The Sociological Analysis of Iranian Scholars Approaches to Western Civil Society

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Abstract

The present paper aims to introduce a sociological analysis of components, concepts and aspects of Iranian approaches to civil society. In term of religion, Iranian approaches to civil society are divided into two groups: religious and secular (liberal) approaches. Religious approach is divided into two groups of opponents and proponents of civil society compatibility with religion. Opponents suggests the differences between Islamic society and civil society with respect to freedom, equality, principle of majority, human right, legislation, state, relationship between state and society, plurality, and tolerance. On the hand, proponents emphasize on independent public sphere, non-governmental organizations, pluralism, legality, collective sense, civil rights, rights of minorities, and respect to human dignity. In liberal or secular approach to civil society, civil society has components, aspects and concepts such as non-governmental organizations, social movements, public sphere, public opinion, collective wisdom, free economy and law state, which can be realized in all of societies (religious and non-religious) and is applicable in Iranian society.

Keywords: civil society, Islamic society, Iranian scholars, sociological analysis.
1. Introduction
The history of the civil society debates in Iran dates back to less than two decades, initially in the early 1990s in some specialized journals of social science by university professors, political activists and clerics were discussed theoretically and in less than a decade later, during the seventh period of the presidential campaign in May 1997, by Mohammad Khatami, the former Iranian President, it was introduced to public opinion and, in practice, became one of the political demands of Iranian people. With respect to the importance of civil society at that time, in the dates of 31 January and 1 February 1998, in a seminar entitled “the realization of civil society in the Islamic Revolution of Iran”, four domains concepts and components of civil society, religion and civil society, civil society and law, and civil society in Iran, in the 65 articles were discussed theoretically. The results of these debates were published in a book under the title of "Organization of Cultural Documents of Islamic Revolution" in 1998. Since that time, although a few books and articles have been written about this matter, this subject has been almost forgotten in the intellectual debates. In this regard, in this study our purpose is to conduct a sociological analysis on the Iranian scholars’ approaches to civil society.

2. Iranian Approaches to Civil Society
According to the criterion of religion two main approaches to civil society can be identified in Iran: religious approach and secular or liberal approach

2.1. Religious approach to civil society
The religious approach is divided into two categories: the approach of "incompatibility of religion with civil society" and "compatibility of religion with civil society". In the first approach, being a religious community is a priority and there is the belief that civil society in many indices and components is distinct from religion and therefore its realization is not practical in a religious community. The second approach, or religious approach in agreement with civil society, while it adopts and prefers religious community, it will emphasize on the civil society, because it recognizes many common points and similarities between religion and civil society components.

A. The approach of "incompatibility of religion with civil society"
In this approach, with the belief that civil society subject is a liberal and western concept; it is considered contrary to religion (Islam). According to this view, civil society is free from religious values and its value principles and beliefs don't arise from religion, but from human reason and therefore they are not valid in Islam (Aghajari, 2000: 54). Ayatollah Sadeq Larijani, one of the clerics, in support of this approach says:

“In the Liberal thought if any abmoral law is accepted by public opinion it is legal and applicable and the state is obliged to implement it. Since there is no basis for determining right from wrong and make recommendations or give advice to people, the only government's duty is preserving of freedoms. If people thought that homosexual relationships or abortion should be legal, (liberal) state have to accept it and its laws will comply with them” (Larijani, 1997: 220).

Also with regard to their special understanding of religious society adherents of this approach believe that civil society is different from religions society and it's extreme. Ayatollah Vaez Tabasi in this case has stated that:

“The greatest difference of civil society with religious society is that in the religious community, engagement, responsibility and fear of God are important and state
positions are used for private interests, while completely contrary to these issues are present in the civil society” (Vaez Tabasi, 1997: 8).

