The cross-cultural dialogue is struggling for extension of 'international consensus'.²¹ He is completely against all kind of 'external imposition' and states that "this is normally counterproductive and unlikely to succeed in changing the practice in question." ²²

Although this approach is considerably important and effective, since it has consequently increased the universal validity of human rights, but is not sufficient. Key "to the global ethics approach is that it solves the problem of elusive foundations by stipulating that human rights can be grounded in the main moral and religious traditions of the world as they already exist." ²³ and he notes that this theory "also shares another important feature with the natural law tradition, namely that rights (or the corresponding basic values) are attributed some sort of prior objective existence (in existing culture). They are facts of the world to be discovered." ²⁴

In this meaning I undoubtedly believe if we try to find the human rights standards in Quran or Sunna (in Islam), the core common values such as right to life, the brotherhood manner of mankind could be extracted and, even more than this, we have to accept that some tenets are not included. For instance, the equal rights of women or the LGBTs rights, which are not explicitly included at all. Thus, I argue the aforementioned approach cannot be appropriate since some weakness points could suffer its validity eventually. I am for the view of Ulrich to this moral approach, but that

²⁰ An Na'im, 2009, p. 74.

²¹ Idem.

²² Idem.

²³ Ulrich, 2001, p. 208.

²⁴ Idem, p. 209.

is a risky approach. He states “this paradigm is so successful since it retains the moral force of human rights but without the metaphysical trappings of the natural law position. And at a practical level, it promises to have significant impact, ... it responds in a positive, constructive manner to the fact of cultural diversity.”²⁵

I argue that the historical approach is more effective, even more than the constructivist approach of Ulrich. In regards to this view Ulrich states:

*“A key to constructivist outlook is that human rights are to be grounded, neither in metaphysical principles nor in traditional cultural values but rather in history. In essence human rights are not timeless principles but a construct that responds to the exigencies of a particular type of social formation emerging on the world stage during a particular historical epoch.”*²⁶

While Habermas states that “human rights appear to be a Western invention because European societies were the first to experience the kind of intense modernization (rationalization in the Weberian sense) which required them to develop a modern concept of human rights... other cultures and world religions are now also exposed to the challenges of social modernity, just as Europe was in its day”²⁷ So if human rights as law occurred in western countries before other nations since the modernization process was shaped earlier, then and the same thing could happen through a variety of ways in other parts of the world.

Although through this point of view the events of the Arabic countries cannot be easily generalized as modernization consequences, but can be described and explored as the same historical process of their peoples asking for self determination in opposition to totalitarian states. I argue this kind of exploration could open a novel way to a historical assessment of changing circumstances. The shaping dialogue of the basic demands of peoples and respecting human rights in context of Muslim countries is notably significant and capable of research. Therefore, through historical approach, this dissertation seeks to follow and assess the shaping process of human rights dialogue in religious layers of Iranian society. I will assume long and difficult process of human

²⁵ Idem, p. 212.

²⁶ Idem, p. 214.

²⁷ Cf. Ulrich, 2001, p. 214.

rights achievement is inevitable, which will be comprehensively explored through interviews with Iranian civil society actors. In the following chapter, I will historically explain the process through assessment of one of the most remarkable groups (religious intellectuals) that attempted to institutionalize human rights discourse in religious parcel of society.

Iran and Human Rights

We can to some extent claim the main aspiration of civil society in Iran nowadays is for human rights to be presented in a respectful manner by the state. Human Rights were not a matter of discourse before 1979 revolution between struggling student or political groups. Although reaching freedom was one of the reasons which groups and students were organizing to fight against the monarchic regime, mostly they had tried to establish an independent state, free from foreign countries intervention.

If human rights and fundamental freedoms, such as freedom of speech, were similar with a people sensitized to any violations of their freedoms, they would have protest massively against the state behavior after the revolution, which forbid any protesting or demonstrations. Many political groups who did not accept the absolute mandate of Jurist in constitution (Khomeini's religious leader as vali faghih) were even expelled from state, arrested, some imprisoned or executed in prisons. Many people did not criticise against such a manner, which to some extent can lead us to believe that the human rights discourse was not progressed in Iran at that time. Some also consider the silent behaviour of society because of breathing in the ideologic atmosphere and charismatic figure of religious leader (Ayatollah Khomeini).

Experts also explore the consequences of living in time before information was readily exchangeable, a time in which internet did not exist and independent media or presses were not able to publish.

But after the Islamic revolution two turning points in this period of history of Iran can be shown, in which the people precisely and harshly asked for their fundamental rights and freedoms, rule of law and civil society building. First in the 1997 presidential election, reformists came to power for a period of eight years. This was followed

afterwards by the 2009 green movement emergence for fair elections. I might refer to people slogans on 2009 election that millions of people on the streets were asking for their votes and implementing a new election. These protests continued for almost one year and many activists got arrested. Some were killed and sentenced to long prison. Nowadays a little slight remainder of those protests are still flowing and the regime has imprisoned many students, women and political activists to prevent the protests for being able to grow and recruit additional members.

Some sociologists consider that the shaped human rights discourse in Iran is an inevitable process from the universal discourse flow. What has forced the other people around the world to establish universal standards and rights did also attract Iranians even by some periodical distances or delays. It can be argued that the universal demand on large scale does not ultimately mean the human rights institutionalization in culture of societies, even if intellectuals and scholars try to fulfill such rights but people across the society might resist against their efforts and ultimately the movement could not be successful. The experience that happened in Iran after the revolution indicates precisely this conclusion. While people did not have awareness and concern regarding the state's behaviour, the regime misused the situation and imprisoned, tortured and killed many opposition groups and leaders in prisons to eliminate dissent.²⁸

Scholars also explain human rights socialization in Iran due to various factors.²⁹ For instance, the civil society actors and intellectual or academic researchers efforts, as well as the scholars who could change considerably and through ideas the religious masses, specially students and young people in Iran. They have revised and interpreted the religion that after Islamic revolution was being misused and manipulated by clerics to establish an undemocratic state over Iranians, afterwards they have reconciled it with modern concepts that entails democracy and human rights.

I have perceived human rights in Iran as an unfinished project with many obstacles and challenges, but as a discourse in society that is progressing and going forward. Absolutely we cannot talk about human rights in the legal aspect since, currently, the Islamic regime uses its absolute power and does not implement human rights standards

²⁸ Abdorrahman Boroumand Foundation, The Massacre of Political Prisoners in Iran, 1988, Report Of An Inquiry by Geoffrey Robertson, April 18, 2011, <http://www.iranrights.org/english/document-1380.php>.

²⁹ Razzaghi, 2010 speech at University of Maryland.

particularly in political aspects. In spite of the fact that Iran has ratified many of the instruments of the global community³⁰ but it implements them selectively and neglecting most of it, as well as violating many of the rights as defined. Iran was also a founder of the United Nation before the revolution and took part in drafting the Universal Declaration.

Besides, the legally implementation of human rights documents that Iranian state signed, another angle of human rights realization must be explored which I understand as human rights in context. To do so the major aim of this dissertation is to assess how religious intellectuals in the framework of the Islamic state communicated with religious layers of society through student movement and flourished a new space of dialogue and debate towards human rights.

I assume that their interpretations have inspired the religious strata of Iranian student movements to develop the Human Rights discourse in their respected organisations since the 1979 revolution. Since the Islamic doctrine is the only legitimate framework in which the intellectuals are able to develop and present their thoughts, in some of these countries, the new interpretations of scripts would produce a space to flourish new ideas. What are these new ideas? I will ask how do they interpret Islam that muslims could exit from strait framework of religion and live in modern wold?

Another question is relating to the universalist and relativist debate in Islamic countries. Which approach could open a way to cross the debate and universal human rights problem in Islamic societies? I answered to some extent the question by suggesting the historical exploration of human rights discourses in each context, but I will try to open up the approach through the Iranian experience.

As I answer the previous question some other argumentation will be explained and mentioned, such as which part and aspects of human rights are most important for student movement actors? What is their understanding regarding human rights? And how have religious intellectuals impressed their ideas?

³⁰ Abghari, 2008, p.161.

Why Religious Intellectuals?

There are several reasons to select religious intellectuals as a group of assessment. First and foremost, based on the argument that some scholars make regarding Islamic countries as one of the main obstacles in the route to universal human rights expansion and progression. These scholars tend to assume that in the Islamic context, the religious perspective of state and/or societies towards politics makes human rights development difficult and somehow almost impossible. It is assumed people have duties to their society and God, not rights. So as the Islamic countries that contain a large population of the world, their exploration and reaction to the expansion of Human Rights culture, almost is shaping the main circle of debate and research of academics or nonacademic atmosphere centres on the religious aspect.

Meanwhile, fundamentalist groups often originate from within this context as well. This could be because of the whole clashes and conflicts inside this society in regards to west and east duality, which is defined as occidental dominance and oriental subordination. Bearing in mind that these fundamentalist groups cause many difficulties and barriers in roads to human rights progress. Some of them perceive the western culture and modernization process as the cultural imperialism which is a consequence of globalisation.

Thus, I have decided to focus my work on a group of intellectuals that are not secular, but are indeed religious. Groups that could be the alternative to the fundamentalist approach and do have an effective and constructive role in Iranian society. The worth of their role assessment is obvious and vital in that they have altered the muslims perspective in terms of religion, as well as their ideas. The importance of them will increase more when they can influence the muslim population who are currently the audience of fundamentalists as well. These religious leaders have led to dialogue and discussions relating to the meaning of being muslim and eventually reconcile religion with modernity, which is the impossible issue in fundamentalists ideology and could never come true. They will help the societies development, as well as seriously challenging the fundamentalist approach.

The second reason to choose such a topic is in regards to previous work of some leading

Iranian scholars and sociologists in recent years. I believe there is a missing part in their works. In most of the recent works, these scholars have confirmed and explored such a role for religious leaders, but since I have been part of the student movement and civic society activities then I was following the debates of religious intellectuals and observed the impact of these leaders on my fellows and colleagues. Thus, I have not seen a work that explores such a process from the actors' perspective and people who have been impressed and consequently also altered their respected associations and unions. In that regard, I have interviewed some of the student movement leaders who were working in different parts of the country during the period of the 90s and have asked about their understanding of human rights in relation to Islam. A few articles have been written about this topic which were concentrating on religious scholars' role, but I have not found any work that is assessing the quality and circumstances regarding the actors in the civil society.

This thesis will not focus on religious intellectuals' views or their current ideas in detail, although it will historically introduce figures and brief theories. Instead the focus will remain on trying to evaluate how they promoted Human Rights discourse inside Iranian civil society. I think studying the practicing of Human Rights in Muslim countries would help to enhance the previous analysis.

My methodological approach in this thesis will be composed of studying religious intellectuals' interpretations in a qualitative method and interviewing with Iranian student activists who were engaged in the student movement during the 1990s. These interviews will serve as the main sources of analysing the role of scholars.

Also, in order to answer the aforementioned questions I will consider academics' works which were published in Journals, lectures, website and newspapers about religious intellectuals after the revolution, besides historical analysis of texts written by religious intellectuals to elucidate their interpretations and thoughts.

After the brief introduction and review of main questions, I will assess the historical role of early and recent religious intellectuals in chapter two, which should be noticed that they have encompassed a variety and extensive spectrum and I have merely chose the notable figures who had the most direct relation with student movements. The interviewees and previous works by scholars assert the leaders' impressive role and

discuss how they primarily influenced the civil society discourse. Hence, the intellectuals before the revolution, their ideologies and discourses will be explained and be compared to recent ones after the revolution took place.

The earlier religious leaders are also as important as the recent leaders, since many of the intellectuals in the post-revolutionary period have started their works and theories by the critiques of passing processes through revolution which is the discourse of struggling before the revolution. That discourse was to some extent anti-western and have tried to convinced the young to use the traditional figures and religious values to fight with injustice, whereas after that they have tried to secularize society and people's values, with limited religion in private spheres.

In the third chapter, I will review the interviews with student activists regarding the role of the intellectuals and their understanding towards religion and human rights. In forth part, I will analyse and explain their roles according to historical factors and the interviewees answers. Finally, In conclusion I will try to answer the main questions by historical analysis of intellectuals' figures as well as student activists answers that were achieved from interviews. I will attempt to use the results of this research in responding to three main questions of the work:

- How religious intellectuals interpreted Islam in Human Rights?
- How did their thoughts influenced student movement and activists?
- How do we need to look and explore the human rights progression in Iran in the middle of relativist and universalist debate?

