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## Theory of Relative Universality in Islam

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### Abstract

This article seeks to explain which position Islam has adopted amongst homogenous universal and non-homogenous relativist approaches and how it has managed to strike a balance between universalism and particularism. The author develops the hypothesis of “relative universality”, i.e. universality in the principles and relativity in the procedures and approaches, to explain that Islam has managed to establish a kind of dialectic between centripetal and centrifugal forces in the age of glocalization and to bring about harmony between universalism and particularism with a focus on alternative modernity. This article, based on the theoretical eclectic method, lays emphasis on the interaction between the context, structure, agent and processes at three levels of ontology, epistemology and methodology for the purpose of dialectic synthesis of contradictory concepts. The author concludes that the relative universality theory relies on overlapping values, extended rationality and organic linkage between content and form at the contextual level, on two-level legitimacy, pluralistic unity and multi-layered governance at the structural level, on interaction between sub-national, national and international actors at the agent level, and on general-particular intertwinement, tradition-modernity linkage and continuity despite change at the level of processes.

**Keywords:** Islam, Universalism, Relative Universality, Particularism, Glocalization.

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## INTRODUCTION

The present paper tries to scrutinize on Islamic approach towards universalism and relativism in international relations and to explain the idea that in the midst of globalism and particularism, the theory of "relative universality" in Islam i.e. the universalism in principles and the relativity in the procedures have internal consistency. Relative universality in Islam is based on the universalistic principles of Islam as well as the relativity of governance styles in the era of "glocalization."

Accordingly, in response to the question of what is the Islam's preference towards the two approaches of homogeneous universality and heterogeneous relativity, the paper claims that Islam is not against the multi-layered global governance which connotes the complementarity, the intertwinement, and the interconnectedness of global, regional, national and local layers and Islam's resilience towards the "pluralistic unity" that means the ontological monotheism and methodological pluralism.

With a view to adopt an integrated and synthetic approach towards Islam, the paper tries to borrow some philosophical, theological, mystical and jurisprudential concepts in order to establish some sort of compatibility between paradoxical elements of stability and transformation as well as between centrifugal and centripetal factors and to establish consistency between integrative and fragmentary trends. In other words, the article is of the idea that there is a dialectic synthesis between globalism and particularism in Islam based on the "Intertwinement of homogeneity and heterogeneity" borrowing the Robertson's terminology (Robertson, 1995: 40) and the intersection of universality and relativity in the age of glocalization, in a manner that the interaction of universalism and particularism as well as that of the convergent and divergent trends give rise to some kind of interconnectivity and complementarity between relative and universal affairs in the framework of theory of "relative universality" according to the author's perception of international relations in Islam.

The article elaborates on the theory of "relative universality" in Islam by borrowing from the philosophical notion of "unity despite diversity" i.e. the unity of worldviews and values as well as the plurality of methods, so that while benefiting from universal monotheist principles, it considers that the patterns and methods are multifaceted, diverse and variable. In fact, according to this theory, the synthesis of absolute and relative or that of universalism and localism or the compatibility between unity and plurality or between general and particular are considered as dialectical synergy and complementarity of seemingly contradictory concepts.

The present article tries, by adopting eclectic methodology to elaborate the foundations of the theory of relative universality in Islam so that at contextual level it is based on the overlapping values, extended rationality, organic linkage of content and form; at structural level on the composite and two-level legitimacy, pluralistic unity, and multilayered governance; at the agent level on the interaction of sub-national, national and transnational actors, and at the process level on the intertwinement of general and particular, the interconnectedness of tradition and modernity as well as the continuity despite change.

The study of the relationship between universality and relativity in Islam has always tended to be dichotomous. Much Western literature sees Islam as a homogenizing force or as a particular tradition that is at odds with modernity, while internal works emphasize the theological and fiqh dimensions without linking them to the dynamics of international relations. The concept of *relative universality* itself was previously only used by Jack Donnelly in the context of human rights and has not been extended to Islamic political thought. This limitation shows the existence of a *research gap*, namely the absence of a framework that is able to explain in an integrated manner the interaction between Islamic universal values and the diversity of praxis in the era of globalization, and the absence of an approach that connects contexts,

structures, actors, and processes simultaneously. This research offers a new contribution by developing the theory of "relative universality" in the perspective of Islamic international relations through an eclectic approach and multi-level analysis. By showing how Islam combines universal principles with relative and contextual methods and applications, this article presents a theoretical synthesis that has not been offered by previous studies.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

The concept of relative universality was first discussed by Jack Donnelly with regard to the concept of human rights. He believes that human rights are relatively universal in terms of concept, content, and function. What he means by conceptual universality is that all people deserve equal, inseparable, and universal rights as they have intrinsic integrity and dignity. By content universality, he means that there is consensus with regard to a universal list of human rights, including civil-political, social-economical, and collective-developmental rights, especially those noted in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (Donnelly, 2007: 281:289).

He also believes in functional universality despite the relative and contextual nature of human rights, since human rights protect people from common threats to human dignity in the era of globalization. Of course, universality does not mean that human rights must be met at all times and places in terms of function. According to him, even the international legal universality of human rights demonstrates that human rights are relative and contingent but universal, such that all movements of social justice and political opposition use the universal language of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, whereas governments may not accept the scope of universality of human rights, as currently non-aligned countries deny the centrality of Western homogenizing and globalist approach by emphasizing the "right to culture" in the framework of "human rights and cultural diversity". Therefore, by discussing the concept of overlapping universality with regard to human rights, Donnelly holds that there is no justification that the acceptance of human rights in one place would lead to its legitimacy in other areas. Therefore, it seems that the universality of human rights according to Donnelly means the outcome of views shared by different cultures and finding the points of agreement between diverse cultures with regard to human rights. Therefore, the global call for human rights is mostly an outcome and not a cause or context legitimizing human rights (Donnelly, 2008: 194).