In case of government, this group argues that in the expected political system by "Islam", heavenly laws are governing and ruling power should be appointed by God or the Prophet or "Imams" or by his successors, i.e. religious authorities, not through the election. Therefore, the relations between people and state in Islamic community are distinct from their counterparts in democracies. In their opinion, people in the Islamic society are divided into two groups of religious cleric elites i.e. "grand Ayatollahs", and simple mass. Although in some cases ordinary people in the private life are considered wise and grown-up, in all other matters related to public sphere, including politic, legislation, they are considered and should be under guardianship (Kadivar, 2003:58). Hence, the desired political system to this group is placed versus Western democracy, because the rights of people on the election by Islamic system are limited. Ayatollah Vaez Tabasi in this case has stated that: “Islam does not accept the democracy….., because in the democracy, majority is one of the principles and fundamentals that Islam does not accept it” (Vaez Tabasi, 1997:8).

Mohammad Javad Larijani, one of the experts of that approach, in his article of "government and its legitimacy", believes that people can't criticize and depose the Islamic leader, because in his view, "Islamic leader is a symbol of state legitimacy and obedience to him is not considered legally, but is a duty." (Larijani, 1970: 337). Therefore, according to Larijani, the religious leader of Islamic society is placed beyond the political administrations and gives them legitimacy. As he writes: in the Islamic government, "without any flaw in its legitimacy, the leader could dissolve administration of government that he has established due to its efficiency" (Ibid: 329). Similar the viewpoints of Larijani, Ayatollah Mesbah Yazdi believes that the supremacy of religious leader is followed by the supremacy of God, Prophet Mohammad and infallible Imams and also obedience to him is a duty (obligatory) for all people, because legitimacy of Islamic leader comes from God and not people and he has a plenipotentiary power, and legitimacy of legislative, executive and judiciary powers depend on him (Mesbah Yazdi, 1990: 159). He also reduces parliament to a council of leader and writes: "from the Islamic point of view, parliament is an advisory assemble to the religious leader, i.e. experts in each area evaluate and consider the issues … then the leader proves them based on Islamic law and he will sign them” (Ibid: 162).

According to this view, there are obvious differences between the religious and parliamentary democracy. For example, democracy is a temporary government, based on peoples vote, and limited to civil laws that people have developed and formulated them themselves. Whereas, religious government is divine, permanent and targeted (human good) phenomenon and human has no role in its regulations. According to Mohebbian , a journalist and one of the experts in this group, because of essential differences, any compatibility between religious community and Western civil society is impossible. In his opinion: "significant differences between civil society and religious community are based on fundamental principles". The legitimacy of civil society is derived from people vote but religious community is from divine origin. The establishment of divine government based on Western civil society's principles is impossible; likewise the expected civil society of Westerners based on divine legitimacy is not possible" (Mohebbian, 1997:30). Vaezi (2002) also states that there are similarities such as limited power, political participation, responsibility of public between religion (Islam) and civil society, because of fundamental conflicts in principles, integration of them is impossible. He distinguishes the most important contradictions between the principles of civil society
such as individualism, utilitarianism, instrumental rationality, secularism, pluralism, moral skepticism and non-ideological religion... with religious principles including rejection of issues like individualism, instrumental rationality, utilitarianism, and secularism. He also believes that the laws in the religious community have divine origin and because religious obligations are definite, any compatibility and reconciliation between civil society and religion or realization of a society, which can be as civil and religious, is impossible and contradictory. He explains:

“How can on the one hand, the religious and Islamic laws (Sharia) be followed, and on the other hand the civil society and necessity of realizing it be talked about? In the legislation of civil society, is there any place for divine sovereignty and laws? Or what exists, are individual and collective rights, these are discussed by political parties and civil organizations and are beyond religious legislations (Sharia)? ... How can moral (ethical) pluralism and secularism be combined with Islamic value system and its law (Sharia)? On the other hand, pluralism and tolerance should be viewed from two theoretical and practical aspects. Largely in civil society both pluralism (theoretical and practical) are common. Political pluralism and moral skepticism provide appropriate conditions for the spread of relativism, and recognition of completely opposite opinions and ideas. In practice, in civil society, as tolerance is respected, different thoughts and ideas with respect to collective essential rights have peaceful coexistence with each other. But in our religious thinking, although practical tolerance and pluralism are somehow recognized, theoretical contradictory views and pluralism are not so acceptable. Religious beliefs and values are not equal with other beliefs which in the pluralism have equal value and validity. Even in practical tolerance Islamic tolerance is not so spread as its counterpart in civil society. In religious society the matters such as Idolatry, laicism and homosexual relationship are not tolerated either individual or in groups” (Vaezi, 2002:111).