Chapter II: Historical Review of Intellectuals

An Introduction

Religious intellectuals in Iran have always had a remarkable role in building the change discourse. Before and after the Revolution they were deeply involved in the political environment and have triggered basic social change of the Iranian community. It is this role that this dissertation will consider due to its high importance. While this dissertation cannot cover all the details, it will reflect the complexity of the issue and will illustrate that social conditions and international dialogue that have been mutually influential in changing views of the intellectuals.

Religion is crucial and effective as a factor in personal and public behavior of Muslims and shapes part of their social identity. Hence, it may be important in countries that are in progression towards democratic transition. This hidden source (religion) even managed through history to lead a revolutionary role in Iran's 1979 events.

Therefore religious intellectuals need to be perceived as a group who can interpret and give new understanding of religion. They spread a novel meaning of Islam, which is compatible in context of modernity and could lead to reconciliation. The middle class who are more urbanized and civilized could communicate with such an Islam. Considering that religion, due to its divine roots, is highly capable of changing to a strong and severe ideology, capable of altering people's faith to a direction against democratic changes in Islamic countries. When people lose everything around them, the only column that they can stand by is their faith. Clergies who have the power could misuse this social capital and mobilize people through institutions, such as mosques, to strengthen religion in politics and turn it to the myth. The religious masses are following their leaders and understand religion from their windows which indicates social power of clergies in the Islamic revolution of Iran (1979). In fact, religious intellectuals could challenge explicitly the divine power of religious leaders and prove that multiple understanding of religion is possible particularly through their relation with students.

Spectrum of religious intellectuals before and after the Revolution is very extensive and perhaps due to the unavailability of clear definition of the subject is to some extent a

difficult issue. In numerous articles and books, each writer and researcher according to the idea of its work had to consider the range of it as minimal or maximal. Some merely assessed the pre-revolutionary intellectuals, either clergies or non-religious leaders. Some considered the post-revolution religious leaders as the same as non-religious ones. Meanwhile, some authors categorize varieties of intellectuals, for instance as grand one or intermediary,³¹ but some only explained the intellectuals who influenced philosophical aspects.

Utilizing interviews with student activists and previous written works, this work will focus on the religious intellectuals on the end of the spectrum that student activists believe influenced the civil society discourse. This does not mean others, such as intermediary intellectuals who spread and promote the philosophical ideas, have not played crucial roles, merely it serves for limiting our assessment to those who held remarkable influence.

As in pre-revolutionary discourse, Mehrzad Boroujerdi has mentioned in his book that Jalal Al Ahmad played a significant role in influencing Ali Shariati to develop an ideology against western culture.³² It has been asserted several times in books and articles that Ali Shariati is the main ideologue of change in the 1979 Revolution. As a teacher, not only because of his ideas but also lifestyle, lectures, speeches and even his style of clothing was influenced by the young population extensively. His penetrating speeches, excited and even revolutionary manner in meetings usually attracted students and young so much so, that some of his cassettes or files are still being listened and watched on the Internet as relevant today.

Also, there are post-revolutionary intellectuals who were chosen due to the scholars articles and activists' interviews, because these people have changed in-depth the meaning and actions of the social movements discourse. It can be confirmed a similar position as Shariati for Soroush, who is a proficient lecturer, but mainly speaks calmly and eloquently. He has a charismatic face like Shariati and speaks poetically through using literary language.

Furthermore, Mojtabeh Shabestari and Mohsen Kadivar have been selected because of

³¹ Khosrokhavar, 2004.

³² Boroujerdi, 96.

their capability of rebuilding change discourse and reconciling religion with human rights. Although we can see Soroush's attitude in Shabestari's lectures, Shabestari also has a unique and influential language. It is the belief of many scholars and sociologists that these three intellectuals have significantly altered fundamentally the young and muslims students thoughts through promoting critical approaches towards Islamic regime and ideology.³³ which will be explained completely and comprehensively through student activists interviews.

If the discourse before the Islamic revolution (1979) was affected by intellectuals such as Jalal Al Ahmad, with reliable work of Westoxification (Gharbzadegi) and Ali Shariati forming the Islamic ideology, even anti-West culture as a definition of a generation, this discourse after the Revolution have been greatly changed. Due to shortcomings of Islamic regime after the revolution, which is reflected extensively in many researchers works such as Mohammad Ali Kadivar and Shabestari which was supposed to be guaranteed the people's rights, religious intellectuals have worked on a new conception of Islam that can guarantee individual freedom, human and fundamental rights.

Abdul-karim Soroush with the theory of "Expansion and Contraction of Religious Knowledge," (Qabz va Baste Theoric Shariat), Shabestari with "Hermeneutics, Book and Tradition," and Kadivar by challenging the Velayat Faghih concept (The religious supreme Leader-Absolute Mandate of Jurist) are all important texts which attracted young minds toward a novel vision of religion. A new vision which was different from the official views. These religious scholarly texts show that the authors have been affected by the global discourse of human rights and democracy and were concerned to take advantage the the positive achievements of Western culture.

The viewpoint that variety of interpretations differing from formal reading is possible and the foundation of religion in society based upon pluralism (Kesratgaraii) are in the works of intellectuals post-revolution. For assessing the modality and verdicts of religious intellectuals after the revolution, it is highly necessary to explore the religious ideologues' ideas who shaped the Islamic ideology as a tool to change Iran.

In doing so, comments and book reviews of opinions known as Jalal Ahmad with Westoxification and then Shariati's opinion in forming the "Unitary classless Society"

³³ M. Sadri, 2001.

is part of this document.

Boroujerdi shows in his book called “Iranian Intellectuals and the West” moral indignation against Westernization in Iran pre-dated the out burst of revolution in 1979 by a few decades, beginning as a series of nativistic protests that gradually cohered in the shape of Islam ideology.³⁴ Different views of these intellectuals has been crystallized in their ideas which indicate obvious and clear differences between theories before and after the Islamic Revolution.

Moreover, the questions of the origin of the religious intellectuals ideas that lead to this considerable change are still present. As mentioned before, some sociologists assessed their role, wrote books and articles, but we consider this role was more effective on young people, especially students, to change the discourse in regards to religion. The students afterwards could support the reformist's coming to power (President Khatami).³⁵ The aforementioned discourse not only led to secularization of religious people towards politics, but also was a reason to save religion from broad and numerous expectations that were a consequence of Islamic Ideology and afterwards religious state. It attracts massively from the student movement sector and somehow being changed mutually as result. It means intellectuals’ ideas and opinions in confrontations process and dialectically being altered in some aspects. For the first part, I will start by discussing Jalal Al Ahmad’s ideas and his impact which were a main source of inspiration for Ali Shariati.

Pre-Revolutionary Discourse

Jalal Al Ahmad and Gharbzadegi Idea

Iranian writer, Jalal Al Ahmad was from a traditional and religious family. He passed away almost ten years before the Islamic Revolution. His novels and books were influential in literature, due to his powerful and effective pen. Some of his books also

³⁴ Cf. Amir Arjomand, 2002, p. 720.

³⁵ Mashayekhi, 2001, p. 283.

have a political approach, for instance westoxification (Gharbzadegi). He was politically active in the Mass Party, which belonged to a communist idea. Besides stories, he published social articles and anthropological research (ethnography). His works widely seen as having affected the intellectual waves in that time.

After separating from the Mass Party and not being active for a while in the years leading up to the oil industry nationalization, he came back to politics by membership in the Iran National Front (as an political party). Following the coup on 19 August 1953 against Mohammad Mosadegh (the prime minister), Al Ahmad was disappointed with the outcome and wrote the westoxification book. The book was of significant interest to Rohollah Khomeini, who would become the leader of future Iranian revolution. Thus, the waves against western domination came from intellectuals with a religious background. As Amir Arjomand wrote that:

“Islamic ideology became increasingly revolutionary and culminated in Khomeini's theocratic redefinition of Shiism. The modernist writer Al-Ahmad, who initiated the reception of ideology in Iran, set the direction of its development in two steps: first, by characterizing Iranian culture malaise as “Westoxification” (Gharbzadigi), then by turning for a cure (toward the end of his career) to the Islam of his clerical family. His “Westoxification” proved definitive as the diagnosis of the age and constituted what sociologists call the definition of the situation for a whole generation.”³⁶

Jalal Al Ahmad explained in his book that the Westoxification (1343) as a disease caught the whole Iranian society. He argues that in the current world there are two worlds where one is the manufacture and the other consumer and Iran society should be perceived as a consumer. “Two of the world are in our time. One for making, dealing and exporting machines, and another towards consumption and wear out and import it. one manufacturer and other consumer.”³⁷

Yet, his main criticism is that Iranian society has been unable to save its identity and origin against a Western cultural attack and even their culture has been lost. In part of his book he states:

³⁶ Amir Arjomand, 2002, p. 720.

³⁷ Al Ahmad, 1343/1964.

“The main word is that we could not keep our cultural-historical personality in face to machine and algebraic attack. We have been overturn. The point is that we could not take a calculated and proper position towards the monster of new century. we are westoxified until the time of being consumers since we do not make the machine. Westoxification is the character of our historical period that we have not familiarized with machine which means new knowledge and technology.”³⁸

Furthermore, he explained some clashes which originated because of westoxification and being consumer and mentioned one of them as segregating religion and state which relies on westoxification. He concluded it will lead to devolution of society. Al Ahmad thought the state without religion (Din) or denomination (Mazhab) is not a right way. Finally, he concludes that we [Iranians] cannot close our windows to the technology and modern world, but we should have saved our custom and tradition. In fact, the point of his idea is our disease of being solved in western culture and the cure is to learn how to make machines and technology, besides independence in global politics and economics. The pattern influenced in-depth Shariati as a teacher and political activist to constitute Islamic Ideology against west.

Ali Shariati: Islamic Ideology

Shariati is widely viewed by many scholars to be the main teacher of the Islamic revolution along with Morteza Mottahari. Motahari is one of notable clergyman and well-known as an important impacts on the Islamic Republic Ideology, by request of Ayatollah Khomeini he constituted the Council of Revolution of Iran. he was assassinated by Furqan (a guerilla organization) in 1979.³⁹ Jalal Al Ahmad and Shariati have some Marxist opinions and tried to adapt Islam with Marxism. Therefore, it is understandable the use of term ideology in Shariati's work to make it as a tool for fighting against King (Shah). In fact, putting Islam in an ideological manner is a Marxist concept, which redefines Islam as revolutionary notion. Dabashi in his work noted that “the islamic

³⁸ Al Ahmad, 1343/1964.

³⁹ Fischer, 99, pp. 181-182.

ideology is the deepest, most effective form of Westoxification ever.”⁴⁰

Ali Shariati grew up in a Muslim family and studied history and sociology. He was arrested several times before the revolution and played a remarkable role in combating against the regime as a monarchist dynasty. In Shariati's view, the relation of politics and religion is connected with two crucial ideas composed of first religious society (Ummat Eslami) and secondly religious leader (Imam) as successor of the prophet Mohammad. Shariati took these two concepts to develop another concept called the Unitary classless Society (Jame Bitabaghe Tohidi) which is composed of a combination between Islam and Marxism.⁴¹ To achieve such a society, Muslims who are a member of Ummat have to combat with injustice until the death and even being martyr in this way. In fact this is a modern understanding of sacred struggle and was inspired from Shiite. Consequently, the political struggle becomes a holy activity and it is the Muslims duty to combat against all forms of injustice and inequity. The aforementioned reading of religion provides a ground to attract and mobilize Muslim people to campaign against the monarchist regime which was defined as the symbol of evil and cruelty.

On the other hand, the Muslim Society (Ummat) should be unified and organized by a Muslim leader or Imam, which as duty has to provide and implement social justice and political unity through battle of the oppressed (Mustazafin) against oppressors (Mostakberin).⁴² This sacred interpretation of society was followed by Ayatollah Khomeini. Khomeini and Shariati had all sorts of differences, but consented on the notion that Islam and politics are intertwined and Muslim society (Ummat) should seek for Islamic justice alongside equal society.

Ayatollah Khomeini believed that the Muslim Ummat are united with the idea to wait and be patient for the end of humanity on Earth by appearance of the twelfth Imam as the Day of Resurrection like Christ who will rise one day too. Muslims should preserve their unity during the Twelfth Imam absence thoroughly relying on Islamic leadership, who is the valiye faqih (Mandate of Jurist) which is here Khomeini as successor of

⁴⁰ Dabashi, 1993, p. 75.