This article attempts to borrow the terminology of Jack Donnelly in order to firstly generalize the theory of relative universality to the whole international relations concepts (and not merely confine it to the concept of human rights) and secondly apply it to Islamic political thought by emphasizing on the interaction of globalism and particularism.

Generally speaking, the current literature about globalism and particularism in Islam has had dichotomist approach of black and white to this subject matter from one hand as well as single angle orientation towards Islam as universalistic or particularistic religion from other hand. Regarding the latter approach towards Islam, some western scholars such as Ronald Robertson have attempted to consider the act of some fundamentalist, extremist and radical groups for the propagation of Islamic universal ideas and principles as an effort of resistance to globalization (Robertson, 1992: 166-178). However, the current research tries to present a rationalistic, civilizational, systematic and holistic approach to Islam by presenting a spectrum-based, gray zone and civilizational approach, taking into account the dialectic interaction between locality, nationality and universality in the multilayered governance, rather than the binary approach of western orientalists who claim that Islam is in contradiction with modernity and try to introduce this religion as a symbol of backwardness, neglecting Islam's consistency with modernity.

Furthermore, contrary to the approach of western sources that often highlight the concept of “Islamic Government” by putting emphasis on Sunni caliphate literature, the present research tries to scrutinize on “Islamic Governance” inspiring from the model of Imamate in the political thought of Shiism i.e. the justice-based governance rather than dominant ruler – based approach of caliphate. By the same token, the available sources, because of the confusion between modernity and modernism, have tried to introduce Islam in contradiction with modernity. For example, Sayyid Muhammad Qutb in his book entitled “the ignorance of the Twentieth-Century” interprets jahiliyyah (Ignorance) as the domination of humans over humans in modern societies, rather than submission of humans to God and claims that the modernity has led to corruption in Muslim societies (Qutb, 1964). Marshall Berman in his book entitled “the Experience of Modernity” after explaining the concepts of modernity, modernization and modernism, introduces a particular form of modernism as the factor of underdevelopment and emphasizes on the negative impact of “modernization from above” on the culture of societies (Berman, 1988:9-10); whereas based on the theory of relative universality, Islam is consistent with modernity (based on innovation, creativity and new technology) but is in contradiction with modernism (whose foundations are: individualism, materialism, capitalism, liberalism, utilitarianism, positivism, empiricism, secularism and humanism (Dehshiri, 2017: 27-45)

Additionally, available sources are trying to represent narrowly the rationality in Islam and to pretend that Islam has limited the scope of rationality whereas in the theory of “relative universality” the rationality includes a broad spectrum, ranging from ontological, epistemological, and instrumental rationality to communicative, correlative and circumstantial one.

The current sources put emphasis on Islam’s approach towards the infidel world based on dichotomist confrontation between Islamic world and infidel world, whereas the theory of “relative universality” in Islam has reluctance towards this dichotomization in the present world as there are other worlds such as world of peace, world of immigration, world of oppressed people, world of non-belligerence, world of contract, world of safe-conduct, world of obligation, world of neutrality, according to Islamic classification (Amid Zanjani, 1994: 251-258). Moreover, existing sources concerning the behavior of Islamic world, emphasizing mostly on radical confrontation or passive cooperation, have less taken into consideration the interactive and cooperative teachings of Islam in the current complex world.

In addition, the available sources about the globalism and particularism have elaborated these notions with a theological and jurisprudential approach whereas the present paper tries to look at Islamic teachings based on International Relations’ approach, so that it has established a kind of linkage between the Islamic teachings and the theological and jurisprudential principles of Islam with political science and international politics.

Perhaps we can retrace some similarities with the theory of “relative universality” in the theory of “codified thought” elaborated by Ayatollah Mahdi Hadavi Tehrani who believes in two universalistic and comparative levels of Islam during the governance of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) in Medina as well as the rule of Imam Ali Ibn Abi Talib (AS) in Kufa. By distinguishing conceptually between the notions of: political philosophy, school of thought, political system, governmental institutions and legal system, he believes that the political philosophy represents “the Islamic beliefs in political arena”; The school of thought in Islam includes “political principles of Islam” as well as “political goals of Islam”; political system means “political universal stratification and organization of Islam”; the governmental institution represents “the objective manifestation of the Islamic goals and principles regardless of territorial context as well as the systematization of the Islamic universal law”; The legal system includes “a set of rules and laws that are practiced as a guideline for all Muslim

individuals" (Hadavi Tehrani, 1995: 401-426). He believes that general affairs are considered to be of "must" or "true" axioms which are based on the infrastructural principles of Islamic worldview and/or ideals of Islamic intellectual system. In his idea, some minor issues in a particular era are considered as the existential or real axioms in the context of "adjunct philosophy" whose case depends on specific circumstances and situations and has the potentiality to be realized objectively, so that it can be transformed and evolved according to circumstances (Hadavi Tehrani, n.d., 71-85; Hadavi Tehrani, 2001: 50-54). However, we believe that the "must" cannot be extracted from the "is". In other words, the "is" has not productive correlation with the "must". In addition, the terms used in this theory have little in common with the terminology of political science and international relations. Furthermore, the transcendental or top-down approach of this theory has deprived it of a dialectical or two-fold interaction of universality and relativity.

