Shia Islam and Religious Forbearance among students in Iran A qualitative study using the concept of social norms

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ABSTRACT: *The main questions of this study is why there is no sign of serious conflicts over religious beliefs in Iran, while other Muslim countries are almost all at war. We assumed that there is something to do with the Shia sect of Islam because in comparison of Iran and other Muslim countries, the most important difference is that the majority of people in Iran is Shia. We defined a concept, religious forbearance, and tried to find out, first if it is rooted to Shia Islam, and second if it is a social norm in Iran or not. We interviewed about twenty five students from two national universities of Iran, University of Tehran and Amirkabir University of Technology. To select our cases and conduct our study, we used judgment sampling and unstructured interviews. Using the norm model of three essential attributes, we find out that we can call our concept of religious forbearance a social norm which regulate and diminish the religious conflict in a Shia society like Iran. By explaining the cognitive situation we find out that this norm have a greater chance of emerging in the context of Shia Islam than of Sunni Islam. By investigating the system condition we found out that the spread of the means of communication could have a positive impact on the emergence of this norm. Also, we understood that the main value behind this norm is that people, now in Iran, consider the mutual interests to be more important than religious interests.*
Keywords: Religious forbearance, Islam, Shia, Iran, Norm model, Norm science

I. INTRODUCTION

The main source of many social norms is religion. Nowadays, in Iran, we face a phenomenon which is called, metamorphosis of religion. There is no longer a homogeneous and monolithic Islam. People with different and antithetical beliefs and ideas, call themselves Muslims. In such a condition, conflict, in social life has a great chance of emergence, but we don't see any sign of it in our society. People with different and distinct beliefs, which have a same source, can live with each other without any aggressive conflict, while these kind of nuance in religious beliefs has led to many bloody battles in all our Muslim neighbor countries: like Iraq, Afghanistan, Pakistan, and etc. Some may say that this peaceful coexistence between distinct believers in Iran is because of the existence of a powerful government which can handle this situation. But it could be related to a kind of social contract, which can be rooted deeply to the Shia branch of Islam. In this research, the main question is that what had made people of Iran, who have different and antithetical beliefs, able to live with each other without any serious conflict. Is it a kind of social contract or there is something else, like legal norms, which give them this capacity.

The main aim of this research is to find the most crucial element explaining why Iranian people, with different and antithetical religious beliefs, live with each other without any serious conflict in their everyday lives. This phenomenon could be named as "religious forbearance". To define this concept, one must show its fundamental elements. The question which should be answered is that what religious forbearance is and can we consider it as a social norm, controlling the religious behavior of people in Tehran.

One crucial aspect of religious forbearance is the accepting of the fact that people who have different ideas, have the right to do so. This means people should accept that it is possible that maybe their idea were wrong, as they consider the others' ideas are wrong. The other aspect of this concept is not to be aggressive toward people who have different religious idea. If people accept the differences between them, they would not show aggressive behavior. They might be angry or feel disillusioned, but they would not show it directly.

These two aspects may lead us to a definition for the concept of religious forbearance. It is a strategy of behavior in front of the people who have different religious ideas. This strategy allows people with antithetical beliefs to live, work, and make friends of each other. But the query which remains unanswered is why the people of Iran, pursue this strategy in their everyday life; while people in other Muslim countries are in fight with each other having the same situation of existence of religious differences. As it is one of the fundamental methods in social researches, in the first place, to answer this question, one must compare these two cases of difference. It means that we should compare Iran with other Muslim countries. The first point which rises immediately after making such comparison, is that the majority of Muslims in Iran are Shia; while in other countries, they are mostly Sunni. That will lead us to the assumption that maybe the answer to our question lies in the differences between these two sects of Islam.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Here, a brief description of these two sects seems to be necessary. "The overwhelming majority of the world's 1.3 billion Muslims are Sunnis. Shias number from 130 million to 195 million people, or 10 to 15 percent of the total. In the Islamic heartland, from Lebanon to Pakistan, however, there are roughly as many Shias as there are Sunnis, and around the economically and geo-strategically sensitive rim of the Persian Gulf, Shias constitute 80 percent of the population." (Nasr V., 2007). "The divide between Shia and Sunni is the most important in Islam. The two sects parted ways early in Muslim history, and each views itself as the original orthodoxy. Their split somewhat parallels the Protestant-Catholic difference in Western Christianity. Just as past intra-Christian conflicts shaped European politics, so the Sunni-Shia conflict continues to shape the history of the Islamic world and the broader Middle East."(Nasr V., 2007)