⁴¹ Khosrokhavar, 2004, p.195.

⁴² Khosrokhavar, 2004, p. 194.

Twelfth Imam in Occultation period.⁴³ It could be perceived as highly ideological redefinition of Islam, but is the interpretation that confirmed in all books of scholars as a means to mobilize masses in order to bring the Islamic revolution triumph.

Shariati thought it is something premier and more than a religion, which is understood in our perspective and western world. Islam does not merely promote the relation of God and his follower or creature and human, but also defines a comprehensive vision for the modern man and the perfect plan to guide humanity.

Religion has responses for all individual and collective potentiality of humanity. This gives explanation to human creature roots and determines his/her duty as a Muslim.

Soroush's intersection with Shariati's point of view begins in this point that Islam has the ability to answer all kind of needs and ideas and has general instructions in all the time for Muslims that a person should have to follow to achieve salvation. Shariati's perspective is a monotheistic type, which means there is one reality even in the spiritual world or materialist world and this world and hereafter are in conjunction, so a religious person could not find a boundary to separate them. Human and nature in his thought do have a same beginning and end. While his ideas based on monotheistic, all the concepts and opinions are based on it as well. He believes Human as a creature constituted of soil and spirit, always in the process of evolving and changing. Society could be divided to fidel or infidel, based on faith in monotheistic belief. History is according to Quran text. Moreover, all the clashes through the history have been the fidel and infidel fight, the battle between right and wrong. The of beginning all perspectives and worlds could be this kind of thought, which consequently will lead mankind to being wrong or right. Finally, based on these issues, monotheistic faith originates and comes into existence. It can also turn to ideology as a program for action. Ideal society, which Shariati called Ummat, has its leadership ruled by Imam. Ummat is a type of society where race and classes do not have any place, all being united to achieve a main goal and moving towards a religious leader. Ideal humans with all capabilities could grow up and evolve in such a society.

Besides this explained systematic order of thought regarding Islam, Shariati's opinions in regards to Islam should be elaborated briefly. He criticises and assesses many

⁴³ Khosrokhavar, 2004, p. 195.

fundamental concepts in Shiite thought. Firstly, he starts with the Muslims interpretation of Imam critique. Meanwhile, they usually see Imam as a Prophet successor and his descendants as a semi-clerical and sacred person. Muslims mourn for his martyr, but we cannot observe any positive practical influences of Imam advices and lifestyle in people. This means they merely cry for his death but never act like him in their life to be a good man. For instance, they usually cry for Imam Hosein, the son of Imam Ali who has combatted against injustice regime and became martyr. Afterwards in time of mourning they usually commemorate his name with ceremonies, but never follow his way in battle with evil and symbol of Zolm (cruelty). Consequently, he calls for Muslims changing their lifestyle according to the way of the Imam and being a better human. He also promotes a new interpretation of Twelfth Imam *Occultation* thesis to expect his appearance. This means Muslims, instead of being inactive in this period and not having any effects, should proactively provide a better condition for his appearance. Muslims ought to constitute a society based on justice and monotheistic for end of Occultation time. The Um-mat and Imam-at thesis of Shariati is explicitly the place that Soroush criticizes and refutes the Islamic Ideology thought, which will be explained more.

Post-revolutionary Discourse:

Abdul-karim Soroush:

Soroush is the most notable religious intellectual figure. Arash Naraghi, a noted intellectual who is influenced by his ideas, wrote in an article Soroush is the last step of religious enlightenment process in Iran, which means he gives answers and solutions for major problems and obstacles which originated because of religious confrontation with modernity.⁴⁴ The role he played after the revolution is comparable with Shariati's work. Since he affects many scholars and the overall religious environment, he tempted them to reconstruct religious thought. These groups of scholars and intermediary intellectual

⁴⁴ Naraghi, 2005.

mobilized social movements by the end of the 90s and led to reformist's victory in the presidential election. Shariati was the religious revolutionary ideologue, but Soroush theorizes religious and political pluralism. Intellectuals try to influence the atmosphere of religious thought in contrast with prior to the revolution, which they formed and built religious ideology and Islamic regime with sacred approach towards religion.

Soroush's achievements, who was extensively engaged in the revolution's atmosphere, are products of two decades of efforts and post-revolutionary observation. Although many people who were engaged in revolution preferred to take part in Islamic regime development and construction.

Some intellectuals believe the religious intellectual project is seeking for religious salvation. The religion was politicized extensively in the revolution and no signs of its holiness remains. Soroush seeks for society and regime secularization in modern period, but never has neglected the celestial and sacred aspects of it.

Soroush grew up in religious family like other mentioned intellectuals. He studied pharmacy at Tehran University, but became familiar with philosophy while studying. Later, he went London to study modern philosophy and was influenced by the rational and critical philosophy of Kant. He was influenced by varieties of other Iranian thinkers and poets, particularly Molana (Rumi) who is the main poet in his works. He has studied other thinkers such as Eghbal Lahouri, Asad Abadi and Ghazali, as well as participation in Shariati's lectures during revolutionary time at Hosseiniye Ershad. Probably, because of this, he was much concerned to find some ideas to criticise Shariati's work.

His field of work was science and history. Epistemology also is important in his work and efforts were made always to show the boundaries of science, philosophy and values. In many of his papers, he somehow inserted challenges to non-scientific concepts and approaches. In his works before the revolution and its occurrence, he always criticized Marxism's ideas, which can be cited in the book *Satanic Ideology*.⁴⁵ In a period that many religious intellectuals and political groups, like Mojahedin Khalgh, sought to reconcile Islam with Marxism and did many efforts in this area, he was against

⁴⁵ Jalaiipour, 97.

combination. Many intellectuals in the new system had tried to approve and support the theoretical principles of regime and construct a new form of state, but he mostly tried to strengthen the religious students to think scientifically through a philosophical lense.

He was appointed as a member of cultural revolutionary council by Khomeini at the beginning of the revolution. This council, which was founded after significant Universities' closures and during the time in which the revolution was trying to establish a new rule for revolutionary and Islamic ideas in academia to change the educational texts and expell the non-religious students and teachers. he quitted that position after some years and started studying and writing. At the beginning, he mostly published ideas regarding religion in “expansion and contraction of religious knowledge” on Keyhan Farhangi magazine. Later, as publishing with that magazine was being stopped, he decided to continue on Kian magazine. Kian is the most famous magazine of religious intellectuals in Iran, which was published during the 1980s and 90s and reflected their ideas.

Most religious scholars and thinkers were silent regarding Soroush's ideas, which means they did not think about the importance of his books in forming a change discourse. Until the time that he made some serial lectures, which many students took part in because of his attractive speeches. His attitude along reading poems also increased his effectiveness. In these lectures, gradually he basically challenged Islamic jurisprudence, and the political and traditional basis of Ullama. Answering many of his questions by conservative scholars proved to be not that easy.

Following we will assess the Sorosh's ideas. Those which will be explained from Soroush includes: expansion and contraction of religious knowledge; minimal and maximal religion; the religious ideology critics; and religious democratic regime.

Expansion and Contraction of Religious Knowledge

Soroush's ideas in this epistemological and detailing thesis is regarding religious knowledge. Soroush divides religious knowledge into two branches of prior and subsequent knowledge and his hypothesis is that subsequent knowledge is not related to

branches of science which explained in detail about one particular subject, but mostly belong to a general science framework. Mind philosophical structure and understanding is far from an experimental issue. On the other hand, the knowledge branches are prior knowledge and religion belongs in this category, since it is speaking in regards to one particular subject.⁴⁶ Although we can assess religion with subsequent knowledge as well. In continuing, he pursues religious science and scheduled five basic principles to it:

- Religious sciences do not intrinsically differ from other human sciences and both are attempts by humans to understand events through the application of concepts, theories and specific methods.⁴⁷
- Human sciences are continuously evolving and religious sciences are not excluded from this general rule.⁴⁸
- Transformations of natural and religious sciences have impacts on both of them, which mean eventually any changes in human sciences could indirectly affect religious science.⁴⁹
- Religion is sacred and absolute but the knowledge of religious scholars is not celestial, but rather temporal and all the inaccuracies that confront the scholars of other branches would face to religious scholars as well. Hence, the knowledge of religion continuously and gradually is expanding and contracting.⁵⁰
- The identity and evaluation criteria of various fields are not dependent on a single person but on a combination of methods and criteria which scholars have come to agree. Religious knowledge are not exception to the general rule and in scientific domains. One person's monopoly does not have any meaning and existing.⁵¹

The implication of Soroush's thoughts has many impacts and the resulting logic could lead to vital changes which altered the thinkers environment. For instance, to allow for comprehensive and good understanding of religion, all jurisprudence and shiite religious

⁴⁶ Soroush 2008/1387, p. 429.

⁴⁷ Jalaiipour, 97.

⁴⁸ Idem.

⁴⁹ Idem.

⁵⁰ Idem.

⁵¹ Idem.

thinkers need to learn and understand philosophy as a basis of science and nobody can claim to be the only *true interpreters of religion*.⁵² Bearing in mind, currently, Vali Faghih and Ullama claim they are the main and truly interpreters of religion. He challenged this claim by construction to criticize religious knowledge monopoly.

Meanwhile, although Islam is celestial and sacred, religious thinkers and Ullamas who interpret it are like other science thinkers and scholars, which means they are not the best. Legitimacy and criteria of religion is not merely in the hands of religious thinkers or individuals . It could also depend on scholars and experts consensus. No one entity can monopolize religion, nor can any single entity claim they are the only source of questions and answers. Finally, this led to the elimination of primacy of scholars in understanding religion and denial of individuals juristic authority in regards to religion. He consequently provides a ground for pluralism in Iranian society and insists on this crucial point that religious understanding is a collective affair not individual work. Noted contemporary intellectual Arash Naraghi argues the previous part that religious scholars do not have any privileged rights because of their relation with religion in public sphere generally and politics specifically.⁵³

Minimal and Maximal Religion:

Soroush defends a minimal interpretation of religion. This means we need to reduce our expectation from religion to merely understanding that it does not encompass all answers and solutions about problems, and also does not contain all knowledge and ways. The question of man's expectations from religion is very complicated and not easy to answer and many scholars through the history did not have answer for many problems. This is our misunderstanding to seek answers in religious disciplines. In fact, many ways could be hidden in the history of religion, philosophy or sociology of religion and cannot expect jurisprudence to provide solutions.

If we do not seek all human and universal answers in religion, we would not be disappointed in what could be incomplete and imperfect. The viewpoints that try to find

⁵² Idem.

⁵³ Naraghi, 2005.

answers in religion through maximal approach could suffer it consequently. Arash Naraghi noted this that religion does not have any specific theories for societal management and regime orders.⁵⁴

Critique of Religious Ideology:

Shariati's main disagreements with Soroush lies in the non-ideological basis of religion. In Shoroush's opinion, religion is richer and larger than ideology and described in articles with the same name in the "richer than ideology".

Various aspects of religion includes ethics, jurisprudence, mysticism, philosophy and epistemology and the reduction of the generality of religion to ideology is wrong.

This issue destroys the meaning and substance of religion and reduces its function as tools for fighting to null.

He counts a number of reasons for non-ideological nature of religion:

- God has never introduced religion as ideology and all religious books are inconsistencies with this.⁵⁵
- Religion is vague, not clear and can not be defined as the ideology is obvious and prescribes the way.⁵⁶
- Religion can not be limited in time and space, whereas ideology specifies for particular community and time to fight.⁵⁷
- Religion is a ladder, light and reflects the criteria for belief and faith in contrast the ideology which indicates way, and is guidance. religion in contrary with ideology does not show a clear picture of way.⁵⁸
- The ideology is for revolutionary change and period, while religion belongs to a time of civilization when political stability is established.⁵⁹
- When religion changes in ideological form it will reduce to Islamic law level,

⁵⁴ Idem

⁵⁵ Jalaiipour, 97.

⁵⁶ Idem.

⁵⁷ Idem.

⁵⁸ Idem.

⁵⁹ Idem.

essence of religion is mystical and can not be decreased as law.⁶⁰

Soroush concludes that the Islamic Ideology of Shariati after the revolution trumped changes to needed ideology for official clergies who wanted to get power, which was not even something that Shariati considered, desired or anticipated.

But the clerics did not allow the opposition views even spoken or heard. Revolutionary and Islamic ideology in religious society of Iran altered towards the Islamic jurisprudence ideology and distanced from its primary reality.