By the same token, the available works have intermixed between globalism and universality without scrutinizing on their conceptual nuance. In other words, the globalism means an imposing project of "globalization from above" in order to homogenize the world whereas the universality is a generalized process of "globalization from below" which takes into account the cultural diversity of nations. The other point is that the available works have studied the political thought of Islam with a single-variable, one-dimensional and static approach so that for example sometimes they have interpreted universal thoughts of Islam with materialistic power-oriented approach, neglecting the role of norms, identities, ideas and social factors and even have considered it as a symbol of Islam's domination-seeking approach. Sometimes the available works have adopted identity-oriented approach stressing on identity and norms while being stagnated in the past. Hence, they have failed to search for religious innovation for the sake of compatibility with contemporary political structures and processes (Walt, 1998); whereas the present paper endeavors to project an eclectic, systematic, dynamic, multivariate, multidimensional and multi-layered approach in the framework of the theory of relative universality, establishing the linkage between context, structure, agent and process.

## METHODS

Eclecticism is a method in which the variables of two or several theoretical or conceptual approaches are used in order to better understand the real world issues (Checkel, 2013: 224). The eclecticism seeks to integrate the assumptions that are less cognitive and more epistemological so that there would be intrinsic logical consistency, taking benefit of both empirical and interpretive methods (Little, 2009: 398-399). Thus, the eclectic theory is seeking to provide a mixed and complex model out of a set of elements in different theories in order to increase the potentiality for the better explanation of the complex and multi-faceted theory of relative universality (Della Porta and Keating, 2008: 4).

It seems that eclecticism has the capability to explain the Islamic approach towards universalism and particularism. In fact, Islam's views on international relations are so multidimensional that no single theory affords to elaborate it sufficiently through an inclusive and exclusive conceptual framework. The maximum function of each single theory is to shed light on one aspect of Islamic teachings. Therefore, through an eclectic theory this conceptual vacuum may be filled (Dehghani Firouzabadi, 2015: 190-195).

The eclectic theory on relative universality would lay intellectual foundations for scrutinizing on global and local events. It has the utility and ability of explanation in order to provide an integrative context for theoretical analysis (Checkel, 2013: 225).

The eclectic approach in this article seeks to rediscover and to highlight the interconnectedness of international, regional, national and subnational levels of analysis in the

framework of the theory of relative universality in Islam, with a multivariate and multilevel approach.

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

### Findings

The findings of this study show that the theory of "relative universality" in Islam is able to explain the integration between universal principles that are absolute and procedures, mechanisms, and practices that are relative according to the context of space and time. Through an analysis of four levels-contextual, structural, actor, and process. This study found that Islam has a consistent pattern of universalism in the form of basic values such as monotheism, justice, and moral goals, as well as relativity in aspects of application such as governance, rationality, and social dynamics. These findings also show that multilayered governance, general-particular interactions, and tradition-modernity relationships are integral features of Islamic approaches to global and local issues. Thus, the results of the study confirm that Islam is internally able to synthesize value stability with social change through the concept of relative universality.

### Discussion

#### The foundations of the theory of relative universality in Islam

Since the theory of relative universality in the international relations of Islam is based on the linkage between context, structure, actors and processes, it is attempted to reconsider the mutual interaction and consistency between universality and relativity at these four levels.

##### A) At the contextual level

The theory of relative universality at the contextual level is based on overlapping values (from ontological perspective), extended rationality (from epistemological perspective) and organic linkage between content and form (in terms of methodology) as follows:

###### 1. Overlapping values:

From the Islamic point of view, not all values are relative and all values are not subject to contract. It is true that customs are contractual and subject to temporal and spatial variability, but there is a series of absolute, fixed, and unalterable values. (Mesbah Yazdi, 2012: 11-15). In fact, the author's conception of Islam rests on the ontological universality of absolute ultimate and intermediate values while relativizing contingent and contextual values. Absolute ultimate values mean final values such as spirituality, happiness and salvation. Absolute intermediate values, such as justice, are the ones that pave the way for achieving ultimate values. Relative values such as peace, freedom, development, prosperity and democracy are temporal and spatial, contextual, and contingent values, subject to the observance of absolute values. For instance, peace is desirable if it is just and aimed at the achievement of human prosperity and salvation. Thus, it seems that Islam is compatible with an overlapping, multi-layered consensus based on the compatibility of relative values with absolute ultimate and intermediate values.

###### 2. Extended rationality

The author's conception of Islam is based on widespread and extended rationality based on the connection of the universal ultimate and normative rationalities with the relativity of instrumental, critical, communicative, and contingent rationalities. Ultimate or ontological rationality means to consider the Almighty Allah as present and overseeing all affairs and the

observance of the ultimate objective of the creation world, i.e. the resurrection and thinking in the end of affairs on the basis of hereafter calculations.

Normative or epistemological rationality means observing ethical values and norms in achieving goals and necessitating the legitimacy of means for achieving goal / outcome. Moral rationality is consistent with the logic of proportionality and is concerned with identifying and determining the task and taking the appropriate decision and action. Although the task performance in the form of moral rationality does not necessarily contradict the instrumental rationality and the logic of outcome-orientation, and in many cases the two are compatible and consistent, yet in some cases it emerges some sort of fruition between ethical rationality behaviors and instrumental rationality actions. In these situations, based on moral rationality, the task performance takes precedence and priority over outcome-oriented actions. (Heyran Nia, 2019)

Instrumental rationality means maximizing efficiency by utilizing the shortest, most reasonable, the least risky, the least costly, and the most useful way to achieve the goal / outcome. Instrumental rationality, within the framework of "rational choice" theory, focuses on the logic of the result. Based on this approach, actors think about the outcome of their choice and make the decision by "cost-benefit analysis". Instrumental rationality dictates that the best and least costly means should be used to achieve the most profitable goals. The criterion of instrumental rationality is the rate of success in achieving the benefits and producing the desired results. (Raz, 2005: 1-28)

