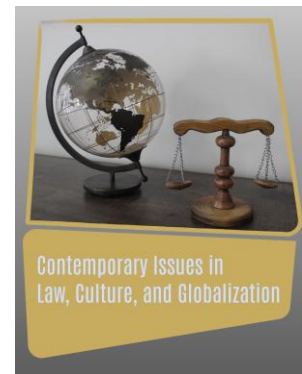




The Interaction Between International Law and Local Cultural Practices

1. Mehran. Nouri: Department of International Law, Islamic Azad University, CT.C., Tehran, Iran
2. Sina. Asadi*: Department of Cultural Studies, Islamic Azad University, CT.C., Tehran, Iran. Email: sina.asadi.law@gmail.com (Corresponding Author)
3. Majid. Ghasemi: Department of Cultural Studies, Islamic Azad University, CT.C., Tehran, Iran

ABSTRACT

This study aimed to explore how legal professionals, civil society actors, and community-based cultural intermediaries in Tehran understand, interpret, and negotiate the interaction between international legal norms and local cultural practices. This qualitative study was conducted using a conventional thematic analysis approach. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews with 24 participants in Tehran, including lawyers, legal consultants, academics, civil society workers, cultural mediators, and community representatives with experience in rights-related disputes involving cultural norms, family practices, minority identities, informal mediation, and access to justice. Participants were selected through purposive sampling followed by snowball recruitment. Interviews lasted between 45 and 80 minutes and continued until theoretical saturation was achieved. All interviews were audio-recorded with consent, transcribed verbatim, and analyzed using NVivo software. Coding proceeded through open coding, axial categorization, and theme development. Trustworthiness was enhanced through member checking, peer debriefing, reflexive memo-writing, and maintenance of an audit trail. The analysis generated five main categories: translation of international norms into culturally meaningful language; coexistence and tension between formal law and informal cultural authority; cultural practices as both protective resources and sources of rights restriction; trust, procedural justice, and accessibility in rights implementation; and the role of intermediaries in bridging international law and local communities. Participants emphasized that international law was rarely rejected in principle, but its legitimacy depended on how it was communicated, localized, and institutionally implemented. They described cultural practices as dynamic rather than fixed, noting that local actors frequently reinterpret tradition in response to legal, social, and generational change. The findings suggest that the interaction between international law and local cultural practices should not be understood as a simple conflict between universalism and relativism. Instead, it is a negotiated process in which legal norms gain meaning through translation, trust-building, and culturally informed institutional practice. Rights-based implementation is more effective when it respects cultural identity while maintaining clear limits against discrimination, coercion, and harm.

Keywords: international law; local cultural practices; legal pluralism; human rights; cultural rights; qualitative research; Tehran; legal consciousness; vernacularization

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Introduction

The relationship between international law and local cultural practices has become one of the central questions in contemporary socio-legal scholarship. International legal norms, particularly those related to human rights, cultural rights, gender equality, minority protection, access to justice, and non-discrimination, are commonly formulated in universal terms. They are designed to apply across national, cultural, religious, linguistic, and social boundaries. Yet their implementation always occurs in specific local settings where communities possess historically embedded values, social expectations, moral vocabularies, customary practices, and informal mechanisms of authority. This creates a complex field of interaction in which international law does not simply replace local culture, and local culture does not simply resist international law. Rather, legal norms and cultural practices are continuously interpreted, translated, contested, and reconstructed through everyday social and institutional processes.

A central debate in this area concerns the tension between universal human rights and cultural particularity. Universalist approaches emphasize that rights attach to persons by virtue of their humanity and therefore cannot be suspended by reference to tradition, religion, custom, or local moral order. From this perspective, international law functions as a protective framework against practices that may be normalized within communities but harmful to individuals or marginalized groups. Donnelly (2013) argues that universal human rights provide a moral and legal language for protecting human dignity across political and cultural boundaries. Similarly, international instruments such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights affirm rights that are not confined to national or cultural traditions (United Nations General Assembly, 1948, 1966a, 1966b). At the same time, these instruments also recognize culture, participation in cultural life, and minority identity as important dimensions of human flourishing.