Religious Democratic Regime Theory:

In this theory Soroush assesses Human Rights principles and he insists on primacy with human rights principles, while some conflict occurs. He argues that the Khomeini's theory of Absolute Supreme Leadership, which gives the authority and power of public and regime affairs to one person, is far from democracy and he thinks the benefits of regime, which is national benefits and public interests, should be determined by collective intellect and democracy. Soroush accepts minimal religious democracy, which means people use the democratic methods to determine public spheres affairs. Implication of religious orders is merely applicable with two conditions. First, rules should come to the public sphere with secular methods, like voting, and secondly, should not have any contradictions with human rights standards. He argues human rights norms are the prerequisite values to understand and accept religion. While some understanding of religion contradicts with human rights rules we have to doubt on religion understanding instead of Human Rights standards.⁶¹ The primacy he gives to collective intellect and democratic mechanism causes society to deliver the methods of societal management to the same mechanism. He believes whenever some problems come up with religious rules, we need to refer to the collective intellect of society and here the society decides, not religion.

Soroush also sees all parts of religion with secularization's aspects. Soroush shows

⁶⁰ Idem.

⁶¹ Naraghi, 2005.

human and secular aspects in holy text, (Quran, prophet words, religious knowledge and implications of religion knowledge) which does not always lead to neglect the sacred affair.⁶² He explains that the prophet's experience was part of prophet personality and character and could contain some human and natural aspects. Even in sacred text somethings are transverse, which means it reflects the Arab history and culture in time of the coming revelation. Although the origin of text is intrinsically sacred and contains a message apart from time and space, the knowledge of religion is totally humanistic.

The result of practical usage of Soroush's theories is widespread and important. In a religious society at the end of eight years of war, (Iran and Iraq battle) which was perceived as a fight for sake of God and as a sacred job, the shadow of religion was everywhere either in individual or public human lives. The implications of Soroush's ideas leads to a broad reformation of the youth, who is a believer and religious person and as one of the revolution founder. Although attention to his ideas took years and 15 years after the revolution happened, his books and lectures, like Shariati, were being published in universities and among students.

In one of Arash Naraghi's articles, the author notes that the religious intellectuals' goal is to save religion. In time, some leaders action should be the source of young motivation and attraction towards religion, in contrast to methods that lead to regretting religion and all products of it by people, where religious schools are not anymore convincing and acceptable.⁶³ He also sees this approach as a way to expand modernity in religious society and argues Soroush with political Islam critiques, opens a way towards a more moral and spiritual Islam.

Probably because of this belief, he was expelled from various Universities and deprived from teaching. His several speeches was interrupted by plainclothes attacks who are informal opsessor forces of intelligence serveices in Iran.

⁶² Idem.

⁶³ Idem.

Mohammad Mojtahed Shabestari:

Mojtahed Shabestari is clergy, but does not wear the special clergy's clothes. He was educated in Qom Madresa. He is in favor of mystic sciences and philosophy, and after the revolution attracted to political Islamic thought. He was appointed as director of the Islamic centre of Imam Ali in Hamburg. He was the student of Ayatollah Tabatabaai and Khomeini.

In his time living in Germany, he started learning German language and pursued his favor regarding western philosophy and theology, particularly Protestant theology. He also reviewed philosophers and some theologies works such as, Paul Tillich, Karl Barth and Rahner, Immanuel Kant, Wilhelm Dilthey and Hans Georg Gadamer.⁶⁴

He went to the first Parliament of Iran after the 1979 revolution, but decided to follow concentrating on Islamic ideology, which was believed to be the only solution for everything. He altered his perception towards a more spiritual and salvation-oriented understanding of religion for humans. He lectured at numerous academic and public circles, and played a crucial role in religious discourse evolution in Iranian society.

He is one of the intellectuals who wants to keep the distance with politics, but most of his theories affects the political and religious discourse of Iran, particularly human rights and democracy. The main theory he put forward was published in the book, *Hermeneutic, book and tradition*. He published another book: *Critiques on Official Reading of Religion* as well, which challenged the official dominant discourse on Iranian society.

Meanwhile, he forced to publish his thoughts and theories on human rights, democracy, peace and its relation with Islam only on the Internet, through numerous interviews and articles since many restrictions were imposed on him by authorities. One magazine was forced to close after publishing an article from him and one of the Islamic student associations at the Industrial University of Isfahan closed as well after his lecture regarding prophet word.

⁶⁴ Seidel, 2004.

In following more detail theories of him will be explained and particularly his opinion regarding Human Rights will be assessed:

Hermeneutic, Book and Tradition

During his studying period in Germany Shabestari was highly impressed by modern hermeneutic theory and found it as a window to criticize those claiming Islam by official institutions of regime. He argues that interpreters of Islam revelation have always interpreted book and tradition according their own understanding, favor, goals and expectations. He comprehensively shows that the extracted interpretation that Islamic religious scholars and Ullama have promoted is according this general rule of hermeneutic knowledge, which cites the interpretation and understanding of texts is based on the understanding, interests and expectations of the interpreter and could not be separated from it.⁶⁵

The solution he offers for solving this problem includes that scholars need to cleanse completely their understanding in all historical period or time for giving new interpretations or explanations. The evolution of religious knowledge is impossible without reviewing this process and revising. He confirmed the only way that could save the Islamic world from all theatrical and practical problems is the suggested solution.

Khosrokhavar noted “no single hermeneutics of Islam exists as such, and there are different types of knowledge that are not religious, Islam is the quest for spirituality and it leaves the social and historical field open to understanding by mankind as such.”⁶⁶

He then focuses his theory on this point that juridical Islam (eslame feghahati) could never answers all the needs of humanity and has never claimed such a thing. Figh does not have the ability to establish something, but merely can adjust politics and dealings of humans. If it was like this that all humans around the world should extract the lifestyle and orders from book and tradition, Islam could never go far from the Arab territory and could not become part of human around the world. Islam recognizes all types and methods of lives apart from race or color, and merely invites Muslims to a

⁶⁵ Shabestari, 1996/1375.

⁶⁶ Khosrokhavar, 2004, p. 97.

more moral and religious way of living. It is noted in Quran that Islam comes to give a new direction to human life, not for questioning all human civilizations and mankind efforts on the world.⁶⁷

He harshly criticizes the scholars who give verdicts according their own thoughts and extract ambiguous results instead of people's life solutions and suggestions.

Amir Arjomand cited "Mujtahed Shabestari uses the hermeneutic principle as a generally accepted and key element of modern epistemology to refute the fundamental claim that it is possible to base a form of government-or, for that matter, any social institution-on religious jurisprudence."⁶⁸

The Critique of Official Reading of Islam

The next most major work of Shabestari is his critique towards official reading of Islam. He argues reading of Islam is the reading of religious texts which could be commented and understood differently. All forms of religious readings should be criticized and none of them are an exception from this general rule. Shabestari said my presumption is that Muslims could achieve to the more acceptable form of religion merely with all different reading critiques. We need to consider accepting varieties of different readings of religion, which does not necessarily mean not having order or being anarchist in understanding and commentary of religion. In addition, we could not regret providing reasons and rationality, but means as a matter of fact readings could be different and for reality achievements. We have to criticize all readings and clarify its shortcomings and positives points to show the argument and logic of readers and evaluate its credibility in different ways.⁶⁹ It is basically obvious that scientific methods, as a rule, are needed and crucial to prevent massively biased events in religion understanding. And we have to criticize the official readings, since it confronts, severely, many obstacles and challenges which this crisis suffers many things, such as religion message and also political rationality in our society. Therefore, there is a need to solve it. This crisis includes non

⁶⁷ Shabestari, 1996/1375.

⁶⁸ Amir Arjomand, 2002, p. 725.

⁶⁹ Shabestari, 2000/1379.

public participation of people in politics, theorized violence and even the lack of scientific validity.⁷⁰

The third reason, the lack of scientific validity, is due to hermeneutic challenges. The modern hermeneutic, which proves that there is possibility of many readings and comments of religion challenged the perceived authority of religious jurist (Faghih Mazhabi) in the name of Khomeini and seems not easy to have a logical answer for it.

Amir Arjomand explains this “Mujtahed Shabestari explicitly refutes the two cardinal tenets of the official clericalist reading of Islam- namely that Islam as a religion has political, economic and legal regimes based on the science of jurisprudence suitable for all ages and that the function of government among the muslims is the execution of the commandments of Islam.”⁷¹

Shabestari argues “I am of the opinion that it is high time that we let people know to what extent they can expect religion to solve their secular problems and to establish an advanced society.... the necessity of a democratic government can not be derived from the meaning of faith or the religious texts. However, since social realities demand such a form of government, people of faith must forge a relationship with this reality, reconcile themselves with its requirements, and follow a faithful life along its riverbed.”⁷²

The Prophet Narrative of Universe:

In a series of lectures and seminars, Shabestari elaborates the theory of regarding the prophet narrative of Universe in the Quran. He argues that the Quran is the word of the Prophet and his perspective from the world. He argues “if we perceive it as [the] prophet’s word that was expressed and created by God’s guidance.” He stresses that in this definition of Quran “the place of revelation is changed and switched to inside of prophet instead of Quran text. It does not decline revelation itself and it has no contradiction with statement.”⁷³ In his opinion the true understanding of the Quran

⁷⁰ Shabestari, 2000, p. 30-34.

⁷¹ Amir Arjomand, 2002, p. 725.

⁷² Shabestari, 1998, pp. 134-192.

⁷³ Unpublished interviews with Mojtabeh Shabestari, 2009, at <http://mojtahedshabestari.blogfa.com/post-47.aspx>.

could be achieved by all humans only if we consider this is human language and prophet words, not God.

In one of his interviews he explained in detail that one day he was reading the Quran and noticed to this point that all definition that narrates about nature, stars, trees and days and nights circles seems the prophet definition. The prophet sees them as sign of God and it indicates this is the prophet words. He definitely says the message and basis of Quran that God expressed for human is perceived in revelation, but simultaneously includes the historical and temporal period of prophet.⁷⁴

If we consider the Quran as words of the prophet, we can anticipate many conclusions which would be extracted. This anthropological approach towards revelation and prophet in his narrative could act as a human at that specific time, which does not exist any more.

Human Rights and Islam

Shabestari views in human rights and its relation with Islam is considerably different from other scholars. Some religious intellectuals have tried to extract and indicate the human rights standards and norms in the Quran and tradition. (moral project theory approach) There are some Quranic verses to prove human rights were mentioned in the text. Shabestari argues human rights are contractual principles among mankind and should be accepted unconditionally. The Quran and tradition are silent in regards to human relations orders in a human rights framework, since human rights are truly the evolutionary production and understanding of human thought in current history and space. He also criticize this view that seeks to prove *Islamic human rights* and regrets such an approach completely, saying the nature of religious knowledge is incomplete. His authoritative commentary on the essentiality limited nature of religious knowledge and rules, and thus the necessity of complementing it with extra-religious sources.⁷⁵ He argues this human production does not have any contradictions with God's reality,

⁷⁴ Idem.

⁷⁵ M. Sadri, 2001, p. 261.

which is mentioned in Quran. We have to accept and respect human rights, even if it contains a specific source of philosophy basis since it is an utter historical necessity for human life to regulate rights in the social life and between human relations. Hence, we cannot decline it at all.

He argues the same view in regards to democracy and believes Islam does not prescribe the methods of government and administration. The Prophet was following his time and historical period and he was not the founder of the governmental method, which now clergies perceive as an Islamic state in the time of Prophet. If there was such a requirement for government on that time, nowadays could be totally different. “the Islamic democracy does not have meaning but Muslims could absolutely have democracy.”⁷⁶

He also noted in one lecture that God is not present currently that could be in power directly, although would appoint some special values. Government is a human phenomena, which could be in varieties of form between human and appearance in different ways.

Mohsen Kadivar

Along with the two other aforementioned intellectuals, the notable theory of Mohsen Kadivar regarding the Absolute Mandate of Jurist (Velayate Motlaghe Faghih) is crucially important. This theory led to many arguments in scholars networks and civil society. He was arrested at the end of the 1990s and spent approximately 18 months in prison. Many believe it was due to his work on the theory of Absolute Mandate of Jurist and his speeches. He courageously criticized the theory of Velayat Faghih, which is the Khomeini's idea. He took a new approach towards the ideas assessment and regarding the current government of Iran in Shia Jurisprudence.