Critical rationality means critical reflection and thinking to bring about change and to achieve liberation. This kind of rationality stems from the tendency of the human being for emancipation, which stems from his inclination to think and reflect on subjective beliefs and assumptions. This kind of inclination would force man to free himself from the constraints and pressures of human and social environmental factors. Emancipation prerequisite is also the application of critical or transcendental rationality, rationality that is not intended to define nature and mutual understanding, but is used to criticize and modify existing order in order to achieve optimal order and circumstances; in which one contemplates that self-awareness, self-understanding, transcendence, bliss, transcendent moral conditions and liberation are achieved. (Popper, 1972; Bhaskar, 1989)

Communicative and correlative rationality means the ability to talk and contend with the aim of achieving consensus based on communicative action and hermeneutic and inter-subjective understanding. Communicative rationality means understanding the way of communicating with others and building co-understanding. This kind of rationality, which originates from the communicative interests of human beings and social actors, focuses on understanding, interconnection, and inter-subjective exchange and is manifested in language as bi-fold speech act or communicative action for mutual understanding or inter-subjective interaction. Wilkinson in his analysis of Islam, while emphasizing on the priority of structure over the agent, considers this kind of rationality as the basis for Islamic critical realism. (Wilkinson, 2015: 419-442) Contingent and contextual rationality means taking into account the spatial environment, temporal space, and circumstantial conditions appropriate to the contingent situations and contexts in the framework of the dialectical space of international

relations and generally speaking the consideration of contextual factors. (Jordan & Howard-Snyder, 1996: 75-79)

Therefore, the extended rationality encompasses the ultimate, normative, instrumental, critical, communicative and circumstantial rationalities and takes into account the spatial, temporal, contextual, and historical transformative situations.

### 3. Organic linkage of content and form

Given the profound relationship between content and form in Islam, there seems to be some kind of interconnectedness between value and method and the complementarity between the universality of the content of religious texts and the macro-level principles with the relative verbal tools at the micro level. The organic linkage between content and form is based on the truthfulness of the word and the appearance of meaning in Islam in such a way that there is a confluence of the principles as a whole and the branches or corollaries as components, so that the two layers of principles and corollaries have holographic particularity in the sense that each branch reflects the whole or the principles in such a way that some kind of "overlapping consensus" between principles and corollaries is realized. Hence, there is a two-way interaction between the universality of pervasive religious, ethical, and philosophical concepts, and the messages, symbols, slogans and ideals of Islam as well as the interpretive specificities with respect to integrative contexts. (Jafari Nia, 2012: 53; Al-Mekki, 1966)

In addition, Islam emphasizes on the linkage between intention and form of action. However, intention of action is sometimes more important than its form. (Ibn Hayoun, 1965) But Islam has emphasized in some cases on the forms of acts such as prayers and hijab which are the forms of worship and chastity respectively. Also, in the area of the rule of law in Islam, there is some kind of consistency between the form and content so that the article's interpretation of Islamic thought is that from the viewpoint of content it emphasizes on universal assumptions in Islamic doctrines and in terms of formality, it has no objections to pluralism, multiculturalism and adherence to modern political structures, as well as openness towards diverse cultures, on the condition of Islamic rules observance and that of preservation of religious authenticity. (Hazri, 2016)

#### B) At the structural level

The theory of relative universality in terms of structure is based on compound and two-level legitimacy (from the ontological perspective), pluralistic unity (from the epistemological perspective), and multilevel governance (from the methodological perspective).

1-Compound and Two-Level Legitimacy: According to the two-layered conception of the term legitimacy, there is, in the theory of relative universality in Islam, a hybrid and two-level approach to the longitudinal relationship between the universality of divine legitimacy aiming at establishing justice in human society based on religious texts, with the relativity of popular legitimacy measured by the assessment of efficiency of the political system based on public opinion and popular support and respect for the right of universal suffrage. Thus, there are two levels of legitimacy: first, the primary legitimacy of the political system, which is rooted in religious principles and scripture and is indispensable as divine; and second, popular support for the political system. According to the instruction of Imam Ali regarding political guardianship: "If it were not for the presence of that large crowd (for allegiance to me) and for

helping to bring the contention to an end, and for the covenant of the Exalted God from the Olama (religious scholars) and the wise not to rest on the oppressive course of the oppressed, the string of camel calf would be mounted; I would throw it away" (Nahj al-Balagha, Faiz al-Islam, sermon 3:52) Public support for the political system operates on its secondary legitimacy and makes the political system effective and efficient in practice.

Islam emphasizes on the rule of principles over corollaries and that of universality over relativity, and emphasizes on a kind of interconnectedness between the universality of principles and fixed value criteria with the relativity of corollaries extracted from principles over a longitudinal relationship. Given the rule of principles over branches in the jurisprudential interpretation of Islam, the duty-oriented Muslims should distinguish between general principle and its examples. But Islamic law jurisprudence has some basic justification for inferring religious law by the Muslim Jurists. The Holy Prophet is quoted as saying that: If the Mujtahid is led to proper understanding of the commandments, he will have two merits, and if one goes wrong he will have one. (Ameli Nabati, 1964)