Cultural relativist critiques, however, caution that universal legal language may become detached from local histories, meanings, and community structures. Critics argue that international law may appear externally imposed when it is introduced without sensitivity to local moral worlds or when it fails to account for culturally embedded systems of belonging, obligation, and authority. An-Na'im (1992) emphasized that cross-cultural legitimacy is essential for human rights implementation and that rights norms become more persuasive when they are interpreted through internal cultural dialogue rather than merely imposed through external pressure. This does not mean that culture can justify rights violations. Rather, it suggests that effective implementation requires engagement with local cultural reasoning, internal reform movements, and community-based interpretation.

The UNESCO Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity provides an important normative bridge in this debate. It affirms cultural diversity as inseparable from human dignity while also stating that cultural diversity cannot be invoked to infringe upon human rights guaranteed by international law (UNESCO, 2001). This dual commitment is central to the present study. Culture is not treated as an obstacle to international law, nor is international law treated as culturally neutral. Instead, both are examined as interpretive frameworks that meet in concrete social contexts. Cultural practices can preserve identity, transmit ethical values, support social solidarity, and provide informal systems of care. At the same time, certain practices may reproduce exclusion, gender inequality, generational hierarchy, minority marginalization, or restricted access to formal justice. The challenge is to understand how legal actors and community actors negotiate this boundary.

Socio-legal scholarship has long shown that law operates in plural normative environments. The concept of legal pluralism refers to the coexistence of multiple legal or normative orders within the same social field. Griffiths (1986) famously described legal pluralism as the presence of more than one legal order in a social field, while Moore (1973) introduced the idea of semi-

autonomous social fields to explain how communities generate rules and enforcement mechanisms that interact with but are not fully controlled by state law. Tamanaha (2008) further argued that legal pluralism is not an exceptional condition but a common feature of modern and historical legal life. In urban societies, individuals often move between state law, religious norms, family expectations, professional ethics, customary obligations, and transnational legal discourses. This plurality complicates any assumption that international law operates through a single, direct pathway.

The interaction between international law and local cultural practices is especially visible in areas such as family relations, gender norms, inheritance expectations, children's rights, minority identity, migration, informal mediation, and community-based dispute resolution. These domains often involve deeply rooted moral assumptions about honor, responsibility, kinship, privacy, social harmony, and authority. When international norms enter these areas, they may be reframed through local categories. For instance, the language of individual rights may be translated into the language of fairness, dignity, family protection, religious justice, or social respectability. Merry (2006) describes this process as the translation of international law into local justice. She shows that human rights norms become socially meaningful when activists, lawyers, and community intermediaries adapt them into local discourses without entirely abandoning their normative force.

Levitt and Merry (2009) develop this insight through the concept of vernacularization, which refers to the appropriation and local adaptation of globally generated rights ideas. Vernacularization does not mean simple dilution of international norms. Rather, it involves selective translation, strategic framing, and cultural negotiation. Local actors may emphasize some aspects of international law while softening, reinterpreting, or sequencing others to make them acceptable within local settings. This process is politically and ethically complex. If localization is too weak, international law may remain abstract and ineffective. If localization is too strong, rights norms may be absorbed into existing power structures and lose their critical capacity. Therefore, the question is not whether international law should be localized, but how localization can preserve rights protection while producing cultural legitimacy.

The anthropology of human rights has also challenged the idea that global norms and local practices exist in separate domains. Cowan, Dembour, and Wilson (2001) argue that culture and rights are mutually constituted through social practice. Goodale (2009) similarly notes that human rights become meaningful not only through treaties and courts but also through lived experiences, moral imagination, and local struggles. From this perspective, local communities are not passive recipients of international law. They actively interpret rights, resist certain formulations, appropriate others, and produce hybrid normative arrangements. These processes are especially important in societies where formal legal systems coexist with strong family networks, religious norms, community expectations, and informal mechanisms of dispute resolution.