He was the student of Ayatollah Mohammad Ali Montazeri⁷⁷ who was at one point the

⁷⁶ Shabestari lecture, 2008, <http://ettelaat.net/07-oktober/news.asp?id=24301>.

⁷⁷ Ayatollah Mohammad Ali Montazeri is one of the most notable grand Ayatollahs. He was fired from vice deputy of Khomieni since he criticised the regime method of government and went under house arrest. He defended the rights of oppositions after revolution who was being arrested, tried, detained

successor of Khomeini's after death, but was fired by Khomeini before he died.

Kadivar studied in Qom and has the capability to extract verdict through the book and tradition (Ijtihad) and also graduated with a PHD in the field of Islamic doctrine with speciality on Motaa'liye doctrine (Islamic philosophy). He was summoned and tried in court several times, while he was writing all defenses on special court of clergies (dadgah-e Vije Rohaniyat) with details on a book by name of the *Expenses of Freedom*. He was also the dean of philosophy group in Tarbiyat Moddares University, but was expelled in 2006.

He made a ground to Velayate Faghih critiques and through historical studying in Shia Jurisprudence proves that Komeini's theology was merely one theory among a variety of possible theories. He differentiates between appointed and selected Mandate and defends the election of government with relying on the religious basis. His theory's difference with other intellectuals is that he proves the plural nature of religious knowledge by jurisprudence principles with method of Islam casuistry of application. Soroush uses the critical and rational philosophy to prove the variable nature of religious knowledge and Shabestari with hermeneutic method assesses the limited nature of it. Whereas “Soroush emphasizes the variable nature of religious knowledge and Shabestari underlines the limits of it, Kadivar substantiates the multiple nature of religious knowledge.”⁷⁸

He wrote some books and articles, but the most important theories are included in two books of the *Government Theories in Shiite Jurisprudence* and the *Government by Mandate*.

The Theories of States in Shiite Jurisprudence:

In the book *The Theories of States in Shiite Jurisprudence*, Kadivar tries to prove that the implemented theory of Ayatollah Khomeini in regards to absolute Jurist is merely

and in some cases executed. The House arrest continued for many years until the reformist coming to power in presidential election. Afterwards young, students and people could meet in his house. In all these years he kept criticising the Khomeini's regime and did many interviews, verdicts and articles.

He passed away in 2009.

⁷⁸ M. Sadri, 2001, p. 266.

one theory between varieties of possible theories that could be performed in Iran. He makes a typology of religious ideas in regards to these other theories.

All the theories he explains are nine which could be categorized in two main categories. In each part the possible branches and ways are explained. These dual categories are: the Theories of State based on Immediate Divine Legitimacy and Theories of State Based on Divine-popular Legitimacy and in each of them he introduced the representatives and people who defend the idea. The "Absolute Appointed Mandate of Jurisconsult" (Velayat e Entesabi ye Motlaghe ye Faghihan) that Khomeini advocated would be in the first category which is the immediate divine legitimacy. He consequently concludes that this theory is the most totalitarian and absolutist one among all possible hypothesis, which was advocated by other scholars and Ullama.⁷⁹

He completes his ideas in Government with Mandate book and leaves the major critiques towards Ayatollah Khomeini, due to Velayate Faghih theology which he consider as the most absolutist's theory through the history.

He assesses the age of this theory and with researching in regards to thesis on the eighteenth and nineteenth century books. He found its age is merely two century old, which means it does not have a strong root in whole history of Shiite Jurisprudence and just now becomes as the regime implemented theory.⁸⁰

On the other hand in second part of his assessment he brings the arguments related to Velayate faghih on the Quran, tradition, reason and the consensus of Ulama to prove that this theology is not directly written and, hence, could not logically be necessary. He notes that this is "nothing more than a jurisprudential minor hypothesis".⁸¹ His courageousness to challenge the most important basis of Islamic government is highly important, the theory of Velayate Faghih, even if it does not contains the philosophical approach, but the history of Shiite Jurisprudence. Though this theory does not contain logical and strong roots and merely should be perceived as a hypothesis in Shiite Jurisprudence, it opens ways to criticise. The Islamic authority cannot any longer consider the sacred aspects for their mandate, whereas through the whole last years after

⁷⁹ M.Sadri, 2001, p. 263-264.

⁸⁰ Idem.

⁸¹ Kadiver, 99, p. 23.

the revolution the totalitarian state has always tried to prove a different view as a sacred government.

Chapter III: Interviews with Student Activists

For a more detailed assessment of religious intellectuals' role in shaping the political discourse regarding their ideas, interviews have been implemented with student activists who were active in Iran in the 1990s. These students were the directors of the student associations and unions. The main goal of these discovery interviews was to elaborate their experience with the intellectual's work and also trace the university environment as part of the student movement from that period in time. Their opinion regarding Human Rights and its relation with religion was being asked, as well as their current understanding and meaning in regards to Islam.

The activists that have been interviewed played a role as leaders of the student movement and opened the doors for religious intellectuals entrance in universities. They have also participated in intellectuals' classes and have been impressed in their social and personal lives by their ideas. Although they may have believed in secularization of religion, these activists remain religious people who have not abandoned religion in their everyday life. The activists have been interviewed are:

Ali Afshari, as a Central Council member of Daftare Tahkime Vahdat (the Office for Consolidation Unity, OCU, as major student Union in Iranian Universities for student affairs) has studied industrial engineering and is currently a PHD student at George Washington University. He was first a member of the Central Council of Islamic student Association in Amir Kabir University and has served as the director of the Association three times. Then he became the OCU Central Council Member in five elections and has been the director of political affairs of Union three years. He mostly was active in the 90s and left Iran in 2004.

Ahmad Medadi entered Zanjan University in 1993 and became director of Islamic Student Association in 1997-99. He also was a member of the public Council of OCU and the vice deputy of the modern fraction in OCU.⁸² Ahmad was also the chief editor

⁸² The Union had two main fractions, which entails modern and traditional in the 90s of which the modern fraction was highly impressed by intellectuals ideas.

of the student newsletter (Basically most Associations had a newsletter to cover the news as well as association activities) and he is currently a member of the Alumni Association of Iran (Advar-e Tahkim Vahdat) organization.

Abbas Hakimzadeh was at the beginning mostly active in student newsletters with political and a student affairs approach. He entered the Central Council of Islamic student Association of Amir Kabir University in 2005 and became the political director, as well as the central member of OCU in 2007. He left Iran one year after 2009 disputed election and currently living in USA.

Student Movement and Organizations in the 1990s

For detailed explanations of the interviews, it is necessary to have a brief introduction on the Student Union activities after the revolution and mostly the Islamic Student Association and OCU, since the three interviewees are the member of OCU in different years and sectors.

The first Islamic Student Associations were founded before the 1979 revolution by Bazargan and Shariati in some famous and state's universities such as Amir Kabir, Tehran University, etc. Mostly the Islamic and nationalist students with liberal direction were active on them. It is considered their establishment as an attempt by Islamic-nationalist students in opposition with leftist group. After the Islamic Revolution and two years later (1981) the universities closure happened in the name of a cultural revolution to Islamitize all institutions and part of the universities. Then the eight years War between Iran and Iraq began and continued until 1989.

At the beginning of the 90s, the only student associations that have existed from the post-revolutionary decade of the 80s were the Islamic associations which participated in the cultural revolution and cooperated with the Islamic regime as supervision of

Islamitized state on universities.⁸³ These associations took a key role in shaping the environment in each period, such as the revolution, the Constitution period after the War ceasefire or Reformist period. Thus, they were influential and were also influenced by atmosphere. Since they have been unique and widespread in universities, they had the power to affect academia. Many other groups with different ideas were not allowed to have associations and their activists mostly left Iran or were confined, even sometimes executed in prison in the 80s. Considering these associations after the cultural revolution and reopening universities cooperated with ruling order to implement the Islamic state's goals and made reports regarding the students attitude to disciplinary committees and the Basidje about non-religious behaviour of students, such as the male and female students relation or any other communications. Therefore, there were not any independent student associations in universities which Islamic associations were the forces of state in academia.

The Islamic Associations united in 1981 by Ayatollah Khomeini's order to students. They mostly were the Khomeini's followers and even asked him to appoint a person to supervise the founded Union in name of Daftare Tahkime Vahdat. But the OCU by end of war and in time of constitution period became the most vocal opponent group of President Rafsanjani's policies inside universities and broadly changed in theoretic way by Dr. Soroush's critical approach towards religion. An altered atmosphere in the 90s was leading to reformist victory in presidential election and students played a crucial role. In fact because of the big youth population of Iran, as well as the notable amount of students in universities after the Islamic revolution, any united Union or associations would have a strong impact power in academia, so as the OCU had the same power and role. Some analysts believe one of the main factor of Khatami's victory in the 1997 presidential election was because of OCU's support and campaign. Since OCU had approximately 60 offices in each state universities in name of Islamic associations, which empowered it to play a remarkable role.⁸⁴

⁸³ Mashayekhi, 2001, p. 292.

⁸⁴ Mashayekhi, 2001, p. 297.

In the opinion of some experts, many other students thought that groups such as leftists did not have the right to participate in universities atmosphere, as well as the solid Islamic framework of academia, religious intellectuals were the only group that could enter universities for some years and did many lectures and classes which led to student associations theoretic skin up.⁸⁵ Finally, this altered discourse made its appearance in the 1997 presidential election, in which many students and people voted for the reformist platform with rule of law, political development and civil society slogans. In that, I assume the discourse assessment of the 90s years and the role of intellectuals is crucially important, as well as writing the social history of that period to understand the current social movements in term of Human Rights and Democracy in Iran.

Interviews Content:

In all interviews with the three student leaders, the first question was in regards to the religious intellectuals that they have invited in their respected organisations.

Ali Afshari answered they mostly invited Dr. Soroush at the beginning of the 90s and by the middle of decade, other intellectuals such as Mujtahed Shabestari, as well as other intellectuals who were mostly in political aspects, such as Mohsen Kadivar, Ezzat Allah Sahabi, Taghi Rahmani and Reza Alijani.

Medadi responds “because of the universities and society atmosphere by end of the 90s which was changed in religious beliefs and opinions. Hence, promoting a new reading of Islam which was compatible with Human Rights and Democracy were the main needs and priority of activities in universities lives. So a high numbers of student activities were around this issue and pleased by religious intellectuals, which we had many programs in name of faithful life challenges in the modern world and we have invited varieties of intellectuals includes Soroush, Mojtahed Shabestari, Abdul Ali Bazargan, Taghi Rahmani, Alavi Tabar, Yusef Eshkevari, Fazel Meibodi, Musavi Boujnordi, Reza yousefi, Asadollah Bayat, Gholam Abbas Tavvasoli, Azam Taleghani etc.

⁸⁵ Mashayekhi, 2001, p. 304.

Abbas Hakmizade answered the question, “We usually invited Dr Soroush, Mojtaba Shabestari, Hashem Aghajari, Ebrahim Yazdi, Mohsen Kadivar, Reza Alijani, Taghi Rahmani, Mohammad Maleki, Habib Allah Peiman, Taghi rahmani, Mohamad Maleki etc.”

In another question, they have been asked whether they generally perceived an important role for religious intellectuals or not and how they would explain it.

