INTRODUCTION

Under the particular conditions of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, in the Middle East, the hallmark of the age was the politico-cultural domination of the West over the Islamic countries. Within this context, modernity was considered as the collection of the technological abilities and organizational skills, which were the cause of the Western countries' power. As a consequence of their view of modernity, Muslims considered the modernization of the Islamic societies as a mere transformation and subsequent adoption of the Western institutions and modern sciences in order to make the Islamic states as powerful as their Western enemies. As a result of this approach, the rationality that was attributed to modernity become an inherent part of the institutions. It was thought that by the mere transformation of the institutions, the rationality could also be planted in their traditional societies, regardless of the historical context which caused its emergence. Obviously, this notion of rationality is far from the notion, which considers modernity as a value-based process of insertion of human reason into different areas of human life. Due to this approach in the Middle East, secularism has predominantly been understood as the ideology of the above-mentioned replacement, which in the name of the transformation of modern Western institutions, dispossesses religion from the control that it was traditionally wielding over different social institutions. The main flaw of this type of modernism might be attributed to its underestimation of the past, and its ignorance regarding the important role that it can have in the social ordering of the present and future. By acknowledging the aforementioned deficit in the predominant notion of modernism, the Islamic reformists strove to present themselves as an alternative. But in reality, due to (a) their
selective approach towards tradition and modernity according to their political priorities, (b) lacking the capability and courage to interrogate the basics of tradition, (c) and due to their unawareness regarding the disastrous consequences of politicization and ideologization of religion, they failed to overcome the pitfalls of the previous approaches.

The main question that this study deals with is related to the place of religion in the contemporary Iran. By asserting the undesirability of the present situation in Iran where religion became the basis of sociopolitical formation, the study attempts to explain on the one hand the causes of this misplacement of religion and on the other hand, at a speculative level, it searches to adopt a sociopolitical framework in which religion’s place fits the order of a modern democratic society. The study views the failure of modernization as the main cause of the dislocation of religion in Iran. In other words, the occupation of the political stage in Iran by the forces of religious traditionalism, rather than being a sign of their political dynamism and strength, is a manifestation of the symptoms of a failed modernization. Therefore, at one level the present study attempts to understand and explain the different root causes of the failure of the modernization in Iran, and at another level it tries to find out whether there is a possibility for a different, but more suitable, path of modernization for the present context of Iran.

The story of Iran’s encounter with modernity is a long story. It could probably be traced back to the first war of Iran and Russia in the 1810s when Iran lost a big portion of her northern lands. The loss in the war awoke Iranians or at least some members of the court to the widening military gap between Europe and Iran. Basically, the modernization of Iran had started as a project by which this gap could be eliminated, though, later on, it became a comprehensive project, aimed at transforming Iran into a Western-like modern nation-state. As will be discussed in chapter one, the process of modernization in
Iran did not result into the situation that the followers of modernism in Iran had promised. It not only failed to upgrade the different institutions and transform Iran into an advanced country, but by its eagerness to replace traditional institutions with modern ones, unintentionally, it also created many types of new crises which made the entire situation much more complicated than was the case in pre-modern Iran. As a result, the transformation into a modern democratic sociopolitical order become much more difficult than it was in the last decades of the nineteenth century when the modern institutions were absent. This study challenges the ideas of the annalists who - from an Orientalist point of view - merely link the cultural, social and political aspects of the failure of modernization to the context in which these have been projected. For example, they link this failure of modernization to what they identify as an inherent cultural resistance of the region to secularism. In contrast, the present study believes that the failure of democratic modernization in Islamic countries, particularly in Iran, must also be related to the understanding of modernity and the way in which it has been projected into the context by modernists, secularists as well as non secularists. In other words, it is not enough to link this failure merely to the counter modernism of traditional forces in society. The failure was the result of a primary misunderstanding of the problem and the solution, and the mishandling of the entire project by those who upheld the ideology of modernism and those who strove for an authentic notion of modernity.

As a result of the absence of an interpretive and hermeneutical approach towards the understanding of modernity and tradition, the early modernists of Iran overlooked the complexity of learning and did not differentiate between learning, amendment and improvement from imitation, and replacement. Iranian modernists failed to achieve their aims and to change reality because their incorrect assessment of the situation led to a faulty projection of the situation, and consequently,
the application of flawed solutions. By not being aware of the falsehoods of the program that they had undertaken in order to change reality, the Iranians, unintentionally, projected their own failure. Accordingly, the Islamic revolution of 1978 with the occupation of the entire sociopolitical stage of Iran by clerics who were upholding pre-modern political and cultural values, is the unintentional result of a bad modernization which itself resulted from a wrong imagination of modernity, a flawed modernism which encompassed all political fractions of pre-Revolutionary Iran, including the Islamic reformists.