"Shia Islam and Sunni Islam not only understand Islamic history, theology, and law differently, but each breathes a distinct ethos of faith and piety that nurtures a particular temperament and a unique approach to the question of what it means to be Muslim. The rivalry goes back to the early days of Islam and the succession crisis that followed the Prophet Muhammad's death. Most Muslims at the time (the forebears of the Sunnis) followed the tribal tradition according to which a council of elders would choose the most senior and respected elder to become the head of the Islamic community. Early Muslims found justification for this practice in the Prophet's declaration that "my community will never agree in error." For the Sunnis, the successor to the Prophet would need no exceptional spiritual qualities, but would merely have to be an exemplary Muslim who could ably and virtuously direct the religious and political affairs of the community. The Sunnis chose Abu Bakr, the Prophet's close friend and father-in law, as his successor or Caliph. A small group of the Prophet's companions believed that the Prophet's cousin and son-in-law, Ali ibn Abi Talib, was more qualified for the job and that it had been the wish of the Prophet that he led the Muslim community. In the end consensus prevailed and all dissenters, included Ali, accepted Abu Bakr's leadership." (Nasr V. , 2007)

"Abu Bakr was succeeded by Umar, Uthman, and finally Ali. Sunnis call these four men, whose successive terms spanned the three decades from 632 to 661, the Rightly Guided, or Rashidun, Caliphs. They had all been close companions of the Prophet and were knowledgeable in matters of religion. For Sunnis, the time of these caliphs was Islam's golden age, an era when political authority continued to be informed by the pristine values of the faith and when Muslim society remained close to its spiritual roots."(Nasr V. , 2007)

"Even the era of the Rightly Guided Caliphs, however, proved to be far from harmonious. Umar was killed by an Iranian prisoner of war, but most notably, Uthman was murdered in 656 by mutinous Muslim soldiers, his blood spilling onto the Quran that he was reading. The young Muslim community was in shock at the spectacle of Muslims murdering the successor to the Prophet. The aftereffects of Uthman's murder plagued the caliphate of Ali. He faced mutinies—including one that included Abu Bakr's daughter and the Prophet's wife, Ayesha—and was hard-pressed to restore calm, and soon confronted a strong challenge from Uthman's cousin Muawiya, the governor of Damascus, who demanded that Ali avenge Uthman's murder. The tribal demand for justice soon took on the quality of a power struggle between the new Caliph and the governor. A civil war between the Caliph's army and Muawiya's forces ensued, further miring the Muslim community in conflict and confusion. That war ended only when Ali was assassinated by angry extremists who blamed both him and Muawiya for the crisis. Muawiya survived their wrath to assume the caliphate. The nearly century-long reign of the Umayyad dynasty (661–750) had begun, and Damascus would be its center."(Nasr V. , 2007)

"Sunni Muslims accepted Muawiya's rise. He lacked religious authority, but he guaranteed the basic order that the faith was thought to need. Under the Umayyads, the caliphs became both the Pope and Caesar, delegating authority over religious matters to professional religious scholars and functionaries, the Ulama. The Sunnis were well on their way to embracing their traditional stance of accepting a regime's legitimacy so long as it provided order, protected Islam, and left religious matters to the Ulama. The famous saying "Better sixty years of tyranny than a single day of civil strife" captures the spirit of the Sunni position."(Ann, 1981)

"Not all Muslims were content with this formula, and Shia Islam arose in part on the foundation of their dissent. Ali's murder, the transformation of the caliphate into a monarchy, and the de facto separation of religious and political authorities under the Umayyads led a minority of Muslims to argue that what had come to pass was the fruit, not of God's mandate but of man's folly. They saw the roots of the problem going back to the choice of the first successor to the Prophet. Muslims had erred in choosing their leaders, and that error had mired their faith in violence and confusion. The dissenting voices rejected the legitimacy of the first three Rightly Guided Caliphs, arguing that God would not entrust his religion to ordinary mortals chosen by the vote of the community and that Muhammad's family—popularly known as the ahl al-Bayt (people of the household)—were the true leaders of the Muslim community, for the blood of the Prophet ran in their veins and they bore his charisma and the spiritual qualities that God had vested in him. (Al-Tabataba'i, 1975) Abu Bakr and Umar were particularly at fault for ignoring the Prophet's wishes about how his authority should be handed on and convening a gathering at Saqifah Bani Saeda to elect his successor. This view would become foundational to Shia Islam."(Enayat, 2005)