The universality of Shari'a principles and laws, while the relative role of custom in determining and explaining the extent and scope of Shari'a themes, demonstrates the two-level legitimacy of the general principles and particular custom. Accordingly, custom as a mental perspective, objective approach, practical character, and behavioral habit of a particular group of people, at a particular time, place, condition, and situation that reflects the culture and beliefs of that particular group is a contextualized conception of universality of Islamic doctrines. Thus, by borrowing from the philosophical interpretation of "existential hierarchy" and extending it to the basic Islamic notions, it can be interpreted that the principle of stratification and relativity in hierarchies and stratifications, requires that while benefiting from constant, basic and universal principles, there are secondary, multifaceted, varied, numerous, variable, and transformative procedures, patterns, rules, and practices. Accordingly, the text of religion is composed of longitudinal relation between High jurisprudence (worldviews and beliefs), the intermediate jurisprudence (ethics and mysticism) and low jurisprudence (Shari'a Practical precepts), which, at the same time, is the primary and secondary relationship between higher and lower rank. Rather, they interact with each other and give rise to a mixed and two-level legitimacy.

## 2. Pluralistic unity:

In Islamic thought, unity belongs to the absolute world (divine world as the higher world), which is based on the providence of divine reverence and the will of the Almighty God, as the manifestation of unity, whereas the plurality is related to the relative and low world and to the inferior material or extravagant world of nature. In the latter, the manifestation of human action derives from and relies on the existence and effect of the divine will and the result of the emergence of the will of the divine world. This intertwinement of higher and lower worlds leads to the unification and systematic unity of the objects despite their plurality in such a way that inspired by the "string theory" there is a kind of interconnection and interaction between the divine principles and multiple procedures and corollaries as the momentum of relative vibrations and frequencies. (Khan, 2015)

The universality of Islam's ideals, norms and principles based on common doctrines and ideas across cultural and geographical boundaries with respect to dimming of boundaries and erosion of sovereignty despite particularistic, pragmatic, modern and pluralistic approaches based on the diversity of national and local traditions, cultures and rituals indicate that Islam bears "many globalizations" or "multi-globalization" in the methodical and procedural arena based on the respect for cultural diversity and identity differences, so that Islamic globalization is in competition and critical interaction with Western, Confucian and Russian globalizations, while at the same time Islam has no opposition towards pluralistic consensus in the ontological and epistemological arenas. As such, universalism and relativism complement each other rather than conflicting with one another.

In the system of creation, the Almighty God, despite molding the human nature from Adam and Eve, and the emphasis on the universality of the common human nature and species as well as the unity of the essence of human being, has created and varied human beings to know one another. Hence, while acknowledging and recognizing the multiplicity and diversity of nations, races and cultures worldwide, and considering ethnic and racial diversity in line with the philosophy of creation for the emergence of human creativity, the need for collective human consciousness is based on the divine and monotheistic doctrine. While rejecting discriminatory interpretations of diversity, Islam emphasizes on the need for human societies to connect and recognize one another through interactive, positive and constructive dialogue for realizing convergence and rapprochement of human beings. The universalistic, unifying and monotheistic approaches for promoting human dignity and observing ethical norms and standards while respecting cultural diversity and plurality with regard to different social contexts and diverse temporal and spatial conditions indicate that Islam bears a kind of adaptation and interconnectedness between the unity of universalistic values and the multiplicity of contextual factors in order to respond to the political and social needs of human beings in the contemporary world, in appropriateness with local contexts. (Babaei, 2017: 27-4) The philosophical and sometimes mystical interpretation of "unity despite plurality" can be expanded to indicate that Islam as a moral and intellectual entity, with universal goals, aspirations and values, and normative software capacities based on monotheism, bears extended degrees of conformity, consistency and adaptability to the cultural differences, civilizational distinctions, and multiple social contexts.

### **3. Multilayered governance:**

The author has the impression that governance, the way of governing, has a higher priority in Islam than the government, in that there is a kind of flexibility and interconnectedness between sub-national, national, and transnational layers for the realization of ultimate and intermediate absolute values. In other words, Governance is different from government. Governance as a concept specifies that power inside and outside official authority and governmental institutions is going on in the form of the interaction between three main groups of actors; Government, private sector and civil society. The concept of governance emphasizes on the process, making clear that decisions are made according to complex relationships between a number of actors with different preferences and styles. The Governance establishes

an adaptation between competing and conflicting priorities and methods of these actors. Government, on the other hand, is a particular institution for exertion of power, based on vertical structure and unilateral imposition. The governance is a horizontal space, where non-governmental actors are interacting with governmental apparatus. They are so dependent on each other that they cannot act without each other. In this regard, the space of governance is no longer a state-centered space. Therefore, the role of the government in society is redefined as regulator.

In this multilevel governance, we witness the universality of sovereignty and the governance system, while the mode of governance of the rulers is relative. It gives preference to how to govern rather than who would govern. The governance is based on mutual and dynamic relations between governors and citizens and on the balance between freedom (with responsibility), justice and (multidimensional) security. It is based on developing and strengthening the rational aspects of modern State, based on extensive (ontological, normative, instrumental and relational) rationality. This multilayered governance, while striving to spread universal ideals and to promote the trans-geographic and trans-governmental message worldwide, does not oppose cultural, traditional and local diversity. In this perspective, one can think of the Islam's flexible hierarchical approach in such a way that it provides a kind of relative autonomy for national and transnational units to organize themselves socially within the framework of universal morality and religious law.