The main reason for this misconstruction might be related to the image of modernity and tradition. These two were seen as two separate entities, belonging to two separate universes. Modernity was considered as a rational edifice that creates scientific development, power, control and a specific sociopolitical order. On the contrary, tradition encompassed whatever could not be included in modernity or in other words the other of modernity, and a house to different types of irrationalities. Modernization was reduced to the replacement of the irrational entities of traditional life with the modern rational ones.

In this understanding of modernization, the Islamic reformists were no different from those who officially accepted modernism as a universal project and were striving for a full Westernization. To save the local culture as the basis of identity, the Islamic reformists and the followers of authenticity, by separating the cultural values of the Western modernity from its other aspects, requested a limited and selected modernization, while striving to re-insert Islamic culture into the sociopolitical life of the people. They were not aware of the dangers that could emerge when some unquestioned elements of the traditional belief system, according to political expediency, are brought into a public life which could no longer be considered as a traditional life order.
As a result of the created image of modernity and tradition, a paradigm of thinking and acting was shaped that was shared by the modernists as well as the opposite forces of counter modernism. What was common to both the modernists as well as the counter modernists was the assumption that modernization was a process of replacement. The difference between these two groups lay in that fact that while modernists supported this replacement, counter modernists resisted it. Islamic reformism was selective in its approach towards modernity and tradition as it favored change in some areas but resisted it in others. The thing that was ignored in between were modern values, ideas and a context-sensitive notion of human reasoning. Modernity was reduced to the modernization of material conditions and the scientific organization of human relations.

The story of Iranians' encounter with modernity is also a story of intermingling or dissociation of religion with politics. Religion, as the most important element of the traditional life with an omnipresent quality, became the focus of the Iranian debates on transformation. According to the Iranian modernists' approaches toward modernity and tradition (religion) they may be divided into two main categories. (A) The adherents of Western modernism as a universal ideology of replacement of all indigenous things with the modern ones. The hostility toward religion was the main hallmark of this group. (B) The other camp could be called as the defenders of "authenticity". They saw modernity as a quality rather than a collection of particular institutions. Believing in the existence of different avenues toward modernity, they accepted that religion should not be considered as the disturbing continuation of the past in the present, but rather as a cultural entity which itself is the best vehicle of transformation into modernity. The apogee of this trend of thought to be found in the views of Ali Shariati which was manifested in the Islamic Revolution of 1978. The history of the Iranians' encounter with modernity is mainly
the story of the mishandling of religion by the two dominant approaches in Iran. Either the importance and values of the religion were underestimated, or many qualities were unnecessarily attributed to it.

In the footsteps of the dominant narratives of modernity (mainly Hegelian and Weberian) in the West, Iranians constructed "an ontologically differentiated universe between 'West' and 'East' or 'modernity' and 'tradition', set the stage for the clashes which [were] proliferating in the contest between champions of 'authenticity' and defenders of 'universalism' " (Mirsepassi, 2000, p.11). The two revolutions of Iran (the constitutional revolution in 1905-11, and the Islamic revolution in 1978-9), are the political manifestation of the aforementioned clashes. While the first revolution shows us the political victory of the defenders of a universal modernism and their further failure to realize the project, the Islamic Revolution provides us with the same story for the champions of authenticity. Both of them were successful in overturning old regimes, but they both failed to realize their promises. The peculiarity of Iran's modern political history in the region is mainly related to her costly but failed experiences of the structural transformation from a traditional life order into a modern one.

But Iranian thinkers alone cannot be made to shoulder the blame for the formation of the above mentioned discourse: the absence of a strong tradition of political philosophy in the traditional resources of the Islamic thought made Iranians mere consumers of the political thought of the Western thinkers. When - under the compulsions of the time - Iranians started to produce sociopolitical theories, the lack of experience created failure rather than success. The Iranian discourse of modernization itself emerged from a Western paradigm of thought, dominant in the philosophical and sociological studies. The modern thinkers from their early age in the enlightenment till the twentieth century assumed the East as the non-part or the other of
the West, that means a cultural entity which included all kinds of negative qualities of which the Western culture is authentically is devoid. It can be seen in Montesquieu's *Persian Letters*, or in the way that Hegel explains the Historical movement, or in Weber's definition of Modern Rationality. By understanding modernity through Western resources, Iranians failed to approach it as a process of becoming, which through the insertion of human reason into different aspects of their life, makes it possible for them to remove the false and un-truth of the life-context or tradition in which they live.