B. The approach of compatibility of religion with civil society

This approach tries to reconcile Islam with democracy. Mojtahed Shabestary is among scholars of this group. Without presenting a specific definition of civil society, regarding the relationship between religion and civil society, He believes that this relationship depends on two different kinds of our understanding of religion: In the first understanding of religion, the task of setting of worldly affairs is entrusted to humans by God and they through their wisdom and without the help of a supernatural power could solve their everyday problems and issues. According to the second understanding of religion, the human reason is not enough to solve the problems of everyday life. Therefore the people need to apply holy books and methods of prophets. To Mojtahed Shabestary, in the second type of religion's interpretation, the compatibility of religion and civil society is not possible. But based on three reasons, he rejects the totalitarian interpretation of religion and believes that religion and civil society can be compatible with each other:

“First… many of worldly needs of human beings such as science, art, philosophy and literature are not from occult world's guidance but are created by man throughout history. And thereby can be found that in the creation of human it was not determined that an occult power meet human needs. Second... human communities are inherently variable and changeable and cannot be considered fixed frameworks or mechanisms in their survival and development to be delivered by prophets. Third... historical phenomenology of religions shows that the essence of religions is different from their
substantial aspects and matters such as social evolution rule, the rules of social evolutions and changes of societies are outside of essence of religion. What is inherent in the monotheistic religion, are only to hear the message of God, confess testimony of faith and to follow monotheistic conduct. Religiosity could be bring combined with different social changes and mechanisms into a group and is also compatible with civil society" (Mojtahed Shabestary, 2002:105).

According to Soroush (1997), one of the other modern religious proponents, civil society is synonymous with "political society" and in contrast, the "primitive society" is defined as follow: "Civil or political society is placed versus primitive society, as society without government and without law, in which the separation of powers has not been done" (Soroush, 1997:16). Soroush has considered six characteristics for the civil society: independent sphere of government, non-ideological, pluralistic (political, cultural, and religious), and defender of human rights, lawful and based on law and diverse sources of knowledge (Ibid: 16). Regarding the relation of religion with civil society, He believes that the interpretation ability of religious understanding makes the reconciliation between religion and modern concepts possible. In his opinion, for this purpose it is necessary first to define religion and then, measure the relationship of acceptable religion to modern concepts, including democracy and civil society. In this regard, Soroush has mentioned two types of religious understanding and expectation of the religion, namely "minority insight of religion" and "majority insight of religion":

“The perception that believes that all necessary and sufficient rules and information and policies for the economy, government, business, law, ethics, theology, etc for each type of simple and complex mind and life are entered in the religious law (Sharia) and therefore believers don’t need any sources (for common good) other than religion, I call it majority insight or majority expectation of religion. Along with the majority vision, there is another insight that believes religion in the abovementioned cases (i. e. in the area of religious missions) has taught us few things” (Soroush, 2001:14).

To Soroush, only if our perception of religion changes, the religion can be compatible with civil society. It means that we should believe in a religion that is non-ideological, non-political and non – totalitarian and we accept that religion can only meet the spiritual needs of human and human beings in order to meet other needs must refer to other sciences.

According to Soroush:

“In civil society discussion is about how the governments can be limited... So far there is no contradiction between religion with civil society, but they complement each other totally. Where is religion in conflict with civil society? where religion does not recognize diversity and pluralism. However, we need a new interpretation and understanding of the religion. The reform of interpretation and understanding of religion can reconcile religion with civil society.” (Soroush, 1998: 128, 135, 140)

To Mohammad Khatami, the ex president of Iran, Islamic civil society is synonymous with "city of Prophet" that was a religious, not secular society. Khatami describes:

“Our desired civil society originates historical and theoretical from the city of Prophet. […] In this city and society, worship of God is combined with self determination and autonomy. Commitments of human to the divine and human virtues don’t contradict with his authority and comfort. Spirituality and piety are in accordance with fair and justice enjoyment of world benefits" (Khatami, 2000: 180)