Accordingly, the author's conception of Islam is to recognize the culture, history, language, and way of life of communities, and to prescribe limited local exceptions and changes within the framework of the temporal and spatial custom in the case of permission by the Almighty God. It Reflects the coexistence of religious doctrines and universal legal structures with the relativity of agents, processes, and contexts appropriate to the cultural conditions and characteristics and temporal and spatial contexts of a particular community. (Zamani, 1995: 156)

The theory of relative universality in Islam calls for the harmonization between universal standards and diverse and multiple cultural contexts, so that universalism and relativity as a two-edged coin have a kind of "dialectical unity". Islam recognizes the "right to culture" i.e. respect for cultural diversity, specific ethnic and local traditions and traditions, and for the implementation of universal values appropriate to different cultural and social conditions, traditions, and circumstances, if not contradicted by the Sharia. Islam believes that conducting specific cultural activities or respecting traditional and historical attitudes should not violate the universality of Islamic worldview nor undermine cohesive and integrative norms. Therefore, respect for cultural differences is acceptable to the extent that it does not violate Shari'a principles and does not harm the bottom line of religious norms. In fact, in a world where awareness of differences is growing, the search for a common ground based on devotional worship while respecting cultural diversity is the preferred option of Islam, as it commemorates the diversity as a prerequisite for appreciating human collective consciousness, in order to meet common problems and challenges of humanity. (Robertson, 1987: 35-42)

Multilayered governance rests on rejecting radical universalism while rejecting radical relativism because radical universalism ignores cultural diversity and radical relativism

provides the basis for the abuse of power in authoritarian regimes. Hence, the relative universalism in Islam rests on a kind of moderate theoretical foundation that is free from radical aspects. To that end, Islam bears limited cultural relativism to the extent that local culture and custom, as a major source of credibility for the application of moral or normative rules, does not allow for substantive changes in the way in which universal norms and standards are enforced. Thus, based on the overlapping consensus approach, cultural relativism merely allows for formal and procedural changes in the way Islamic rules are enforced. In this way, the relative freedom of practice for diverse cultures as well as distinct interpretations and perceptions of universal principles are permitted only if the content of religious standards and norms is not impaired.

Islam permits multi-layered governance in the acquiescent zone and accepts relativity in the field of matching and executing permissible precepts. According to the noble hadith of Imam Ali "Verily, Allah has been acquiescent for some issues, not because of forgetfulness; so do not trouble yourself" (Bahrani, Nahj al-Balagha, 2006, vol.8, p. 97, wisdom 97). The Almighty God, with his silence in issuing a precept in the acquiescent zone, and emphasizing the role of civil law in determining the concrete examples of acquiescent precepts, while emphasizing on universal principles and insisting on the necessity of observance of obligatory and avoidance of forbidden acts, provides a kind of customary relativism for permissible precepts. Of course, non-issuance of a precept does not necessarily mean a lack of religious precept, in addition to the fact that the legitimacy of the custom derives from the authorization of God for permissible precepts. It is in this context that the Islamic State plays, in the multi-layered governance, a regulatory and controlling role and not an omnipotent one, in the exercise of power, in the way that it monitors the role of traditions in local communities while overseeing the atmosphere of the interaction of people with non-governmental and civil institutions in order to control practically the local authority and governance.

In the multilayered governance, Islam tries to reply to both the Platonic question of "Who Governs?" and to the Machiavellian questions of "How to Govern". For the question of "who governs", there should be a just, righteous and ethical leader disposing of the virtue of knowledge and management, who provides the possibility of public participation in political and social issues as well as giving the possibility to the elites as social capital of nation to serve in the governmental arena. It emphasizes also on the rotation of elites as well as a combined creative cooperation, interaction and partnership of four sectors: government, private sector, civil society and cooperative corporations. As far as the question of "How to Govern?" is concerned, there should be a political system which can ensure man's perfection and prosperity both materially and spiritually, and which provides the opportunity for a just, right and spiritual prosperity. Therefore, peace, equality, tolerance, ethics and spirituality are the orientation of the Islamic governance towards the realization of prosperity as well as the social and individual virtues as the context for religious democracy and participatory governance. In other words, in the Islamic society, there is no duality between ethics and politics as both should ensure man's prosperity and dignity as well as his ability to choose his destiny. In such a society, politics is the continuation of ethics and the ethics forms the infrastructure for politics.

### C) At the agent level:

Islam, based on the idea of Mahdavi's universalistic governance in Shiite school of thought, believes in universal and transnational governance that transcends geographical boundaries but does not mean neglecting transnational actors. Thus, according to the theory of relative universality in Islam, at the actor level, there is a kind of interaction between sub-national, national and transnational actors. At the sub-national level, Islam emphasizes the proactive role of the sub-national actors by emphasizing cultural diversity and respect for ethnic and local values. (Qaradawi, 2003)

At the national level, in Islamic thought, national governmental and non-state actors have a vital role to play in the dynamics of global governance. In this perspective, the Ummah represents the universalization of Islam, regardless of its territorial, racial, linguistic and ethnic differences, whereas the nation connotes national boundaries and territorial sovereignty. It seems that in the age of globalization, the Ummah and the nation are interacting. That is to say, the Muslim nations with the Ummah-based approach call for a universal united Ummah. The latter welcomes the interaction with or the inclusion of different nations. Of course, the process of passage from nation to Ummah necessitates the observance of the rules such as incremental performance and governmental capability.