"After a chaotic period, dissenters and foes of the Umayyads began to identify Ali, the Prophet's cousin, virtual adoptive son, and son-in-law, as the one who should have been the Prophet's successor all along. According to some accounts the first convert to Islam, while still in his teens, Ali was the hero of many of the early Muslim battles and was known for his chivalry and heroism, symbolized by his legendary forked-tongued sword (zulfiqar). In one tale, Ali risks death by sleeping in the Prophet's bed in order to fool assassins as Muhammad escapes from Mecca to Medina. Ali is the font of spirituality for the Shia."(Shah-Kazemi, 2006)

"The early Shias argued that the Prophet had chosen Ali as his successor and had made a testament to that effect, telling a congregation of Muslims at Ghadir Khumm, during his last pilgrimage to Mecca, that "whoever recognizes me as his master will recognize Ali as his master." Ali was thus chosen by Muhammad's testament. The Festival of Ghadir Khumm, marking the date when the Prophet anointed Ali as his successor, is an important date on the Shia calendar. For Shias, the profession of faith is "There is no god but God and Muhammad is his Prophet, and Ali is the executor of God's will". For Shias, therefore, Ali was always the rightful caliph. Though he was eventually elected Caliph, his partisans (literally, Shiite-Ali) believe that the initial usurpation of his right to rule by Abu Bakr, Umar, and Uthman gravely occluded the ideal Islamic authority."(Morgan, 1987)

"The Shias disagree with the Sunnis not only over who should have succeeded the Prophet but also over the function that his successor was to play. Sunnis, whose familiar name is short for ahl alsunnah wa'l-jama'ah (people of tradition and consensus), believe that the Prophet's successor was succeeding only to his role as leader of the Islamic community and not to his special relationship with God or prophetic calling, and that the consensus of the Muslim community that selected Abu Bakr and the succeeding Rightly Guided Caliphs reflected the truth of the Islamic message. Underlying these views is the spiritually egalitarian notion—which in the West would be identified with the "low church" Protestant variant of Christianity—that all believers are capable of understanding religious truth in a way and to a degree that renders special intermediaries between man and God unnecessary." (Nasr V., 2007)

"Shia Islam is based on a more pessimistic assessment of human fallibility. Just as humans could not find salvation until the Prophet took up the task of guiding them toward it, so after him people need the help of exceptionally holy and divinely favored people in order to live in accord with the inner truths of religion. The descendants of Ali, known collectively as the imams (not to be confused with ordinary prayer leaders in mosques) provide that continual help, renewing and strengthening the bond between man and God. The Ulama, or clergy, carry on the project of the imams in safeguarding and sustaining the faith. Without the right leadership, Shias insist, the true meaning and intent of Islam will be lost. The differences between Shias and Sunnis are thus not only political but also theological and even anthropological."(Sobhani, 2001)

"Shias believe that the Prophet possessed special spiritual qualities, was immaculate from sin (ma'soum), and could penetrate to the hidden meaning of religious teachings. Shias further believe that Ali and his descendants had these special spiritual qualities too. They bore the light of Muhammad. They were his "trustees" (wasi) and were privy to his esoteric and religious knowledge. They could understand and interpret the inner meaning of Islam, as opposed to merely implementing its outward manifestations. Since it was the Prophet's will for Ali to succeed him as Caliph, loyalty to the Prophet has to mean refusing to accept any other outcome. The caliphate of the Sunnis encompassed far less of the prophetic function than the imamate of the Shias."(Nasr S. H., 1977)

"The Sunni conception of authority has centered on a preoccupation with order. Religion does not depend on the quality of political authority but only on its ability to help the faith survive and grow. Medieval Sunni jurists developed a theory of government according to which clerics would uphold the government's authority so long as the rulers provided stability and order and protected the Muslim community. Sultans did not have to be spiritual leaders or pretend to create a perfect Islamic order. One might even say that their main job was to protect Islam's values and interests rather than realize its spiritual ideals. This distinguished the Sunni attitude toward power from that of the Shia, who denied such legitimacy to the caliphs and sultans."(Gibb, 2014)