About other characteristics of "religious civil society", Khatami writes:
"Although our desired civil society is based on Islamic thought and culture, it should not realize any case of individual and group despotism, majority tyranny and elimination of minority. In this society humans are behaved with dignity and honor and their rights are respected. The citizens of Islamic civil society have right of self determination, control of their affairs and critic on state. The state in this society is considered servant, not master of people, and in any case must be responsible to people. Our civil society, is not a society, in which are recognized only Muslims as citizen, but also is a society that everyone in the framework of law and order have all equal rights of citizenship and defense of them is the most important duty of Islamic government" (Ibid: 181).

Therefore, respect to human rights, equality of humans in front of the law, respect for minority's rights and the rights of self – determination are common characters of both civil societies (religious and western). But Khatami has distinguished two major differences between religious and western civil societies. First, religious civil society is a religious, not a secular society. Second, there are no vast liberal freedoms in religious civil society and all freedoms are limited to Islamic norms.

Mohsen Kadivar, an Islamic scholar and one of the religious proponents, defines civil society "as intermediate sphere between private life of people and government […]") that its basic characteristics are "free communities, participation, pluralism, competition, and recognizing human's rights " (Kadivar, 2000: 237). According to Kadivar, denial of civil society is equal to acceptance of totalitarianism and autocracy, because in the absence of civil society and pluralism, totalitarianism of government will spread and gradually will expand the control and supervision of government over all social systems (Ibid: 236). About the relationship between civil society and religious society, he raised the question "how must one administrate a religious society? "And then identified two despotic and democratic methods:

“The first method is closed, non – democratic, based on totalitarianism and or on individual despotism, the main feature of this approach believes to do anything with permission of the leader of government that is considered representative of God. The second method is democratic and non – totalitarian. In this method the administration of society is based on human experience and reference to human reason to solve the problems. So when we speak about the relationship between religion and civil society, we should determine what we mean: totalitarian and non - democratic religious society or democratic and non - totalitarian religious society?” (Ibid; 238)

While accepting the above dichotomy political typology, Kadivar concludes that the totalitarian religious society is never compatible with civil society, whereas non- totalitarian religious society is compatible with civil society.

Habibullah Peyman, a political activist, puts the civil society against the tribal community and gives the case of foundation of "the city of Prophet" as a historical example of it. According to Peyman (2001), civil society means a public sphere in which civil institutions, political parties, and free individuals, religions and ideologies are allowed to be present. Peyman writes:

“It is the public sphere, that all civil institutions with any class or ideological origins can have rational and non – imperative dialogues and raise and publicize their ideal values and intellectual perspectives along with their desired interests in connection with any issues of social, political or economic solutions … civil institutions like political parties, the variety of political, social, cultural and economical interest
groups, ... could raise their commands in the framework of ideological and religious values (Peyman, 2001: 35).

To Peyman, in civil society which has a safe sphere and is free from dominance and violence, public opinion is formed and can be achieve common consensus through free and rational dialogue. He considers rationalism, collective consensus, tolerance, pluralism and diversity, respect to rights of others, individual freedoms and rule of law as important features of civil society (Ibid: 32). Peyman, in response to the question: "what is the relationship between religion and civil society?" (Like Soroush, Shabestary, and Kadivar) links it to two different types of understandings of religion:

(a). In the first perception, religion is a divine institution, which is engaged in spiritual needs and its rules don’t originate from human reason and will. This religion has no compatibility with civil society, because civil society is a worldly institution which is formed to solve everyday problems of human life according to common sense.

(b). But according to the second perception of religion, there is compatibility between religion and civil society; because religion is considered as a value and thinking system that allowed be raising and discussing along with other thinking systems. In this interpretation, the only valid criterion for evaluation and judgment is common sense (Peyman, 1997: 29).