Afshari explores their role in that way: “The members of student associations at the beginning of the 90s were harshly religious and it was obvious that they just would work on religious context and all their communication would be in this way. So their atmosphere mentally was surrounded by a new approach in terms of religion and you could not expect either secular or atheist views on Islamic associations. On that time the modern fraction of *daftare Tahkime Vahdat* was recruited by Dr Soroush, critical ideas towards religion had strongly influenced by him. This impacts entail the Soroush lectures on Isa Khan Vazir Mosque and universities seminars, as well as classes and his articles in *Keyhan Farhangi* and *Kian*. Some of these pieces of articles that made waves were the contraction and expansion of religious knowledge, the difference of university and *Howzeh* (religious *madresa*) and the roof of livelihood on Sharia Pillar. Therefore the pioneers of student activities in associations found a critical approach towards the Islamic Jurisprudence (*fiqh*) so as I usually call Dr Soroush the theoretical architect of associations member in religious sector of student movement. Actually Kadivar was in lower place in compare to Soroush, but Shabestari who were almost famous. They were mostly important in terms of theoretic changes of religious layer. Along this there were some other attempts in *Iran Farda* magazine, which in term of political aspects was also remarkable. Dr Sahabi, Alijani, Rahmani and peyman attempts although had a small domain in compare to Soroush. The new generation of associations through passing the Islamic Jurisprudence did not come back to the other readings either based on empirical science reading which was lead by Bazargan in the 80s or Dr. Sahabi and *Nehzat Azadi* party, which the previous generations attracted to them, or Shariati's ideas towards religion. Although Shariati was still effective personally and because of his attitude, since some of his death anniversary ceremonies inside universities in 94 or 95 was

perceived as radical act, but his opinions did not spread anymore. Considering Dr. Soroush critiques on his theories in *Richer than Ideology* book were concerned and interested strongly in universities and was a factor to cross him. Also I think the new characteristic of the student movement was non-ideological approach which was strengthened by Soroush's theories. Regarding beginning of the next decade students movement was not that religious and the associations atmosphere was more open for other views. Also, the influence of religious intellectuals was present but reduced in comparison to the 90s. I assume the freshness of Soroush's ideas passed and his theories have been spread and became realized. I believe the other factor that politically strengthened the Soroush impacts was the state confrontation with him. The Militia and Basidje attacks to his gathering and meetings have concerned students and he gradually became as a symbol of freedom of expression. Also supporting him was a freedom value and he was in centre of struggles between liberties supporters and religious despotism forces. You can understand how some radicals layers of student movement joined the associations afterwards."

Abbas Hakimzadeh to answer this same question believes the sphere around the students and young populations in the 90s has changed a lot and one of the factors that led to changes and opened the door to modernity was the intellectuals' attempts and influence, particularly Soroush. He also sees as a mental and theoretical basis of student associations generally.

Ahmad Medadi looks at the issue in another aspect. Although he confirmed the student movement changed due to the intellectuals as Hakimzadeh and Afshari said, he stresses also the changes in lifestyle and "behaviour" of students as a consequence of the intellectual's work and he calls it as more "faithful lives" in their personal life. The impacts were in private and public activities and in the lives of students. He explains because of the the official and dominant reading of Islam, which was advertised always in people lives, there were no places for a new and fresh reading of religion which could shape a modern faithful lifestyle. The judicial religion was merely the yardstick to calculate the people's faith towards Islam. Figh and other Fatwas restricted the religious

faith such that people perceive Fiqh as their faith. They have always said whatever people do according to Jurisprudences is Islam and people cannot distinguish between faith and Fiqh. The religious intellectuals' argument in terms of faith and Fiqh distinguishing, as well as the minimal Islam and this argument that some parts of the religion are inherent and some parts transverse opened a new door for faithful generation that felt they can save their religion and beliefs from the heavy shadow of Jurisprudence and Islamic orders of clerics and experienced a new way of religious lives.

In the course of our discussion, I asked Medadi to open the "faithful life" notion that he used and he answered: "The new approach towards religion has changed the student views regarding religious issue not only in their public activities and lives but also personal identity. For instance could alter their ideas in regards to relation with opposite gender either in activities and social life or private sphere. They could believe in a new teaching of religion and exit the strait framework of Fiqh without feeling they behave in a way their religion or faith will suffer. thinking in terms of religion from this aspect that some parts of Islam is according to time and history and would be temporal could open a path to new extracts from religion. Also has increased the level of religion in Muslims' hearts, as it is not just confined in Jurisprudence or Fiqh. Consequently students gradually left the classical definition and advertised approach and experienced a new style of being Muslim. Afterwards they looked at the worship orders of the Quran and tradition as advantage and benefits in relation with God, not duty of Muslims. Also neglecting responsibility of Muslim to be according to the official reading of Islam in many fields such as art, politics, sport, culture and morality, and especially the human personal relationship, such as communication with opposite sex and the hijab, even clothing style. That sometimes Dr. Kadivar criticized Soroush and said you make your students non-religious and do not pray five times everyday."

Hakimzadeh argues this issue from his personal experience: "As a religious person who prayed five times in a day and fast, I have always been in question of relationship with female student and friends. Since I grew up with strong religious beliefs in school and

society I could not find a way to live or become friends with a woman who is not religious. I felt guilty and doing a sin. After introducing to intellectuals ideas, reviewing their theories and thinking about religion, I came to this result that Islam does not send us eternal and habitual orders for entire life and could be different in different time. This helped me to live more openly in society and be a modern person. Actually my beliefs on religion, truth and essence did not change at all, but I feel the strait framework of religion that Jurisprudence always promoted which closed my hands and feet to work and walk is opened nowadays."

He continues, " It was not just personal issues but also other subjects for instance were being questioned by the young population, especially religious ones such as modern concepts of freedom, human autonomy, Human Rights standards and democratic values and Islam approach towards them occupied my mind many days and forced me to read about them."

He asserts religion was an important part of the ideologic and traditional society of Iran in the 90s or maybe before that was assigned the people's worldview and vision. The issue propaganda by regime and its monopolized media, such as national TV, have strengthened its power. On the other hand, the state did not allow for secular and free presses or media, so as the promotion and spreading of the contemporary thinkers was just allowed until the line that do not have any conflicts with religion. Although often the theories which were a basis of modern concepts were never allowed to be promoted among a young generation and society. In the 90s, religious intellectuals did try to speak with religious people from their language and introduced them towards modern concepts. Their language disappeared the youth's fear of facing modernity and they left the dogmatism shields and felt close with the intellectuals.

Hakimzadeh also believes this religious language could affect the regime to promote their ideas at a minimum level. The state did not have fears from religious intellectuals classes, so at beginning they could publish books and articles in magazines. Some of them, such as Soroush, were also among them in the revolution. Because of this, the

regime allowed their theory promotion, as well as sympathetic feelings of the young, step by step exit students from dogmatic layer towards modernity. These ideas gradually became pervasive and mobilized a large sector of religious students and youth.

Medadi opened the issue of intellectual's theories by mentioning the most important one. In his opinion, two crucial theories of expansion and contraction of religious knowledge, as well as the hermeneutic basis of Mojtaba Shabestari opened a new horizon in religious and epistemological knowledge and ultimately transformed beliefs of new generation.

He continues: "In my opinion the other attempts by the rest of intellectuals were somehow the continuing of these two theories that some intermediary intellectuals tried to promote them and make a new faithful life for Muslims layer of society that could reconcile with universal and novel teachings such as Pluralism, Human Rights and Democracy. "

He also perceived an equal role even more for religious intellectuals in comparison with secular ones for implementing the modernity project in Iran and argues: "Without their participation in explanation and definition of religion in relation with modern concepts, the group of secular intellectuals definitely could not alone have performed such a role."

Afshari sees the importance of intellectuals role in different angles and says he does not want to enter in theoretic argument: "These religious intellectuals as a wave of religious enlightenment did not seek for Islam's revival in political affairs like the works which Shariati and Al Ahmad have done pre-revolution. They tried to save religion in the private sphere and cleaning its domain from huge expectations that regime made as well as the religion and modern existence reconciliation. In fact the project that Jamal din Asad Abadi in the field of religion revivalism performed in society and was continued by Shariati and others, is different from the recent work of intellectuals. They respect and accept the western achievements and values and in a philosophical angle do not seek for anti-western views. They accept and promote new rationality and use it in their argument towards religion."

“If you get back to their theories will find in some parts they even believe that some values like democracy and human rights are prior than religion. The religious understanding would be in connection with all of them and could not be separated and they recruit this in a theoretical way. In previous work, such as Shariati they usually confirmed for compatibility of Islam with liberty, but religion was the prior and in centre which the others were merely on the margin. But in the religious intellectuals’ philosophical and epistemological work, they mostly perceived human rights as a standard and criteria for religion.

“We also need to consider that since these views were mostly critical and in opposition with official state, they could pragmatically promote some arguments in regards to freedom of expression inside universities. In critical views for programmes by organisations, often authorities did not allow to students and even confront with them violently, which led to protest gatherings and many of the activists were summoned to court or disciplinary committees consequently, but opened the whole debate around freedom of protest or demonstration. All these issues were in field of human rights values. so as these religious students in some part that was possible have tried to promote human rights discourse in angles of intellectuals work.

“I think that most impacts of the intellectuals were on strict religious layers of society that could help them to leave that traditional approach, which believes that Islam and human rights conflict and clash. Probably the only way that occurred was the religious intellectuals work, since they assumed, for instance, Soroush as a religious person. And also we need to keep in mind that founders of OCU were the students who fighting in front with Iraq and had strong traditional and religious opinions.”

After whole questions of religious intellectuals role in order to assess the activists understanding of human rights and its implication, I asked some questions in regards to their definition of Islam. How much and which way is it possible for the compatibility of Islam and human rights? Whether they believe on such compatibility?

Hakimzadeh explains this question is related to the worldview of each person regarding religion. "Each person may have individual understanding of religion and defines its relation with human rights differently. I know that the religious intellectuals always tried to prove non-conflict of religion with this standards and also promote the respect and equality rights of people, so as they have promoted pluralism between students."

But Medadi argues that this is a difficult way and there are many obstacles, one of them being a strait framework of revealed religion, such as Islam and explains: "As far as I am concerned, this ability to compatible Islam with human rights depends on revelation issue and revealed religion. Although there were many efforts that had been done to make it possible and would be some great achievements one way, but in my opinion these attempts by intellectuals cannot continue until the end, because there is a truth that Abrahamic religion, such as Islam or Christianity have a strict and contracted framework. Actually I believe this challenge will appear later, not now because of our society vision and the constant efforts of intellectuals and many projects and programs need to be implemented in current achievements field to spread the intellectuals' ideas."

Then I asked him what he means by the strait framework of revealed religion and he explains: "We have to assume the main characteristic of revealed religion is relying on revelation. Although there were efforts by Soroush and Shabestari to interpret revelation in other ways, but I think it is impossible to decline such a relation between earth and heaven, especially in Islam that all Muslims believe on the Quran as the word of God. Some believe that regretting such a relation is going far from revealed religious framework and it will reduce it to some kind of religion, such as Buddhism. So as this framework is based on some empirical and doctrinal propositions, such as prophecy, resurrection and undefined and powerful God that will restrict and challenge the new readings. For instance, the homosexual rights or LGBT rights which is the third wave human rights cannot not pragmatically be possible to become compatible with Islam and this is where their efforts will face some troubles. Also new scientific argument in regards to cloning and genetic, which will tackle the creating apart from the universe creation framework."

Afshari explains that, “Intrinsically there is a possibility of Islam and human rights compatibility, but I think it would be very difficult work and need to be gradually and constantly, which will take maybe a long time. Actually there are not a coherent moves between intellectuals and they have very different ideas, which make it more difficult than ever. Some of them have a more distance with human rights norms and some less. Also understanding of human rights is a relative affair, various and different. The social and political actors do not have a same and similar understanding of human rights issues and its priority as well. For instance, if we come back to homosexual rights. In developed countries this is an important topic but I think there is not any consent on this issue in Iran. Some assume that it should be in the same level of importance like the western and other countries and some argue this issue has many conflicts with our culture and have to postpone it to the future. The other example is Bahai rights, since there is not consensus on their freedom of religion in Iran to have their gatherings and ceremonies to promote their religion and some part of society are so sensitive about it.

“I think the most considerable function of religious intellectuals would be to make smoother the path towards more acceptable and respectful culture of the universal human rights, which could be also a variable issue. As the interpretations of human rights were different in the past, nowadays could be various too, but I think the audience group of intellectuals are mostly religious classes that might resist against human rights and they try to decrease this resistance and convince them there is not any conflict.

I think there are some also clashes between the intellectuals views and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. They are not that much frankly in their language but this is not an impasse way and in the future I anticipate they will completely support the UDHR norms. Considering the intellectuals view promotion is not possible in all parts and sector of Iranian society, particularly the atheist or even people that accept religion merely in private sphere. This view that there is not such a conflict belongs to religious layers and could also reduce resistance to putting human rights standards in laws.

“The other function of intellectuals’ ideas could be the propaganda to perceive human rights in laws by the Islamic regime, since the ruling order always argues that these

standards, because of their western basis, could not be part of Iran laws or jurisdiction."

I have asked him how they will make the way smoother? By making human rights Islamic? He answers that: "Religious intellectuals have never claimed Islamic human rights. Definitely in some of the early intellectuals direction such as Shariati and early Bazargan did not believe on Universal Declaration of Human Rights and only accepted some small part of it but the recent one such as Soroush or Shabestari will totally accept the UDHR."