"Shia identity manifests itself in many everyday modes besides the black pennant topped with an ornate carved hand. Devout Shia women generally wear black, as do the male religious leaders, who by tradition choose this color for their flowing robes. Shias hold their hands at their sides when praying—as opposed to Sunnis who clasp them—and are often recognizable by names derived from the proper names or titles of saints. Shias who trace their lineage to the imams carry the title sayyid (seyyed in Persian and syed in Urdu), which is treated by Shias as a mark of nobility. Clerics who are sayyids wear a black turban. For instance, Ayatollah Khomeini was a sayyid, as is Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani, the senior clerical leader among Iraqi Shias today."(Nasr V., 2007)

"But Perhaps the most vivid distinction—and one that grates on Sunni sensibilities—is the love of visual imagery evident in Shia popular devotionalism. Sunnism tends to frown on the visual arts as possible inducements to, if not outright expressions of, idol worship. The piety of the Shia, by contrast, is steeped in

visual representation. Although the Shia ulama do not condone the use of visual representations of the imams and even of the Prophet Muhammad, Shias hold them dear. Portraits of Ali and Husayn as well as depictions of the Karbala fight and other scenes from their lives adorn Shia homes and shops and are displayed in marches and festivals along with the ever-present colors of Shiism: black to express sorrow for Ali's fate, red to commemorate Husayn's martyrdom, and green to honor the Prophet's bloodline. Popular Shia artworks play much the same role that iconic images play in certain branches of Christianity. Puritanical Sunnis who condemn as un-Islamic any attempt to depict the Prophet visually or any veneration of images often cite the Shia taste for images as proof that Shiism is a form of deviance or even outright heresy."(Nasr V., 2007)

"Setting the Shia apart from the Sunni most emphatically, however, is the great feast of mourning, remembrance, and atonement that is Ashoura. From its earliest days, Shiism has been defined by the witness that it bears to the moral principles of Islam—a witness whose greatest public expression takes place in and through the rituals that remind the community of the special status of the imams. No ritual observance is more important in this regard than that associated with Husayn's death—the shaping event par excellence of Shiism. While there are indeed Shia approaches to Islamic theology and Islamic law, they developed alongside rituals."(Nasr V., 2007)

By this description, one may conclude that Shia Islam provides a context in which the emergence of the so-called concept of religious forbearance. First, because Shias have been always a minority among all Muslims. Being a minority means that they had not had the chance of dominance over other Muslims and it has not been wise to have conflict between themselves. Secondly, because Shias believe that in the absence of the prophet and the Imams, no one can have a rightful religious authority. This Idea will lead them to consider that no one can have a true judgment about the others, and logically, that means they accept the possibility of their own ideas to be wrong. This point, as discussed before, is assumed to be a crucial aspect of our concept of religious forbearance.

On the other hand, we saw that Sunni Muslims assume that the role of leader in a Muslim community is to make sure that the order is in hand. This might be the point which had led Sunnis to fight each other and Shias as well. Because they want that the Muslim community have a stable order, which in their point of view means homogeneity; which in the modern era, we know that is impossible to obtain. And this is the paradox, they want order and they fight and go to war in order to achieve it. But Shias, they always have been a minority, they know that homogeneity, in the absence of the prophet and the Imams, cannot be achieved.

Iran is a Shia country. This is about four centuries, After Safavid dynasty, that the majority of its people are Shias. Children are brought up whit Shia's principles and attitudes. There are lots of signs in everyday life, from clothing to architecture of buildings, which remind them in all their life that they come from Shia background. In such a context, we want to examine that if the concept of religious forbearance has become a social norm or not.

As it is declared, in this paper, we are trying to find out if the mentioned conception of religious forbearance can be a norm or not. To do so, first we should have a theoretical framework within the norm science. First, we should define and categorize the norms and we should also find some indexes for norms. Second, by having our definitions, categories and indexes and through the process of data collecting, we can experimentally, examine our concept of religious forbearance.