Hassan Yousefi Eshkevari, an Islamic scholar like Soroush and Peyman, has compared civil society with traditional society and has attributed to it features such as human will, choice and freedom, common sense, justice distribution of power and wealth, civil law and equality of all before the law, non elitism, independence from the state, protect of human's rights and freedoms (Yousefi Eshkevari, 1997: 17). About the relationship between religion (Islam) and politic in general and civil society in particular, he believes that Islam has not designed a permanent political system and God has not determined anybody to ruling. Legislation, like the governing is considered as human duty, because based on new changing needs we always need to enact new laws. But according to him, in a civil society in which people live based on religious values, government cannot disregard the religion, but it is obliged to act in the framework of religious values and norms, if they are codified and approved as regulations. The Religious civil society like the secular civil society is an independent society of the state and its various organizations protect the rights and freedoms of citizens. In opposition to secular civil society, it must protect the religious virtues and values of the society (Ibid: 31).

2.2. Non – religious approaches to civil society

The second group of Iranian proponents influenced by liberal – democracy theories, is trying to seek theoretical understanding of civil society and to design a domestic model of civil society which is adapted to Iranian culture. The difference between this group of proponents and religious proponents is that they don’t discuss about the relationship between religion and civil society. Introduction and analysis of civil society's components and categories, barriers of civil society in Iran and looking for their solutions are the main topics of discussions of this group.

Masoud Pedram, one of the scholars of that group, defines civil society as a “space between society and state that relies on liberalism and pluralism and is distinguished with indicators such as rationality, modern science, secularism and development” (Pedram, 2002: 6). Influenced by the theory of deliberative democracy' of Habermas, while accepting "discourse in the public space" as a basic fundamental of a stable democracy, he has discussed the main
barriers of accomplishment of civil society in Iran (Pedram, 2001). In his opinion, in our everyday life of Iranians, value – oriented rationality is dominant. To Pedram, in order to institutionalize the goal – oriented rationality in Iranian minds one should first refine the emotional elements of Iranian culture. He believed that with the help of Iranian mysticism we can refine Iranian culture and provide a public space for public dialogue, because there are in Iranian mysticism the elements such as sacrifice, anti-egoism, tolerance and flexibility, deep thinking, unification with the God, hermeneutic learning and understanding of others" (Ibid: 9). Pedram recognizes the maximal state, politically, and in terms of political culture, the individual "totalitarianism" and "authoritarianism" as the most important structural – historical barriers to the realization of a public sphere in Iran (ibid: 11).

Hushang Amirahmadi, a university professor, has a Hegelian perception of civil society. He defines the civil society as:

“A public sphere between state and citizen (family) that determines laws and rules for both of them. At the same time, civil society is the realm of discourses, organized activities and movements and autonomous and voluntary social institutions, which are formed based on common goals, legal order or set of contracts and coordinated values. The aims of these associations, activities and movements are to strengthen the potential abilities of their members and to protect them against probably attack of state or other organized groups.” (Amirahmadi, 2002: 113)

Based on this definition, two elements of civil society are non – governmental organizations (NGOs) and social movements and its most important function is the protection of the individual rights against the state (ibid: 77). To Amirahmadi, there are two important external and internal barriers for the development of civil society in Iran. He considers the policy of "political control and economic sanctions" by USA against Iran, after the revolution of 1979, as the external factor. In his opinion, if this policy continues, because of the following reasons, it damages the Iran's civil society:

a) The democratic characters of Iranian state including transparency, responsibility and accountability will be weaker.

b) The sphere of civil society is limited by state, in which it controls the activities of civil society's entities such as medians, association and movements.

Also Amirahmadi has mentioned also three factors as the most important internal barriers to the development of civil society in Iran:

i. The continuity of revolutionary revenge and violence in the Iranian political culture, which prevents the correct circulation of elites.

ii. The anonymity or lawlessness and consequently lack of social security, which prevents the formation and growth of institutions and elements of civil society.

iii. The rent – seeking revenues of the state which lead to the reduction of the dependency of state on the social classes and making it irresponsible and unaccountable (Ibid: 99 –100).

Musa Ghaninezhad, an economist and university professor, is one of the supporters of liberal civil society, an article titled "civil society; freedom, economics and politics" accepts "individual freedom" as the basic element of civil society and defines civil society as follows: Civil society consists of a social life area of individuals which is protected by law and in that everyone can be free of any fear and make decisions and arbitrations based on his free will and power of distinction (Ghaninezhad, 1999: 25). According to him, to realize this kind of civil society, first of all people should have "individual ownership rights". He believes that without economic independence of individuals, freedom of speech and the press, freedom of
political parties and social organizations, the realization of civil society is impossible (Ibid: 30).