I have asked them regarding the relativism argument and Human Rights that some human rights standards could not be implemented in some countries since there are cultural differences and how is their understanding in terms of this issue?

Hakimzadeh answers in this way, "This is good if it means we have to consider the human rights issues, because of all differences should be implemented in various ways by particular education of the particular culture or country, which can help in better and constantly understanding of it. But if it means in some part of the world, because of cultural restrictions the human rights violation will be justified and lead to human rights of some people, I think this is merely an untrue justification for not respecting human rights and could not be acceptable. As far as I know, the religious intellectuals work is to reconcile religion and human rights and if the human rights will be limited because of Islam laws or orders with any name or views is unacceptable."

Medadi argues we cannot face to human rights texts and discourse by hermeneutic methods and will suffer the universality of human rights declaration and explains: "To preserve many years of efforts and struggles of mankind for issuing and implementing human rights declaration, we have to close the ways for opposition abuse. Along trying to get distance to make human rights ideologic, we just should defend it as convention and bounding legal contract that defines the states and human groups duties and rights. Making legal the human rights discourse in facing with totalitarian states will close the ways for abusing in theoretic field, such as making it relativism. For instance, we have

to define the abstract words of UDHR by other treaties which happened in CEDAW or ICRC or the Geneva Convention. Although sometimes the logics of these groups will be accepted by jurisdiction, such as the efforts by republicans in America to abolish the abortion law or temporary elimination of marriage law of homosexuals in California state.”

Afshari thinks the oppositions of UDHR do not limited to Muslim countries or Islamist flows. “The leftist views, such as Marxists, opposed this document and claimed it has liberal language and will mostly justify the imperialist system. Some groups also believe this document adopted 50 years ago and some part of it should be redefined and revised. For instance, in the preamble it is written that all human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights, which we can see in real life such a equality is not possible. Therefore the declaration is so idealistic and abstract. I believe relativism was a tool for the orthodox leftist groups, as well as Islamist to regret such a contract. They could not disagree with it directly, but usually argues human rights implementation cannot be possible in all the contexts and countries cultures. The culture of each territory will say which affairs could be performed or not. I assume the relativism mostly helped the opposition views of human rights to escape from document. In recent decades, the post modern also support this view that argues there is not a hegemonic and dominant discourse and truth and defends relativism. In field of human rights, I personally think there are some main principles and factors that are universal for all human beings. Their understanding and interpretation of people could be different, but the tenets are the same and stable. We cannot be relative about them at all. We live in a globalized world that humans are getting closer more than ever and the globalization theory seems possible in comparison to past. I think the cultural differences will be reduced gradually. This is the place that we can find a basis for mankind apart from all identical, cultural, lingual and religious and racist differences. The relativism could not be here and this is the common field of all human beings on the earth. All the international relations inside countries should be according to this shared basis, so as the legitimacy of governments would be according their commitment. Religious intellectuals are cooperated in this way and do not believe on cultural relativism.”

At the end I have asked them how much the intellectuals ideas have been changed because of the present situation and whether we can consider a back and forth process for their theories? If there were some changes was it because of the social and political situation of Iranian society or the strait framework of religion and difficultly of new interpretations of it, because of its limitations?

Hakmizadreh explains, "There are different thoughts which affects intellectual ideas and their understanding of religion. We observe in some years some part of these religious intellectuals' theories have been changed and generally by passing the time their ideas and theories are getting more close to universal human rights discourse. This does not mean that we have only one thought in enlightenment religion or might have one moving or evolution for all intellectuals from different views. I think even in religious intellectuals' spectrum we can see varieties of thoughts that their common aspect of all is to interpret religion according to current and modern life. "

Ahmad Medadi is doubtful on this issue and argues: "We can consider in Islamic societies a dialectic relation of intellectuals and difficulty of new interpretations in all parts of religion. But I think with more theoretic development of human rights, because of the Muslim world realities and the fundamentalism progression there would be some flexible understanding of Muslim and intellectuals towards human rights. I think finally the implementation of these norms will be defined gradually by secular theoreticians even for Islamic countries."

Chapter IV: Interviews Analysis

Flourishing New Space and Faithful Life

Religious intellectuals' entrance to universities after the Cultural Revolution opened some new avenues for academics. They had many classes and lectures in regards to Islam and the main part of their work involved a critical approach to the official reading of Islam that the state tried to promote during the 80s. If we just consider their influence in challenging the official governmental reading, however, it ignores the largest impact of their work, since as the activists stated, the intellectual's interpretations of Islam began to alter the style of student's life. Students' practices changed eventually as result of their work. Afshari stresses the intellectual's role as theoretical architects of associations and adds that the new student generation that came from the revolutionary era and ideological atmosphere were attracted to them, not to previous reading of other scholars or intellectuals. "The new generation of associations through passing the Islamic Jurisprudence did not come back to the other readings either, based on empirical science reading, which was represented by Bazargan in the 80s or Dr. Sahabi and Nehzat Azadi's party, which the previous generations were attracted to, or Shariati's ideas towards religion." Afshari also defines this generation as non-ideological in comparison to the past, since they have started critically reading the revolutionary ideologues. Considering this, it is not definitely mean that whether could we call the new generation as non-ideological or not.

Ahmad Medadi looks at the issue from another aspect, though. He confirms the student movement changed, as Hakimzadeh and Afshari have said, but he stresses also the changes in lifestyle and "behaviour" of students, as consequence of intellectual's work, and he calls it as a more "faithful lives" in their personal life.

In his view, a faithful life as a Muslim means keeping in mind the worship relation with God is advantage for him, (pious Moslem) not a duty that was solving many problems for young students. This means that relations with creature must be in a friendly way, not seeing a pious person just as obedient of God who fears from its brutality and obey its orders without thinking. "We could believe in a new teaching of religion and exit the

strait framework of Fiqh without feeling we are behaving in a way that our religion or faith will suffer.”

Abbas reasserts this point by telling his personal story in relation with female fellows in universities and concludes, “Islam does not send us eternal and habitual orders for our entire life and could be different in different time. This helped me to live more openly in society and be a modern person.”

The intellectuals could change the feeling of fear and sin inside students, as Muslims. As noted from Hakimzadeh’s experience, he felt sin when he was talking with female students. The language of intellectuals “disappeared the young fear of facing to [wards] modernity and they left the dogmatism shields.”

As the interviewees have said, their lives have been altered since their religious practices became different. They had many personal challenges and troubles, which is to some extent difficult, for young people and produced many conflicts. Though these personal difficulties can be big problems, but in the process of an agent evolving and asking questions and answers, every single student could produce several meanings. This eventually lead students to have their own networks and circles, and caused many debates and dialogues in order to establish new interpretation of religion, which has the potential to communicate effectively with modernity.

Afshari explains another reason for more concern from students on human rights. He says the state confrontation and repression of our gatherings with Dr. Soroush politically strengthened the intellectual’s impact and he became “a symbol of freedom” of expression.

The situation initiated arguments in regards to freedom of expression inside universities. Authorities often did not allow for critical views in programs by organisations and even confronted them violently. This led to protest gatherings and many of the activists were summoned to court or disciplinary committees, consequently, but this opened the whole debate around freedom of protest.

It is crucially important to note that the more state repression increased, as did the students desire to struggle and even the discussions with Basidje and conservative students caused some student’s ideas changed. I think this aspect of the struggles for freedom is important to pay attention to. While students have tried to reach to another

meaning of Islam, they simultaneously had to fight for their meetings and gathering programmes. The universities' authoritarians had restricted more and more their activities, but still a large numbers of new students were concerned about religion. They forced gradually to limit their meeting to the association offices and cafes when the universities did not issue the allowances.

Human Rights or merely Political Rights?

There are many challenges in regards to Islam and human rights compatibility, which Medadi argues, to the strait framework of revealed religions, such as Islam or Christianity. He assumes it is a closed way, although he accepts the intellectual's efforts to interpret revelation. But Medadi argues, "It is impossible to decline such a relation between earth and heaven, especially in Islam that all Muslims believe on Quran as word of God." So according to the Quran that Muslims believe is the language of God, there is nothing regarding LGBTs rights or equal rights of women. He continues, "I think that in our societies, not only because of Islamic beliefs, but also tradition, the capability for protection of rights for the LGBT population is low." He confirms that the acquisition of these rights are a long and far reaching goal that may one day come true. Student activists mostly understood human rights as political rights, not as all kinds of social and cultural rights. It is understandable, because of the clashes at the universities were in regards to attaining political rights. However, the social, cultural and rights of other groups are part of human rights as well.

Afshari sees two important and major obstacles. Mainly, non-coherent moves between intellectuals regarding human rights and, secondly, the social and political actors who believe in the priority of these rights differently. Although religious intellectuals initially started debates and made the paths, "smoother towards more acceptable and respectful culture of the universal human rights, which could be also a variable issue." But they are not speaking frankly and he thinks some problems will happen in the future in order to establish equal rights for women and the LGBT community. He refers to their ideas and thinks there is not that much knowledge nor answers to the question of women rights. This could be another problem, not merely because of responses to the

difficulties of the issue, but because this means they might not be successful to impress female students or women Muslims. He asserts that there is no vision or clear perspective, since the Islamic state is still in power and the only way that religious intellectuals can open nowadays is through lobbying and putting pressures on the government to respect and protect human rights in laws since authoritarians argue that these standards, because of their western basis, could not be part of Iran's laws or jurisdiction.

If we consider the two main challenges of the intellectual's ideas, the priority of rights in the view of activists, the conclusion would be that the road to human rights achievement is to some extent difficult. The intellectuals and activists need to reach consent on these two main issues, which also requires a constantly productive dialogue inside society and between them. This also could be another challenge, since the totalitarian regime has become wiser and at present does not allow for the open exchange of ideas or debates of activists in the public sphere like that which occurred in the 90s.

The Question of Universality

The interviewees have been also been asked to answer questions of universality and to what extent they believe rights could be applicable and valid in all contexts. Hakimzadeh answered ironically to the question and believes in cultural relativism conditionally, meaning that many ways of human rights implications should be considered and we cannot expect in different contexts that rights would be fulfilled like western countries. If we would like to promote human rights cultures and norms, we need to raise awareness, which cannot be achieved without speaking to the people through their language, not western culture or logic. Though, he adds, if this is means to justify a human rights regime particularly by authoritarian states, then no kind of limitation argument should be accepted: "I think this is merely an untrue justification for not respecting human rights and could not be acceptable. As far as I know, the religious intellectuals' work is to reconcile religion and human rights and if the human

rights will be limited because of Islamic laws or orders with any name or views are unacceptable to them”.

Medadi argues that norms legalisation could help to change and define the abstract language of the Universal Declaration. He also mentioned the CEDAW or ICRC and Geneva Convention as instances of human rights, which could define rights for women and children, and pull out the ambiguity debates regarding what these rights are.

Afshari observes the issue from a different angle and says: “We are living in a globalized world that humans are getting closer, more than ever, and the globalization theory seems possible in comparison to the past. I think the cultural differences will be reduced gradually. This is the place that we can find a basis for mankind apart from all identical, cultural, lingual and religious and racist differences.” He also mentioned the main principles of human rights, which must be respected and fulfilled in all contexts and with even the legitimacy of governments based on their commitment.

Afshari also thinks that in the religious intellectuals’ view, human values and modern concepts are prior to Islam Jurisprudence. “They tried to save religion in the private sphere and cleaning its domain from a huge expectations that the regime made, as well as the making religion and modern existence reconciliation possible.” He believes this point is precisely in contrast with the intellectuals before the revolution who had tried to revive Islam, and to some extent, struggled for anti-western perceptions. “They usually thought students do not need to know or accept modern concepts, even if they might be true. They more and less have insisted on occidental and oriental clashes. Whereas, recent ones argue, for instance, from rational theory, which is a western philosophy, but it does not mean if everything that people in the west produced for humans would be necessarily wrong.”

To sum up the universality discussion, the interviewees perceived human rights on the universality issue from their own perspective and give different meanings to it. They do, however, have a “shared image” because of their common culture that they came from. As Cohen (anthropologist) notes “the rules are attempts at fixing certain norms in images that we may all share, and this is the point: while 'culture' provides a number of individuals with a set of shared images and discourses, the individuals themselves attach

different meaning to those.”⁸⁶ The meaning of universality that they believe could be the norms as a moral issue, which should be legal in society. This implication of the notion of universality means the emergence of “a global order” in which all humans concerns and desires would be stressed, not only in a moral aspect, but also as a legally binding issue on societies. This meaning will take distance from “the level of abstract norm.”⁸⁷

Although currently the implication of universal values faces obstacles, including a non-democratic state, which justifies all manners by a strict view of religion. The intellectuals and students argue this, merely should be understood as a justification and that universal values could be implemented and preserved in a democratic state and proactive civil society. There even could be legal norms to promote more awareness of human rights, but it depends on Iranians efforts in transition to a government and political structure based on the rule of law, decision making of the people through fair and free election, respecting human rights and the dignity of all peoples.