As such, the role played by States within the specified geographical boundaries is accepted on contractual basis. In addition to States, peoples, including believers, citizens and elites, also play a role in orienting political processes through consultation and advice to the rulers. Also, in the framework of Islamic governance the Qur'anic addresses to the public in expressing the universal mission of the Holy Prophet of Islam indicate that in the Islamic thought public and the believers are simultaneously regarded as both audiences and actors. The Qur'anic verses of A'araaf 158 (Say: O my people! I am the Messenger of God unto you all, to Him belongs the Sovereignty of the heavens and the earth.) and Anbiya 107 (We did not send you except for the mercy of the world) as well as Saba 28 (We did not send you except to all the people, to preach the God rewards and to exhort the divine doom) are a proof to support the aforementioned. At the transnational level, Islamic civilization and international institutions are considered as acceptable actors in the international relations of Islam. By borrowing from Samuel Huntington's view of civilizations as actors in international relations, (Huntington, 1993: 22- 49) It can be deducted that Islamic civilization relies on features such as morality, rationality, self-esteem, and scientism to critically interact with other civilizations (Dehshiri, 2017: 27-45). Also, international institutions and organizations, which are the embodiment of internationalism and multilateralism in international relations, are acceptable in the Islamic thought of International Relations as a mechanism for mutual engagement because other State actors are bound by their pledge to fulfill their obligations, and the possibility of adjudication by Islamic State through constraining other countries to observe the international treaties and conventions would be provided.

### D) At the level of processes

The theory of relative universality in Islam at the level of processes is based on general and particular intertwinement (from the ontological perspective), the nexus between tradition

and modernity (from the epistemological point of view), and continuity despite change (from the methodological point of view).

1- The intertwinement of general and particular: according to Islam, general affairs are global and universal whereas particular affairs are contextual, so that the divine general traditions as series of global general laws are universal but the material world, in which we witness the social change, due to the evolution of complex trends and human innovations and creativities, is relative. Qur'an, when discussing the laws and traditions as the leitmotiv in human history, emphasizes on the continuing frameworks, principles, rules and practices of the divine traditions which will not change or transform (Isra77, Ahzab/ 62). , Fatir/ 43, Fath / 23). While emphasizing on the universality of "being", it also emphasizes on the relativity of "becoming" in respect to the possibility of human transformation and change within the framework of divine provisions. "Therefore, one can speak of "Relative Finalities", because within this mindset, "becoming" will lead to human creativity and ingenuity in the framework of divine traditions, and pave the way for social growth, human development and evolution, and the better understanding of the creation system.

Concerning the intertwinement of general and particular in Islamic thought, it must be acknowledged that God's mercy encompasses all of his creatures- according to his attribute as "Al-Rahman" -will he is also benevolent to his specifically righteous servants- according to his attribute of being "Al-Rahim"- , in the same manner, the Prophet (Peace be upon him) preached to the general public (Naas)but his guidance was specific to the believers; so the Qur'an is regarded as a general cure to the general public and a special cure for the believers (Va shifa lema fi-s-sodor : "the word that heals what is in the hearts") (Surah Yunus, Verse 57).

According to some commentators, in the general addressing of Islam, or "Ya'aiyoha al-Naas " (Surat al-Fatir, verse 5), addressing Naas (or the people), indicates that it's a very general target society, namely, the human community composed of ordinary people. But the Qur'an addresses some people specifically when it says: "Ya'aiyoha Al-lazin Aamanou " (Surat Ma'eda, verse 94) addressing the Muslims or the believers to whom the detailed phrases of Qur'an were revealed during the twenty-three years of the Holy Prophet's mission. Also, some Quran commentators, including Allameh Tabatabai in his book on Quran, al-Mizan, argue that the whole Qur'an was revealed to the blessed heart of Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) at the night of Ghadr, in a form that is known as "Enzal", i.e. descending the whole content of the Qur'an. Afterwards, Qur'an was reveled in details and over the course of twenty-three years, and each reveled part was supposed to fit the specific spatial and temporal context. This gradual revelation is known as "Tanzil" (Tabatabai, 1981, vol. 20: 330-331). Hence, the general principles and universal frameworks of Islam can be presented as a whole, but these principles are presented gradually and according to contextual circumstances as well as the stratification in methods, procedures, mechanisms and tools.

As such, Islam underlines universalism in general affairs, whereas in specific and minor matters it opens the way for relativism and gradualism, yet it is shown that there is a mutual interaction and interplay between global universal and homogenous principles and norms, with the pluralistic and particularistic processes and procedures, taking into account the bottom-up impact of local communities on global governance. Ronald Robertson calls this interaction "the

two-fold process involving the universalization of the particular and the particularization of the universal." (Robertson, 1992: 102)

2- The nexus between Tradition and Modernity: Islam does not seem to oppose the linkage between religion's powerful values, principles, and dynamics to the modernity and contemporaneity. Therefore, it bears the conscious efforts to represent authentic religious beliefs and values with a new traditional approach at the areas of methods and practices. This approach negates the reductionist approach towards Islam, as the reductionism aims at limiting the scope of religion and minimizing the function of religion; whereas the modern approach towards Islam seeks to preserve the integrity and comprehensiveness of religion while making it operational, and bringing it into the realm of social reality, appropriate to modern world circumstances, so that the efficiency would be enhanced and the equilibrium between immaterial and material issues of religion would be established. (Babaei, 2017: 4-27) While stressing the importance of holding on to the sacred beliefs, doctrines, principles, and holy texts, Islam calls for a rational approach towards global issues arising within, due to the interplay of religion and modernity (as a different notion from modernism) (Bauman, 2000). Dichotomist approaches such as tradition versus modernity, society versus individual, general versus particular, divinity vs. materiality, and universalism versus relativity, are negated by Islam, as it calls for a synthetic, hybrid and spectral approach.