Secondly, "competitive market system" make the fundamentals of civil society; which means that economic activities of individuals should be performed in a competitive and free environment based on mutual needs (ibid: 33). The third essential element which Ghaninezhad call it the strengthening factor of civil society in Iran, is " the rule of law". Qaninezhad (1999) believes that there are mutual relationships among the elements of civil society, namely, "competitive market", "individual freedom" and " the rule of law". Market system is based on the rule of law. The role of state in the market system is to maintain the order and guarantee law enforcement. Here, although the role of government as a referee in a collective Game is essential, this doesn’t mean states' sovereignty and dominance over the will of players of the market, this means that the state should not intervene in individual decisions, but oversee the activities of citizens not to exceed legal frameworks" (Ibid: 33).

Hashem Aghajari, a university professor, considers civil society as a society independent of the state, in which "… people and citizens apart from the will of the government, political institutions of ruling power somehow be able to defend themselves against the government" (Aghajari, 2000: 30). Aghajari (2002) in the book "religious government vs. democratic government" tried to explain civil society in Iran in the form of rationalization's theory of Max Weber and based on his "ideal type" of patterns of authority, namely, charismatic, traditional and legal authority. According to him, based on Max Weber's theory, charismatic authority in the process of development of the community changes into one of the other two types of traditional or legal authorities. This transformation in the modern western societies has been done in favor of legal authority, but in Iran it has lead to reconstruction of traditional authority (patrimonial regime or "sultanism") during the Pahlevi age and dual sovereignty of Islam and Republic during Islamic republic of Iran. (Aghajari, 2002: 317)

According to him, patrimonial structure of the power which has been restored always in different forms in Iran prevents the formation of horizontal free dominance relationships and also prevents the formation of civil institutions in Iranian society, because this structure leads to the control of major economic, political and social sources by ruling power and thus forming a monopolistic government. The unequal distribution of resources in the society by ruler results in the reinforcement a kind of opportunistic, irresponsible, alienation and passive political culture in the society. Therefore, to Aghajari, the formation of a "patron-client system" is one of the major obstacles to formation of a "legal authority" and development of civil society in Iran (Ibid: 323).

Hussein Bashiriyeh, a university professor, also presents a Hegelian interpretation of the civil society. According to him: “Civil society, contrary to state refers to the area of social relations that is free from intervention of political power and involve a set of institutions, associations and private and civil (non – private) organizations (Bashiriyeh, 1997a: 329). Accordingly, civil society includes all non – government areas such as economic, cultural and especially legal realms. Therefore, to Bashiriyeh, if people are able to participate in legislation and thus transform all their natural rights to enforceable civil rights, civil society will be realized. He states that: “civil society will be realized, if citizens could enact law and regulations in all affairs of their lives without any limitations, this means that they are free in their private lives. This refers to fundamental legislation as the basis of democracy” (quoted by Vaezi, 2002: 109).
Bashiriyeh (1997b) theoretically studied the developmental factors of the formation of civil society and the barriers to its realization. He classified them generally into two desirable and undesirable internal and external factors: according to this university professor, the process of modernization, including industrialization, urbanization, etc provide desirable conditions to realize civil society, whereas survive of absolute power and also the dominance of authoritarian ideology in the modernization process can create difficulties in the process of its institutionalization. We also can mention international favorable and unfavorable factors in the development and realization of civil society. In this respect, the concept of welfare state and maximal state are detrimental to achieve civil society, because they restrict activities of civil institutions, whereas the “minimal state” that doesn't intervene in public sphere lets civil institutions enjoy more independence, freedom and self-determination. To the writer, the four abovementioned conditions are true about Iran. So could one refer to the overall process of development as an internal desirable factor, and survive of “Authoritarian Ideology” as an unfavorable factor for the establishment and growth of civil society in Iran today. On the other hand, the emergence of new ideas of liberalism, privatization of the economy, and globalization process, maximal state theory, in the present international situations means providing a favorable external circumstance for the realization of civil society in Iran (Bashiriyeh, 1997b: 19-35).