I argue that while human rights would change to a moral issue even by religious or non-religious roots, humans respecting each other can be expected. It means that the main challenges are not merely an undemocratic state, (perceiving its utter importance) but even the moral promotion of human rights might be another problem. Religious intellectuals could solve this challenge by *moral project theory* (explained in chapter I). Discovering the religious roots and values of human rights could vastly help human rights protection in this context.

⁸⁶Cf. Hastrup (b), 2001, p.16.

⁸⁷ Ulrich, 2001, p. 221.

Chapter V: Conclusion

Third Outlook: Going to Context

The concept of universal human rights that came into existence almost 50 years ago with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights has doctrines and principles that are claimed to be proper for all human beings with all environmental and material conditions. This is the product of modern human thought that Shabestari argues, was aimed to balance and rule human relations, that nowadays has been raised extensively in many countries' contexts. But there is always resistance and a number of obstacles to full implementation, with nation states sometimes escaping from some sects of human rights principles. Islamic governments treat human rights relatively in each territory because of the particular cultural, social and political characteristics and define what could be Islamic human rights. Even then some parts of that which would be defined as Islamic human rights would not be accomplished or practiced.

Relativism is, to some extent, the card that Islamic states have played in the International community for not respecting some parts of the universal declaration of human rights. They have argued that these parts of the UDHR do not conform to Islamic rules and principles, which have excused it as reason to not legalise human rights. As Wilson states it as “An undeniable truth is that many governments around the world continue to carry out abominable acts against their populations, and relativism is the most useful available ideology which facilitates international acquiescence in state repression.”⁸⁸

As I argued before in the Introduction, the duality of relativism and universal confrontation is completely absolute. For understanding human rights realization, we need to refer to the context of Muslim countries. The debate is an untrue and unreal clash, which has been made into a political discussion that is playing out on the level of states in the international community. What is ironically important is the events are happening in these countries.

⁸⁸ Wilson, 96, p. 9.

It is indisputable that just 48 countries adopted Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which have tried to define people's rights in states far from this discourse, many of which are developing, non-industrialized and non-western countries. They have lived and ruled their lives and countries by different systems and might not have even thought in regards to universal values or being member of a universal entity for human rights protection. Through the gradual process during the 50 years since the UNDHR, they became parcel of flow and ratified rules, conventions and universal documents even in some countries superficially.⁸⁹ By gradual flood, even more than half of a century, it has taken time for an unevenly realized vision of universal human rights.

I think the remarkable issue is that Muslim societies are moving in order to establish democratic states based on human rights and that everyday people are pursuing the opportunity to determine their political destiny. Some Middle Eastern countries are being shifted by a societal desire and ambition for democracy. How is it possible that rules, which established a day for legalising and structuring states' manners, now, in bottom-up movement, are being demanded and requested by people in totalitarian and non-democratic countries? Even if we assume the movement does not totally engage all part and layers of societies, we can say it was constituted and built by determinant classes and masses.

Human rights discourse might not be merely external affairs, but we have to search for it in societies' contexts, not only at a political and international level. Wilson asserts that considering that everyone communicates with global culture in own way, which these interpretations may completely depends on 'local and individual value distinctions' so "the universality of Human rights thus becomes a question of context necessitating situational analysis."⁹⁰ We need to assess the progression in muslim countries, which many experts have argued is an impossible and difficult wish, because of the solid and strait framework of religion.

As I have argued, shifting the debate from either universal rights or relative culture is a possible way forward. To know and define the process which is being passed. It might be argued that the institutionalization of human rights is different and, sometimes, far

⁸⁹ keeping in mind ratification does not mean implementation and realization.

⁹⁰ Wilson, 96, p. 12.

from universal teaching. However, if people would eventually realize the core and essence of human rights discourse, could we still state that in Muslim countries, due to many weaknesses and problems, the development of rights is far-reaching and impossible? I might stress on the point that “With all its paradoxes and inherent ambiguities, the culture of human rights is a figure of thought that may eventually capture the imagination of people on the global scale.”⁹¹

As I suggested in the Introduction and by developing the other chapters to assess religious intellectuals role, we could go beyond the duality clash. Exploring the quality and circumstances of human rights progression historically from the bottom-up move in these contexts.

The third outlook of mine argues from a context of society that the changing process through productive dialogue of peoples and lives assessment is a much more effective way forward rather than arguing from a perspective of either universalism or relativism. Perhaps the process in Iran would be, to some extent, different from western standards, but we cannot cover our eyes from various paths, religious and cultural differences that differ one context from the other. The differences must be recognized and admitted, although the main concept and soul of human rights has to be promoted.

Despite the totalitarian government and complex political structure of Iranian civil society, activists have tried to introduce human rights to the people. They develop its culture, principles and pillars to the students and young population so that human rights standards would be “relevant and constructive in the contexts in which they are applied.”⁹² It could be expected that some human rights articles and rights may be far-reaching and difficult, as Medadi and Afshari mentioned, such as freedom of religion and preserving LGBTs rights. We can anticipate in the future, after an in-depth realization of human rights, that they will one day come true as well. It does not mean we should forget or neglect these rights, which civil society actors must pursue, but problems do exist.

In the interviews analysis, I mentioned two obstacles that should not be forgotten, including the lack of consensus between actors on priority of rights and, secondly, the

⁹¹ Hastrup (b), 2001, p. 18.

⁹² Ulrich, 2001, p. 221.

not clear language and homogeneous opinions of religious intellectuals regarding some rights.

Intellectual's Role:

The civil society part of Iran, such as students and women's rights activists, have tried and started the very difficult task of human rights teaching and education informally. They have been influenced by universal discourse, religious and secular ideas, as well as academic works through the years after the revolution and wartime. They are attempting to introduce and promote subjects from different views and affect different layers of society.

On the other hand in Iran, like other Muslim countries, there are a variety of groups including religious and theoretical groups. It is possible that the secular part of Iranian society will accept human rights completely and without any conditions, but there is always resistance in the religious parcels. Religious masses, affected by Islamic teachings and education, think differently in regards to the fields of women's rights and human rights. It might take a long process for this segment of society to believe in universal standards. Although Afshari asserted religious intellectuals have tried to alter their views, even if all pious Muslims do not believe in universal human rights principles. At least Iranian society is reaching the step where there is no conflict between what the human mind has developed and thought with the strict religious rules which are claimed to belong to God.

Considering the role of religious leaders, particularly the intellectuals who can alter the Muslim masses, it is considerable. The intellectuals open a way towards dialogue regarding most issues that are considered taboo and undebatable. They also are religious believers, which will increase their position and allow high credibility and acceptability between Muslims. As previously explained in regards to their ideas, they are reading religion differently from the official reading of state. Soroush, by plural knowledge of religion theory, can prove the existence of other views is possible. They have been so successful in developing dialogue that Muslim students believe by practicing a new kind of religious understanding. They can save and preserve their faith. They believe

that by living a faithful life and being open to the new world, it does not mean they will forsake or leave religion.

Meanwhile, in the Iranian context, with the young population accounting for more than 70 percent of the population and over three million university students, indisputably any changes in some part of this population could be important and decisive. Therefore, as the student activists asserted, intellectuals in gradual and slight process after the Islamic revolution could change the universities atmosphere and dogmatic views of the students. They laid the ground work for the reconciliation between Islam and modern concepts.

Each culture has its own roots, ways and meaning, but still also share some common values with other cultures, which are more readily known thanks to the globalisation process. The similarities between humans are areas that humans can consent to, which will slightly reduce differences. As Hastrup states this might be the starting point of 'quest for universality'; "if we step out of the discursive dilemma of the scholars and into practical lives of people, I think we might begin to agree that beyond the manifest differences there might actually be something shared by all humans-equal worth."⁹³

If religious intellectuals can have a constructive role in linking local cultures and beliefs to universal discourse, we need to perceive them as a major group who would have greatly changed an inaccessible layer of society. The intellectuals have facilitated routes toward change, even in a country with an Islamic state where clergies, during revolutionary time, convinced people that religion had the solutions for every single problem of humanity. The intellectuals have also saved religion for pious Muslims, in contrast with pre-revolutionary intellectuals that worked on Islam revivalism and ideological viewpoint of religion.

The modern religious intellectuals might prevent a fundamentalist effort from taking control and launching a movement to attract pious people for fighting violently against other civilizations. They definitely refused the returning solution to Islamic tenets in the time of Prophet. Religious intellectuals mostly talk with Muslims for not expecting religion to provide all answers and grounds for human life. For living in a new world,

⁹³Hastrup (a), 2001, p.2.

the only way to prevent more clashes and battles is to believe in pluralism, respecting other cultures and learning the achievements of humans in different contexts. Intellectuals are building a way between local cultures and universal human rights discourse.

The Priority of Way, Not Result

The strait framework of the Islamic regime does not allow for the expression of different opinions, especially in regards to modernity issues. It also restricts groups and movements in many ways and forbids many tools. But there is always a need to produce discussion on religion, as well as its aspects by both religious and even non-religious people. The state in Iran perceives itself as a sacred and celestial source, and believes it is the historical duty to provide ground for the appearance of the twelfth Imam and the last sender of God, to build a fair and Islamic world. Thus, after the Islamic revolution, they have desired to apply such a plan to implement this ideology. As it was explained in the religious intellectuals debate, the implementation of this Islamic ideology creates many problems and difficulties, which eventually has led some scholars to criticise. These intellectuals believe that we should not expect religion to have plans for humans in all branches of knowledge and all parts of life, particularly its some sectors such as Islamic Jurisprudence (Figh).

Apart from the important discussion explained in the chapters on the religious intellectuals beliefs and consequences, what is crucially more important than the end of these debates is the paths and routes that would lead Muslim society towards modernity and an understanding of modern values in their respective countries, specifically Iran in my work. The atmosphere surrounding the debate regarding these issues is considerably important, even in a strait and strict framework of a totalitarian, religious state for Muslims who have subordinated and have a strict obedience towards the position of the pious Muslim in relation with God.

I argue that all the results that originate from the secular and religious intellectuals, in regards to human rights and democracy in its relation with Islam, do not differentiate significantly, but the environment that will be constituted in religious or non-religious

gatherings and academia, as well as understanding of peoples regarding the modern concepts, is highly worthy. Therefore, the routes towards changes seem to be vitally important more than results.

The Muslim world faces many varieties of questions and, consequently, will perhaps either perceive or leave the dogmatic attitude and way of thinking that currently pervades the culture. Their mind will be engaged and probably assess the condition and his relation as Muslims with faith and the new world. Furthermore, he will try to find a way to balance modern life with preserving his beliefs. As Ahmad Medadi noted in interviews, many students might currently have a more faithful life, even in comparison to past. Having a modern attitude does not necessarily means abandoning religion.

Students who took part in the religious intellectuals speeches of the 90s are embodied with religion, but understand it in different way than the strict view as stated by the government of Iran. They have different readings from official one. They do not believe in a view that expects Muslims to not have any questions without the kind of autonomy to challenge or search for new meaning. In fact, the religious intellectuals' project fills the social duty to help people in their paths towards more modern beliefs and will confirm that there is the possibility of preserving religion, even while accepting modern values. They can be reconciled together. Probably, in many cases, they have also even strengthened the religious faith.

The pluralism that was in all the intellectuals' arguments is the key point to accept the many routes to religious belief. If students have learned from many readings that a multitude of approaches to religion do exist, then eventually people will learn to accept and respect other's opinions, interests and lives. The aim of modernity coexisting in harmony with religious belief could be achieved one day. Although Islamic ideology through years has tried to build a homogenous society in which people think, live and pray in a similar manner and form, the experiences of students has shown such a thing is impossible in our world. Even though the end of the route is vague and perhaps will lead to the separation of religious and political institutions. Or maybe it will lead to the secularization of some part of religion, not all. The whole debate surrounding Islamic networks and the altered views do have constructive and effective consequences, which should be searched and explored in each context.

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