To define the norms, a literature review seems to be vital. Durkheim said the sociology, as a scientific discipline, should investigate social facts. These social facts should be treated as things. (Durkheim, 2010) We can consider norms as social facts, so we have to consider them as things. "When claiming that norms are things it is also understood that the most essential characteristic of those things is as carriers of normative messages. In other words, norms in this perspective are objects (things) containing messages of how reality 'ought' to be."(Hydén & Svensson, 2008) So we can say that norms are generally in the form of imperative statements." The concept of norm can be seen as the connecting link between the actual and the desirable, between what is and what should be, or as expressed in social scientific terms, between system and action."(Almers & Wickenberg, 2008)

But if we say that norms are just imperative statements, one crucial question will rise and that is, within the social sciences, what distinguishes norms as imperative statements, from moral statements that are investigated in the moral sciences. The answer is that "within social scientific disciplines there are however seemingly one common denominator explaining the concept of "norm"; something that guides human behavior/actions." (Bergman, 2008) "Norms influence everyday practice when people act according to the action directives of the social norm, when one behaves as others do in a given social situation, that is to say, normally." (Almers & Wickenberg, 2008) So we can say that in sociology, "norm research deals with understanding the driving force of human social actions." (Almers & Wickenberg, 2008)

Norms regulate social actions in a society telling us how to act in the most rational way. (Hydén, 2011) And they make us act normally. "Norms are said to be positioned behind human behavior and therefore potentially guides individuals towards the desirable or routinely behavior; the "normal social behavior"".

(Bergman, 2008) They are action directives – that govern and influence our lives (i.e. our action and consumption patterns) are often unspoken, invisible and taken for granted. (Almers & Wickenberg, 2008)

We can use norms as a perspective through which we can examine and explain the social behavior of social actors. "The norm perspective places its focus on people's jointly set expectations for each other's behavior; expectations which, in that they affect human behavior, are guiding forces in society."(Hydén, 2011) "Norms not only emanate from social interaction between individuals as is done in social life, but that they also originate from systems such as the economy, politics, technology, environment and law." (Bergman, 2008)

Now that we have defined the concept of "norms", we should be able to use it as a theoretical model in order to explain the social problems and queries. "The norm-model presupposes that a norm consists of three dimensions. The first dimension consists of will and values. This is not enough. In order for a norm to grow there must also be available knowledge about how to pursue the task the people desire."(Hydén, 2011) These three dimensioned model can be used to find out how a norm is constructed. On the other hand, we can say that "Norms are seen as a mixture of cognitive factors, system conditions and values."(Almers & Wickenberg, 2008)The norm model as an analytical tool says "that norms generates out of three concepts; what societal actors want, know, and are able to do. It means that the tool has three variables: will, knowledge and possibilities and the norm-creation process is said to constitute a synthesis of and/or trade-off between these three variables." (Bergman, 2008)The norm model also concentrates on three areas: (a) the cognitive context in which the norm is active; (b) the system conditions that apply to the relevant situation; and (c) the values associated with the imperative. (Hydén & Svensson, 2008)

Now we should find a way to categorize the different norms. The main instrument to do so is to distinguish between essential and accidental attributes. To list different norms, our experience of the norms existing in society should be used. (Hydén & Svensson, 2008) Three essential attributes have been found in different types of norms by Hydén & Svensson (2008):

1.   Norms are behavioral instructions (imperatives)
2.   Norms are socially reproduced
3.   Norms are the individual's understanding of surrounding expectations regarding their own behavior

These three attributes are vital for any kind of norm. But we can say that "the characteristics of norms differ in relation to their accidental attributes. The accidental attributes are related to factors like background and contexts, which afford them different characteristics. These characteristics make it possible to classify the norms in certain categories and thereby accumulate knowledge in relevant respects."(Hydén & Svensson, 2008) In Figure 1, we can see how we can categorize and classify different kinds and types of norms using essential and accidental attributes. Norms of any kind should have these three essential attributes and they may or may not have some of the accidental attributes listed below.