3. Conclusion
The supporters of the Islamic society have attempted to identify the differences between Islamic community (velayat-e faqih-based community) and civil society (western community). The most important features have been summarized in Table 1.

Table 1. differences between Islamic society and western society according to the religious proponents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Western civil society specifications</th>
<th>Islamic society specifications</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Humanism</td>
<td>God - centered</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The rule of majority</td>
<td>The rule of (divine) legitimacy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moral skepticism</td>
<td>Faith and belief</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Based on citizenships duties of people to each other</td>
<td>Based on religious duties of people to God</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Civil law</td>
<td>Divine law</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Government characteristics: collective governance (including state, parliament and councils), the rule of elected, temporary president, with the popular legitimacy and limited powers to constitution</td>
<td>Government characteristics: individual and collective governance (including leader, state, parliament and councils), rule of religious leader, appointed, permanent, with the divine legitimacy i.e. responsible only to God, broad powers but limited to Islamic law</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secular state</td>
<td>Ideological state</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>People: divided to different ethnic, cultural, social group with many rights for example right to citizenship, right to critic on government, right to election. Bilateral relationship with the government based on mutual duties. Recognizing various religious, social, cultural, … pluralism Freedom and equality</td>
<td>People: divided to mass and elites. The mass obliged to do its duties, obedience to the government, and incompetence in the direct election of leader. Unilateral relationship with the government and based on religious duties. Rejection of pluralism, especially religious pluralism Limited freedom to Islamic law, inequality (between</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
men and women, Muslim and non-Muslim

| Unconditioned tolerance | Conditioned theoretical and practical tolerance |

In contrast to the proponents of religious society, modern religious proponents identify both common and different points between them. Overall, we could summarize the differences of religious society with civil society according to proponents of religious civil society as shown in table 2.

**Table 2.** differences between Islamic society and western society according to religious the religious scholars

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Western civil society</th>
<th>Islamic society</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Secular</td>
<td>Religious</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enforcement of civil rules</td>
<td>Enforcement of divine and civil rules</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rejection of role of religion in the legislation</td>
<td>Recognizing of minimal, non-political and non–ideological role of religion in the legislation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Popular legitimacy of government</td>
<td>Divine and popular legitimacy of government</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Separation of religion and politic</td>
<td>Combination of religion and politic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recognition of all positive and negative human freedoms</td>
<td>Recognition of conditioned human freedoms to Islamic law</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>State is not responsible about religious values</td>
<td>State is responsible about religious values</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Also, according to religious scholars, there are common characteristics between Islamic society and western society in terms of following:

- Definition of civil society: this group consider civil society as a modern society which is an independent area of the state which has been formed from NGOs, public opinion and political parties.
- Components: the most important components of the civil society to this group include: enforcement of law, respect for civil rights, common sense, independence of the government and pluralism.
- Functions: (Islamic or western) civil society’s functions include: public discourse, control of state, forming of public opinion, social participation in power, equal distribution of wealth and power, the prevention of elitism, the defense of social and religious values.

The following main points can be extracted from the topic of liberal civil society scholars in Iran:

- Contrary to the Islamic civil society adherents, liberal civil society supporters consider features, components and functions for civil society that are similar to (western) civil society and are accessible and applicable in every society including Iranian society. The desired civil society to this group is based on free economy, secularism, humanism and human reason and has three basic elements of civil institutions, social movements and a public sphere in which public opinion is formed. The independence of civil society from state is acceptable to all liberal civil society adherents. Also to this group, government should be small and limited and play the supervisory and non–interference role in the economy and civil society.

- According to liberal proponents, civil society in Iran today suffers from underdevelopment of the whole society, especially underdevelopment of economy, government, culture and public sphere along with lack of individuality.
Therefore, measures such as minimizing of state, economic liberalization and privatization, cultural reform, pluralizing of social structures and developing of public sphere can provide favorable circumstances to the realization and institutionalization of Iranian civil society in the future.
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