According to the binary goals of the thesis, at one level the study hopes to explain the root causes of the Iranians failure in their engagement with modernity, which has drawn the society to a theocratic regime. To reach this primary objective, the thesis classifies three different sources which each had somehow a share and played a crucial role in the failure of a democratic modernization in Iran. The stagnation of the thought tradition in traditional life and the Iranians' subsequent inability to properly address the questions of the new age, is the first cause of their lack of success in their early encounter with modernity. The second cause of this failure is attributed, in this study, to the way that modernity and tradition have been understood and handled by modernists, including secularist and non-secularist trends. The third main source of the Iranians' failure in their encounter with modernity might be related to the way that modernity has been understood, interpreted and presented by the Western thinkers. To obtain the above mentioned objective, chapter one and some parts of chapter two and three are allotted to describe and explain the internal and external causes of the misunderstanding and mishandling of the project of modernization. As has been mentioned earlier, since the study has a binary objective, it not only describes the past and present political situation of Iran i.e. from where she started her encounter with modernity and where she presently
stands, but the thesis also searches for a possibility of a transformation of Iran from the present situation into a better situation. Therefore, at the other level, by referring to the views of Gadamer, Habermas, Rawls and Bhargava, I try to choose a more appropriate approach for the Iranian context, not only to rethink modernity and its relation with religion but also to revisit the compulsions of the new age.

The continuity of traditional thoughts in modern life and the consideration of an unproductive tradition as a means of encountering modernity, along with an unreflected transformation of the Western institutions into the situation in Iran, have transformed Iran into a deformed reality which encompasses clashes of traditionalists with modernists. As a result of this condition, Iran has become the battlefield of different identities and ideologies. Hence, the second objective of this study is to adopt a notion of modernity which not only makes it possible for Iranians, by becoming aware of the deformity of their living reality, to change the reality, but also to allow different Iranian identities to co-exist peacefully while each of them has a fair participation in the formation and the management of the sociopolitical order. Some parts of chapter two and chapter four are allocated to this purpose. In chapter five, on the one hand by describing the developments that the concept of political leadership has gone through in Shi'ism, the thesis assumes in the age of modernity Shi'ism was apt for a institutional separation of politics and religion as it was also apt for their fusion. On the other hand, by re-referring to the context of Iran and by describing and discussing the present situation of Iran, including some major traditions of thought

1 We use the verb to choose, rather than to find or to discover, to indicate that even if Iranian want to reengage themselves with modernity, it has to be through a Western framework of thought. We agree with Tabatabai's view based upon the fact that the generative life of Iranian tradition has ended. Therefore if there is any reengagement, either to modernity or to our own tradition, it has to go through a Western horizon. As a result in this level we have no choice but to choose our framework of thought within Western traditions of thought.
of the country, I examine, two distinct facets of the situation: one, the influence of the last hundred years of experience of the encounter with modernism - particularly the Islamic revolution - on the present thought of Iranian thinkers, and two, the relation of the present thought condition in Iran with the notion of modernity that the thesis upholds.

Our method in this study is a combination of the genealogical and hermeneutical understanding of the concepts and events. By accepting the idea that each concept or social event has a history, and by describing the ancestral roots of the concepts and events, the study hopes to show how the events and ideas in the past shaped the Iranians' present being. The thesis does not do this to unmask the presence of the disturbing elements of the past in our present situation in order to deconstruct the present sociopolitical order and to establish an alternative order. Being unsatisfied with the present condition, we know that something has gone wrong in the past; when describing the root cause(s) of an event or a concept, a combination of genealogical and hermeneutical approaches helps us to find out not only the elements which caused the malady but also to understand the exact nature of the present illness of the society. The hermeneutical approach presents understanding as a fusion of our horizon of thinking with the horizon of thinking of those who somehow effected the formation of the concept or the event. Hence, we approach the subject of study through our present horizon of thinking which also includes our notion of an ideal society; we interpret the ideas and events while having our specific questions regarding their positive or negative relevance to the realization of the ideal situation that we have in our mind. We do this not only to understand the demerits or the merits of the ideas and events which had an effect on the formation of the thematized subject, but also to find out the ideas which are in our horizon of thinking and which were left un-thought by the thinkers of
the past. As a result, we are able to propose a path that could have been taken in the past but was forsaken.