NORM	Essential attributes			Accidental attributes					
TYPE	Imperative	Socially reproduced	Surrounding expectations	Sanctions	Origins	Arena	System oriented	Value Oriented Internal functions etc.	Etc.
Norm Type 1 Legal									
Norm Type 2 Social									
Norm Type 3 Technical									
Norm Type 4 Economical									
Norm Type 5 Bureaucratic									

Figure 1*:* Norm classification system (Hydén & Svensson, 2008)

Another point which should be mentioned here is that "norms can be studied as something observable in the "real world". We can understand and explain peoples' behavior by articulating what lies behind the actions; in this case a social norm. The norm is said to guide individuals towards the desirable behavior if they do not want to be socially sanctioned (whispering, looks, angry comments, etc.)."(Bergman, 2008) "But even if there does not exist a norm, the norm perspective still gives you one more option; to reconstruct the prerequisites for a potential norm i.e. to analysis the conditions for a future regulation. The reconstruction of the prerequisites for a (potential) norm is translated into the study of a norm-creation process. The study of the norm-creation process allows us to map out the informal structures behind the actions conducted by the different actors."(Bergman, 2008)

By taking all the factors mentioned above into account, we now can explain our strategy in this paper. We are going to investigate if the concept of religious forbearance could be a social norm or not. To do so, we use the norm model. It means that we are going to examine, with our empirical data that if religious forbearance have the three essential attributes which all the norms should have. In addition to that, we are going to describe the cognitive context in which the norm is active, the system conditions that apply to the relevant situation; and the values associated with the imperative. Also, it should be said here that if we find out, during our investigation, that such a norm does not exist, still we can use it as a theoretical mediator in order to have a knowledge about our so-called concept of religious forbearance, which we can easily observe it during our everyday lives in Iran.

III. METHODOLOGY

To confine the field of study, the concentration of this research is about one group of people; university students. Although it seems that this confining is caused by our limitations to access to a greater and more homogeneous sample to conduct our research, but there are reasons why we have chosen this part of society as a representative sample. National universities in Iran get a large diversity in their pupils. From all over the country, students take place in a nationwide exam, competing with each other to obtain the great opportunity of entering these national universities, mostly located in Tehran, the capital. Among the students of these universities, there are students with different social, ethnical and religious backgrounds, having different ideas about society, politics and morality as well. This characteristic makes the universities a proper place to conduct this research. It should be mentioned that attending these national universities dose not cost any tuition, and this point will avoid us from class baize in our study.

By conducting some unstructured interviews with students of two big national universities, the University of Tehran and Amirkabir University of Technology, it is been tried to find out their experiences of conflict around religious beliefs and their reactions to these conflicts. About twenty five students were interviewed, 12 students from Amirkabir University of Technology and 13students from University of Tehran. 14 of them were men and 11 of them, women.

In the interviews, we asked students if they have had the experience of any kind of conflicts regarding religious issues in their lives. We also asked them what they usually do in such cases and why they act in these particular ways. Also, it was asked of them if they can work with, make friend of, or have regular relationships with those who have completely different or maybe antithetical religious views. After that we asked of the conception of a regular and normal relationship. We wanted to know that to which degree they can communicate or cooperate with those who have different ideas. Their expectations of the others' behavior toward them was the final was also asked.

In addition to interviews, observation of spaces and situations was the other source for data collecting in this study. In the following section, the findings, including detected concepts will be discussed in order to describe and perhaps find an explanation for the religious forbearance.

IV. FINDINGS

Almost all of the interviewed student said that they have had some sort of experience regarding religious conflicts with those who had totally different and antithetical beliefs. Most of these experiences have occurred in universities. In universities, usually some students who are classmates or do some extracurricular activities together, shape some groups. Although these groups are usually constituted of people who have close views, but the borders of these groups are not so fixed. And on the other hand, groups are usually getting involved with other groups of other views. So it is probable for an individual in the university to have contact with many people of different ideas. Our interviewed cases said that they have some experience of this sort.

Iran is a country in which religion still plays an important role in everyday life. Muslims should pray three times a day. You can hear the calling for pray (Azan) from every mosque in all cities three times a day, through the loudspeakers. In the morning, at noon and in the time of sunset, even in universities, loudspeakers call all the Muslim students to pray. There are lots of religious symbols everywhere, even in classrooms and corridors at the universities, sounding every one. In such a society, if one might ignore the religion, the religion will not ignore him. On the other hand, every woman in Iran, Muslim or not, even believing in these rules to be Islamic or not, should wear Hijab.