The theory of relative universality is based on the possibility of the congruence of religion and modernity, whereby one can establish a linkage between universal Islamic goals and motivations to moralize social relations, and the indigenous efforts to utilize modern communication technologies, to the extent that it provides the interplay and the intertwinement between localism and globalization, because Islamic teachings have the universal and encompassing potentiality and adaptability to respect cultural diversity. Islam emphasizes on the common features of human beings and the universal nature of religious mission as well as just, moral and spiritual teachings, in order to spread and embody the religious doctrines into all aspects of human life and to realize human prosperity and salvation. It believes also in the necessity of social and cultural contextualization based on rational, interactive and flexible approaches in order to allow for "globalization from above" while simultaneously giving rise to the "globalization from below", or to "many globalizations".

3. Continuity despite change: Islam proposes the continuity of human nature unity and the authenticity of the inherent dignity of human being, as the caliph of God on earth and the divine trusty, but it also acknowledges conditionally the influence of national or local cultures and traditions on some aspects of human nature, because human being nature is a social construct and a natural creature as well. Therefore, the cultural variability of human nature with respect to the social aspect of human nature should not be ignored, although this variability should not be in contrast with fundamental human rights, including "the right to life" and the "freedom synthetized with responsibility".

The theory of relative universality in Islam is based on complementary of perpetual principles originating from discursive, normative, and ideational universals, with variables resulting from temporal, spatial, contextual, and contingent factors. It is stated in the "Al-Shari'ah Purposes" that as" Allah intends every facility for you; he does not want to put you to

difficulties" "يُرِيدُ اللَّهُ بِكُمُ الْيُسْرَ وَلَا يُرِيدُ بِكُمُ الْعُسْرَ" (Baqarah, verse 185), so the criteria of precepts' enforcement should be the consideration of hardness (hardship) and ease (facility). (Ibn Ashour, 1947)

Theory of relative universality in Islam emphasizes on Spiritual essentialism, authenticity of religious beliefs, the unity of Monotheistic Teachings, and the Application of General, Natural and Unalterable religious subjects to all aspects of the individual and public life. In fact, Islam does not oppose to a dynamic and transformative approach in the social and cultural life, based on innovations and creativities inherent in diverse indigenous traditions and rituals. In other words, the universal consensus on the ideational, conceptual and content core of religion is compatible with the variability of its law enforcement practices and procedures as well as its functional relativity appropriate to particular temporal and spatial situation, so that religious values and traditions and pervasive ethical elements can coincide and overlap with multiple modernities, various traditions, institutions, and cultures of national and local communities. (Alam, 2017)

This synthetic approach is based on the compatibility of religion with modernity (and not with Western modernism), thus it emphasizes on the need for "de-westernization of modernity" and rejecting the monopoly or hegemony of Western modernism, to guide the audience's attention to the necessity of new ways of thinking and reconstructing religion with new methods, given the expanding flow of information and communication; according to Bruce Lawrence, religion exploits the benefits of modernity without being subject to modernist values such as individualism, relativism, liberalism, and secularism. (Lawrence, 1989: 2)

Rather than emphasizing on homogeneity, the theory of relative universality in Islam emphasizes on harmony, and rather than emphasizing on differences, it highlights the diversity, because Islam believes that through multiple interpretations or redefinition and reinterpretation of modernity, based on non-western assumptions of modernity, we can reconcile religion with various forms of modernities in order to construct an Islamic modernity as the "alternative modernity". (Dehshiri, 2017: 45-27) According to Sharot, neo-traditional Islamists adopt the scientific and technological components of modernity but criticize its cultural and moral values. (Sharot, 1992: 24-45)

As such, the theory of relative universality emphasizes on the fixed, absolute, and universal principles, at the level of ontology that are commonly agreed upon, and attempts to produce a cognitive synthesis of changing, multifaceted, and dynamic practices with respect to the varied circumstantial contexts that have the fluidity and volatility, in order to establish interconnectedness between two seemingly contradictory trends within the framework of a cross-cutting, syncretic, synthetic and hybrid approach. Therefore, one can refer to the "organic nexus" of "Reality" and "Hyper-reality" using Baudrillard's terminology (Smith & Clarke, 2015) or the "reclaiming reality" as interpreted by Roy Bhaskar (Bhaskar, 1993: 242), a nexus that is represented in the form of "virtual reality" or "Post-truth. That means that the "translated world" replaces the "experienced world" by the means of new communication tools. With the increasing use of social networks as a source of news, we witness how the reality is represented and is gaining more importance in shaping international public opinion than the reality itself. Therefore, given that virtual is a bridge to the real (المجاز قنطرة الحقيقة), one can talk about the

interaction of reality with post-truth in order to enhance the efficiency of image-making. (For more information on post-reality refer to: Malekshahi, 2018: 446)

## CONCLUSION

This study shows that the theory of "relative universality" can comprehensively explain the dialectical relationship between the universality of Islamic basic values and the relativity of its socio-political practices through four levels of analysis: context, structure, actors, and processes. These key findings contribute to the development of a more holistic perspective of Islamic international relations, by affirming that Islam has an internal capacity to harmonize universal principles such as monotheism and justice with cultural diversity, social structure, and the dynamics of modernity within the framework of multilayered governance. The theoretical implication is the need to read Islam not dichotomically, but as an adaptive and interactive system in the face of globalization. The limitations of this research lie in its focus that is more conceptual than empirical, so further studies need to test the application of the theory of relative universality in concrete cases in contemporary international relations practice, both at the level of countries, Muslim communities, and transnational organizations.

## AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

The Author Contributions Statement can be up to several sentences long and should briefly describe the tasks of individual authors. Please list only 2 initials for each author, without full stops, but separated by commas (e.g. JC, JS). In the case of two authors with the same initials, please use their middle initial to differentiate between them (e.g. REW, RSW). The Author Contributions Statement should be included at the end of the manuscript before the References.

## CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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