Therefore, to obtain the above-mentioned objectives, firstly in chapter one we provide a historical narration of the different branches of thoughts in the Islamic world with a focus on Iranian thinkers. We go through a manifestation of the different encounters of Iranians with modernity and tradition\(^1\) in modern times. By clarifying the thought condition in Islamic societies, the study firstly discusses how orthodoxy got predominance. I also examine whether this was the only option that Islam could offer to the society, or whether there was a possibility for the Muslims to step into other historical paths too. Then the study discusses the first reactions when modernity has heralded there. The focus in this part will be on the views of those Muslim thinkers who saw religion as a means of transformation. Subsequently we discuss how modernization was identified with westernization and how modernism as the official ideology of modernization failed to project modernity in the region. Later in the next section we explain how Islamic reformism ideologized Islam by politicizing religion. In the last part of chapter one we show how the mishandling of religion by different modernists led to the establishment of a religious autocracy and the abolition of modern values in society.

The omnipresence of religion in the society along with the mishandling of religion by the different modernist groups of Iran resulted in a situation in which the entire sociopolitical stage was occupied by the forces of counter-modernism. To envision a different path of modernization in which not only religion and politics could be set within the space that they belong, but which also can stop the misuse of religion by the different political interests, makes a theory of secularism a necessary auxiliary of our view of modernity. In other

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\(^1\) By tradition in this study we mean whatever which is handed down from previous generations of a nation to the present generation including all kind of written and unwritten heritages.
words, it is our contention that in a country like Iran we cannot have a successful democratic modernization till the relation of politics and religion is regulated within a theoretical framework. It is not only the necessities of a democratic political formation that makes the understanding of secularism an important fact in the course of our study, but it is also related to the political peculiarity of Shiism which much like Catholicism, is apt for a institutional separation of state and religion. Therefore, to present an accurate understanding of secularism, chapter two of the thesis aims at explaining the conceptual formation of secularism within the Western context. The chapter also searches to clarify whether the understanding of secularism, particularly in Islamic societies, is a fair and correct one or not. As shown in chapter one, in Islamic countries two kinds of policies were predominantly upheld regarding the presence of religion in political life. Either they stood for a total exclusion, or in the opposite direction, for a complete inclusion. By clarifying the ancestral roots of the Western secularization and secularism¹, at the one level the chapter presents how the West, by regulating the relation of religion and politics, transformed itself in the age of modernity, and how in between it conceptualized the process; and at the other level, by discussing the view of the critics of secularism and secularization in the non-western countries, we try to find out whether they have a proper understanding of the process in order to see whether some kind of secularism is relevant to the region or not. In the first part of chapter two we discuss the conceptual development of secularism within its original context. The study traces the formative role of internal rationalization of Christianity and the Reformation in the process of secularization although it continues to consider

¹ In this study we differentiate between secularization and secularism. By the former one we mean the process of removal of religious beliefs and rituals from public life, particularly in legal and political arena that make people able to do without religion, but with the latter one we mean a conceptual framework which clarifies the space of secularization, therefore make people to know in which area they are able to do things while they carry their religious identity, and where they are not allowed to enter if they carry their religious belief.
secularization as a political expedient and as a necessary answer to the historical changes which were taking place in Europe. In the second part of chapter two, the study focuses on the role that intellectual debates, particularly the Enlightenment, had played in the conceptual development of secularism.

The thesis discusses the ideas within their historical context in order to present how ideas and realities are interconnected. In the last part of the chapter, the study argues the views of those who believe that due to the particular qualities of secularism, it cannot be projected in the religious societies of Asia. Therefore by developing a clear account of secularism in our mind, we will see in chapter five whether aforementioned assertion is a true claim or a mere prejudice.

By acknowledging the fact that the separation of religion and state, and the regulation of the relation of religion and politics in the West, took place in the wider context of Western modernization, in chapter three we try to see modernity through the Western point of view. The primary task of the chapter is to provide us with a conceptual help to develop a better understanding of modernity. The study does this not only in order to find out the nature of the influence that the Western self-image and explanation of modernity has had on the non-Western understanding of modernity and the way that the non-Westerners attempted to realize modernity in their local context, but the thesis also approaches the Western views in order to know how much they are relevant to the present situation of Iran. Hence, we describe and interpret the Western thinkers' ideas while keeping the questions of our particular context present in the interpretation.

In chapter three we firstly discuss Hegel's view on modernity and we describe how he explained the new age within the totality of the Western historical life. In the next step we explain how he defined modernity as the triumph of reason in world history. By linking
Hegel's view of the rationality of the modern age to Horkheimer and Adorno's debate on modernity, the study reflects on the view which believes that modernity has failed to avoid the return of the myth.