The last point, Law of Hijab, could lead to a conflict. There are lots of Muslim women in Iran who believe that even in an Islamic context, wearing Hijab is not mandatory. They believe that this is not an Islamic rule, but something that the Quran advices Muslim women to do so and they can choose to accept or refuse this advice. Some of our interviewed students had an idea like that and they told us that in some cases, they have had conflicts over this issue whit their family, relatives and friends.

Another case of conflict which we found out from our interviews, is the consumption of alcoholic drinks. Although most of Islamic teachings and near all of the Islamic sects, forbid Muslims to drink alcohol, there are some people who consider themselves as Muslims but they don't believe in prohibition of alcoholic drinks. They, like in the case of Hijab, say that the Quran never says directly that alcohol is forbidden, but give advice to not drink it because it may be harmful for health and it just forbid praying for someone who is drunk and nothing more. Our interviewed cases have said that they have had conflicts over this issue.

Shia Islam says that it is forbidden for a man and a woman to touch each other unless they are close relatives, like father and daughter, mother and son, brother and sister or husband and wife. In other cases, they cannot touch each other in any form. So they cannot shake hands. But some Shia Muslims in Iran do not believe in that. When a foreigner wants to visit Iran, he or she would be advised to not shake hands with persons of different gender. But in Iran, even in universities, it is usual to see boys and girls, or men and women, shaking hands or walking hand in hand. Not all of them are closed relatives, but they are simply friends. This point would also cause conflict between those who believe in such a rule and those who do not.

These were some of the examples, declared by our interviewed cases, as the probable situation of conflict regarding difference between religious ideas, all of them coming from one source, Shia Islam. These examples are familiar to people living in Iran. They confront such situations in their everyday lives. But the point is that these differences would not lead to serious conflicts between people.

By asking our cases, what would be their reaction to those situations we wanted to know first, how they react and second, why they behave like that? Most of them said that even if they could be upset by these situation, they would not protest. They said that in the extreme cases, they would leave the situation. They told us that they do so because they think that everyone can do what he or she wants in his or her own private life. This would be the aspect of accepting the difference which we defined as a crucial element of religious forbearance. They also said that they would never show aggressive reaction to the others; which was the other aspect of our concept of religious forbearance.

The question which is still unanswered is that if we could call religious forbearance a social norm. The first essential attitude of a norm, according to Hydén & Svensson (2008) is that norms should be in the form of imperative statements. Religious forbearance seems to tell people to accept others' different and antithetical religious beliefs and also to not show an aggressive reaction to those who have different religious ideas. Our interviewed cases told us that they think it is not wise to show aggressive reaction and it is wise to accept that people might have ideas which are different. They do not only think that they themselves should act like that but they said that everyone ought to behave in this manner.

The interviewed cases told us that since they tolerate other different and antithetical beliefs, they expect that others also do so. They told us that they would be very angry if they show respect to anyone's different point of view, regarding religious issues and he or she in return would not show respect to their own ideas. They said that in this case they will immediately break up the relation whit that one who shows aggressive reaction to them. That could be the concept of reciprocal expectations as an essential attitude of norms.

The most interesting point is that the interviewed students, most of them, told us that conflicts around religious beliefs have not been so serious for them before attending the university. Pre-university education system in Iran, which is almost totally managed by the government, tends to ignore and also struggle against the existing differences in the society by propagating a homogeneous, governmentally produced, Shia-Iranian identity. Schools are single-sex and boys and girls have not any direct contact till they come to the universities. The families, on the other hand, are usually homogeneous and it is rare to find serious differences of religious beliefs among the members of a given family. But families themselves come from different classes, areas of the country and of course of different religious beliefs. It means that children who are being raised in their own family do not confront any kind of religious conflict until they become more independent while entering the university.

The interviewed students told us that in their first experience of these kinds of conflicts, they were confused and decided to not get involved with people with different religious ideas. But in their further contacts by watching others' behaviors, they have learnt how to act in such situations. They said also that if someone else does not know how to act in their first contact, they will try to show him how to act properly. They told us that they have some experience in a group, where one or two new members didn't act normal, so conflict has occurred. In those situations, they said that they would try to make peace by showing indirectly how the proper way of action is, to those who didn't know that.

Regarding the last two paragraphs, we can come into conclusion that the religious forbearance, can be socially reproduced among different social groups; which can lead us to the point that we can now call this concept as a social norm.

