



GRM International Conference

“Religion and Human Rights in Diversity: Realities, Challenges and Applicability”

13 January 2016

Doshisha University, Kyoto, Japan

Rationale

While religious values and principles seem to resonate with the core values of Universal Declaration of Human Rights in the key aspects such as freedom, respect for human dignity, human rights protection, justice and peace, there are areas of controversy and contestation. Hence, the complex relationship between religion and human rights has been at the core of the discourse not only among scholars but beyond academic circle. It has become the common concern among various key actors; including religious leaders, policy makers and human rights activists as well as general public who are awakened by the recent development of religious tensions and their consequential gross human rights violations which can be observed in various parts across the world. The latter is characterized by suppression and discriminations on the basis of identities related to faiths and beliefs committed either in the name of religion or national security by both state and non state actors. Given the above facts, several themes and case studies regarding the diverse relationships between human rights and religion will be presented.

Religious Nationalism

Sectarian violence in Syria which has escalated into war beyond control with multiples external and internal actors, Muslim and Christian massacre in Central Africa, Catholic and Protestant violence in Northern Ireland, polarized Buddhist and Muslim communities in Southern Thailand, the world most protracted Israeli occupied territory of Palestine, entrenched Hindu Muslim communal division in India and most recent crisis of stateless Rohingya who are the victims of state manufactured genocidal policy in Myanmar are a

few to mention. One common characteristic of these deadly sectarian violent conflicts is the politicization of the religion which is carried out through state, political and religious institutions giving rise to the religious nationalism. Such phenomenon poses not only the question of the linkage between role of religion and nationalism in nation making which is lacking in nationalism studies but also how religion has been utilized to promote violence which is contradictory to religious values and principles which advocate compassion, loving kindness and peace among the believers.

Human Rights Come First: The Need for Political Will

A dangerous characteristic of the violent conflicts that result in human rights violations is the politicization of religion which is carried out through state, political and religious institutions. The act of politicizing religious and non-religious based conflicts serve self and narrow common interest. Especially when the matter is concerning one of the five permanent members of the UN; being the developed, rich, and powerful states, and owning the right to Veto, makes true democracy in the UN nearly impossible, and gridlock in the UN remain the best description. Under this notion of “restraining gridlock”, no advancement is possible without positive political will from the five permanent UN Security Council Members. Under this constraining gridlock, the work and effort of the hundreds of human rights organizations will remain limited to reporting human rights violations and providing aid to the victims with no true power to protect human rights. The notion of the responsibility to protect and the ability of the UN to stand for those words becomes questionable at times where human rights find only the support of words. Religion poses no threat to human rights, religion is only a tool used by politicians of all faiths and backgrounds to serve self and narrow common interest. Similar to this are the UN charters, theoretically able to solve conflicts and keep international peace, but practically restrained as a result of the absence of political will.

Further understanding of these issues would shed a light on the larger perspective on the complex relations of social and religious values in diverse and multi-cultural societies, and its relations to human rights in general in our contemporary time of accelerated

globalization; witnessing increasing interaction and communication among wide diversity of people and values within global societies.

Student Activism and Human Rights Discourse

The Universal Human Right declaration has created some tensions and divisions regarding its universality. The discourse of cultural relativism challenges the principle of universality and emphasizes on the importance of culture, history and religion. The Islamic Republic of Iran is one of the countries actively advocating such an approach since the Islamic revolution of 1979 when the law was islamized. However, by bringing up the discourse of religious democracy, a blend of republican ideas and religious values, for the first time in post-revolutionary era, reformist government (1997-2005) tried to enforce human rights in the framework of Islamic republic and within the boundaries of Iran's rigid unelected institutions. As a result, the discourse of human rights as an important discourse started to gradually take shape within the Iranian civil society especially university students as influential elements in shaping the political discourse of the country. The experience of political activism together with the influence of intellectuals further promoted the development of the discourse, to the extent that human rights, in its universal context, became the most important mission of student activism. Hence, a historical and critical approach should be taken to analyze the existing understandings towards human rights among the university students, how it was evolved and how it contributed to make a generalization of the discourse of rights within several sectors of the Iranian society.

Biomedical Ethic

Recently, the issue of biomedical ethics has become the more urgent especially how Muslim communities in Europe and North America, as example, tackle and mitigate the health field services. The principles of Biomedical Ethics are concerned with the Patient rights as a human right for those seeking the most necessary social services of the

provision of health. Religion does matter in this area. In Multi-cultural Europe, and certainly in many parts of the world, values do vary on vital health issues. To name a few, there are questions such as ending one's life "suicide," medical treatments, abortion, In Vitro Fertilization, " IVF," the surrogate mother, euthanasia or simply the act of signing the form of Inform Consent. Here, religious values and human rights are inseparably linked. Understanding Islamic perspective on these principles have become crucial to the medical field in diverse societies such as Europe, Canada and Multicultural societies. Moreover, Muslim countries do face new emerging issues such as rapid development of science technology and the perspective of Islamic religion.

The aforementioned phenomena might be a result of long negligence of the role and place of religion. Hence peace scholars, activists and religious leaders are urged to dialogue and comprehend complexity of realities. While the religious tensions and human rights violations share common characteristics, they are complex and require holistic approach and lenses for analysis with closer look. To mitigate and restore peace and justice as to mend an unmended world, this workshop aims to comprehend the complexity of the realities and identify challenges so that fault lines, structural and cultural root causes perpetuating the challenges can be identified and practical ways for remedies and practical applications of human rights values enshrined in the international laws as well as religious teachings and wisdom can be explored for further actions.

Program

Date	Time	Activity
Day I January 13, 2016 Venue: SK119 (Open Conference)	09.30-10.00	Registration
	10:00-10:30	Welcoming Remark by Prof. Masanori Naito (Graduate School of Global Studies, Doshisha University)
	10:30-11:30	Key Note Address by Prof. Chandra Muzaffar (President, International Movement for a Just World (JUST)), Malaysia) (TBC)
	11:30-12:15	Session I: Religious Nationalism Mr. Ekraj Sabur (Doctoral Student, Graduate School of Global Studies, Doshisha University) Commentator: Dr. Maung Zarni (Scholar, The Sluek Rith Institute)
	12:15-13:30	Lunch Break
	13:30-14:15	Session II: Human Rights Come First: The Need for Political Will Mr. Abdalrahman Migdad (Doctoral Student, Graduate School of Global Studies, Doshisha University) Commentator: Mr. Salam Al Mayarati (President, Muslim Public Affairs Council)

	14:15-15:00	<p>Session III: Student Activism and Human Rights Discourse</p> <p>Ms. Elham Hosnieh (Doctoral Student, Graduate School of Global Studies, Doshisha University)</p> <p>Commentator: Prof. Farhad Khosrokhavar (Directeur, Centre d'Analyse et d'Intervention Sociologiques (CADIS))</p>
	15:00 -15:45	<p>Session IV: Biomedical Ethics</p> <p>Mrs. Rehab AL-Abadlah (Doctoral Student, Graduate School of Global Studies, Doshisha University)</p> <p>Commentator: Prof. Mohammed Ghaly (Professor of Islam and Biomedical Ethics, Center for Islamic Legislation & Ethics (CILE) at Hamad Bin Khalifa University)</p>
	15:45-16:30	Open Discussion