In the second part, the study discusses Weber's view of the Western modernization. By discovering a causal relation between modernity and a particular belief system, Weber opens new windows toward the study of modernity and tradition. By classifying rationality into different types and varieties he considers modernity as a peculiar product of Western rationality, the only type of reason that has a universal quality. We will discuss how a Weberian approach may identify modernization with westernization, and how it has caused a misunderstanding of modernity and modernization by non-Westerners who strove to modernize their country.

Our critical view regarding the dominant Western presentation of the new age does not lead us to the view which believes that the non-Westerners have no need of the Western thoughts and debates in their movement toward the formation of a contextual modernization. In the last part of chapter three, by discussing Gadamer and Husserl's views of modernity, the study tries to escape from the trap of counter-modernism. I agree with Gadamer that understanding itself is a fusion of horizons. We are living in an age in which many of the Western institutions have already been universalized. A country like Iran cannot be considered as a modern democratic country but due to the long process of modernization, Iranians live in modern conditions. The alienness of the institutions did not stop them from taking root in a country like Iran, but probably they did not take the shape that they should have taken. Gadamer and Husserl's views of the horizon and its relation with understanding give us the opportunity not only to swing between our peculiar past and present life context but also to re-approach Western history and thought, in which we may understand the reason of the deformation of the modern institutions in our local context. Husserl and Gadamer's approach helps us to
have a better understanding of the past, and consequently a more suitable understanding of our contemporary questions. It also provides us a better chance to understand our present conditions so that we know where we are. But they do not give us a clue as to where we can go from the contemporary situation. It is this demand that brings us to chapter four and Habermas' notion of discursive modernity as an unfinished project.

To consider rationality as the outcome of a communicative inter-subjectivism of the community which is placed in a particular life-context, opens new opportunities to our particular situation in Iran. By considering modernity as the offshoot of de-centered human inter-subjectivism, which emerges from a particular life-context, Habermas delivers the concept of modernity from Euro-centrism, dominant in the debates on modernization. A country like Iran can neither be considered traditional nor modern, neither Western nor Eastern, neither a backward Third World country nor a post-industrial society. It is a country which sways between her different identities - not necessarily in a contradictory fashion. The discursive modernity makes it possible for her to consider the redisposition of the opposing identities within a redefined national framework. In other words a discursive notion of modernity gives us the opportunity to redefine the concept of nationhood and the coexistence of different communities or identities within a national framework. After describing Habermas' view on modernity and considering the advantages that it may provide for us, in the second part of chapter four we define the inherent political values of a modern sociopolitical order that a nation has to stand for, if it wants to be considered as a modern democratic nation. In this part, by connecting modern morality to the idea of liberty and human rights, the study contends that modern morality is basically a rights-based ethicality of which the toleration of the other is its main moral axiom. The interwovenness of the idea of democracy and the preservation of a pluralistic sociopolitical order, brings us to the last
part of chapter four where the study takes into account the necessities of a contextual notion of secularism, which universalizes the idea of Participation, and makes a peaceful co-existence of conflicting identities possible. The debate in this section is mainly based on Bhargava’s view of the issue. By the end of chapter four, at least at a speculative level, we know for what kind of sociopolitical formation the study stands.

Having these theoretical ideas in mind, in the last chapter we return to the context of Iran: the study strives to find some answers for her problems regarding modernity and its relation with religion. In this way, by passing through the conceptual development of the political leadership in Shia religion, the study not only presents how the change in historical conditions compelled the Shiites to redefine and reinvent the political concepts according to the necessities of reality, but also assumes that the historical developments in Shiism was more apt for a secular system in which state and religion were institutionally separated. This study looks at the present situation of Iran and the occupation of the political stage by the clerics, as one of the reinventions which resulted from the necessities of historical conditions, rather than from anything inherent in Shiism as it has been claimed by the clerics. Therefore in the end of this section the thesis claims that secularism as it has been understood in this study is relevant and necessary to the constitution of a democratic Iran and Shiism has no innate resistance to the application of secularism into the present context.

By presenting the views of three prominent thinkers of contemporary Iran we will then reassess the thought of authenticity in Iran. We see how the experience of the Islamic State and the failure of democratization through the revolution matured the Iranian modernists’ debates over the self, identity and coexistence of Iranians in a modern condition. We also see how Soroush, Shabestari and Tabatabai place religion in a modern condition. The
last part of this chapter is the concluding part of the study in which, by reviewing all debates discussed in the study and by reconnecting them to each other and to our problem, we will find an opportunity to reevaluate the study's answers to the questions of modernity, democracy and secularism regarding the contemporary context of Iran.