Now we should describe the cognitive situation, system condition and values, which make this norm work properly in the society of Iran. As it is discussed in the introduction, there is some sort of difference between Shia and Sunni Islam, which in our point of view, provides the context in which the norm of religious

forbearance is possible. As it is mentioned, Shia Muslims have always been a minatory among all Muslims and that has lead them to learn being tolerant. Also in Shia doctrine, in the absence of the prophet and the Imams, there is no final reference for interpretation of God's orders which are metaphorically stated in the Quran. So in this cognitive situation, the chance of emergence for the social norm of religious forbearance is much higher than in other Muslim societies where the majority of Muslims are Sunni.

As system condition, we should not forget the role of the means of communication and the spared of social networks. Diversity, more or less, has always been present in the society of Iran; but people had less communication. Nowadays, people have the chance of meeting, really or virtually more people who have different ideas. The degree of communication with other societies has raised since the transportation is easier. So people of Iran have more chances to meet people of other cultures and this, in our point of view, has bolstered the tolerance of any kind in the society. On the other hand, spared of worldwide social media and networks, has had a dramatic contribution to this matter. People now are more and more under the influence of a global culture of human rights than the past. Urbanization, education and the enormous growth of the middle class, have had their influences as system condition, on the emerging of the norm of religious forbearance in Iran.

As we found out of our interviewed, students usually consider mutual interests as a value more important than the religious ideas. They said that if there are some mutual interests, like at work where the profit is, then they can work properly with people who have different and antithetical religious ideas. But we should not hurry up to conclude; mutual interests are not always financial or personal interest. Some of the students said that in cases like war, where the country and the nation is in danger, they would be prepared to cooperate with people who have different religious ideas in order to defend the country. Some others said that keeping the friendship and preserving a group of friends is more important than the religious conflicts. They said they would work or make friends of people who have different religious ideas, in order to preserve a group of friends, like a group of classmates, from falling apart. We could name mutual interests as a super value, which our cases of study consider to be more important than the religious values. And this is one of the interesting findings of this research because, in Iran as well as other Eastern countries, religion has been the most important issue for many years. Maybe we are observing the signs of social secularism in our country, many years after when the Western country experiences it and its consequences.

V. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

In the following paragraphs, we are going to present a summary and a short conclusion as well. Our question was: what make people of Iran, not have a conflict over different and antithetical religious beliefs, which all consider themselves as Islamic and Shia thoughts; while we are observing bloody wars going on over religious ideas, in our neighbor Muslim country?

To answer this question, we defined the concept of religious forbearance as a strategy of social action; which means to accept others' ideas and to not react aggressively toward who have different religious beliefs. Then we claimed that, in an Islamic context, such concept is more consonant with Shia sect. We showed and described the differences between Shia and Sunni sects to elucidate our claim.

Then by conducting some interviews among the students, we tried to obtain a more scientific knowledge about this issue. We used these interviews for three reasons; first to support our claim that the people of Iran show less aggressive reaction to those who have different ideas. Second to investigate why they do so and finally to know if we could call the concept of religious forbearance as a social norm or not.

To distinguish a norm, we used the norm model of Hydén & Svensson (2008) which provide three essential attribute for each norm. We tried to investigate if our concept of religious forbearance satisfies these three indicators or not. We found out that religious forbearance has an imperative aspect, it is socially reproduced among people and encompasses the surrounding expectations of the others. So we started to call it as a social norm. Then we tried to identify the cognitive situation for emerging this norm; which we claimed and tried to prove is the Shia Islam. We also said that system conditions, like the spread of means of communication could have some contribution to the emergence of this norm. And we found out the main value behind this norm is the mutual interests of any kind of personal, group interests and national interests.

As a conclusion, we must say that there is a social norm, regulating the conflicts over different religious ideas in Iran. We named it the norm of "Religious Forbearance" which is deeply rooted to the Shia sect of Islam and its thoughts and learnings. So we have found out, to some degree, why we don't see any kind of religious war in Iran while other Islamic are almost all involved with this kind of war. Of course, there are lots of political, economic, historical and social variables who could explain this problem, but we should consider the norm of religious forbearance in Shia Islam, as an influencing factor, in other studies trying to find a comprehensive explanation of this problematic. Our study itself has got lots of limitations, especially in its sampling and other methodological matters and its findings should be evaluated by many other more larger and empirical studies, testing what has been found here.

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