The present study situates this debate within Tehran, a large metropolitan context in which formal law, religious values, family traditions, professional legal practice, global rights discourse, and urban social change intersect. Tehran provides a particularly relevant setting because it contains diverse social groups, educational levels, class positions, religious interpretations, and professional communities. In such an environment, international legal norms may circulate through universities, NGOs, legal advocacy, media, professional networks, and public debates. At the same time, local cultural practices continue to shape how people understand justice, authority, legitimacy, and social responsibility. This makes Tehran a useful site for examining how international law is interpreted in everyday legal and cultural practice.

Although extensive theoretical literature exists on human rights universalism, cultural relativism, and legal pluralism, fewer qualitative studies have examined how legal and community actors themselves describe the practical interaction between international law and local cultural norms in urban Middle Eastern settings. Much of the debate remains normative and abstract, focusing on whether culture supports or obstructs international law. Less attention has been paid to the interpretive work through which actors translate legal norms, manage conflicts, and create culturally intelligible pathways for rights-based claims.

This study addresses that gap by exploring the lived perspectives of participants who work at the intersection of law, culture, and community-based dispute resolution.

The study is guided by the following research question: How do legal professionals, civil society actors, and cultural intermediaries in Tehran understand and negotiate the interaction between international law and local cultural practices? By focusing on interpretation, negotiation, and implementation, the study moves beyond the binary opposition between universalism and relativism. It argues that international law gains local force through culturally situated processes of translation, trust-building, and institutional adaptation, while local cultural practices are themselves reshaped through rights discourse, generational change, and legal consciousness. The study contributes to socio-legal scholarship by offering a qualitative account of how international legal norms become meaningful, contested, and actionable in a plural cultural environment.

Methods and Materials

This study used a qualitative research design based on conventional thematic analysis. A qualitative approach was selected because the aim was not to measure attitudes statistically but to understand how participants interpreted the interaction between international law and local cultural practices through their professional and community-based experiences. The study was conducted in Tehran, where formal legal institutions, academic legal discourse, civil society activity, religious-cultural norms, and informal dispute-resolution practices intersect in everyday social life.

Participants were recruited through purposive sampling followed by snowball sampling. The inclusion criteria were: being at least 25 years old; residing or working in Tehran; having professional, academic, civil society, or community-based experience related to law, rights, cultural practices, mediation, family disputes, minority issues, or access to justice; and willingness to participate in an audio-recorded interview. Individuals with no direct experience of law-culture interaction were excluded. The final sample included 24 participants. Theoretical saturation was reached after the twenty-first interview, when no substantially new conceptual codes emerged, and three additional interviews were conducted to confirm the stability of the categories.

Data were collected using semi-structured interviews. The interview guide included open-ended questions such as: “How do you understand the relationship between international legal norms and local cultural practices?” “Can you describe situations in which cultural expectations affected the implementation of rights-based principles?” “How do people respond when international rights language appears to conflict with family, religious, or community norms?” “What role do lawyers, mediators, NGOs, or community elders play in translating legal concepts?” and “What conditions make rights-based arguments more acceptable in local contexts?” Follow-up questions were used to clarify meanings, obtain examples, and explore contradictions. Interviews lasted between 45 and 80 minutes. All interviews were conducted in Persian, audio-recorded with informed consent, transcribed verbatim, and translated into English for manuscript preparation where necessary.

Data were analyzed using NVivo software. The analysis followed an inductive thematic procedure informed by Braun and Clarke’s (2006) approach. First, the researchers read the transcripts repeatedly to become familiar with the data. Second, initial open codes were generated line by line. Third, related codes were grouped into preliminary categories. Fourth, the categories were reviewed against the full dataset to ensure coherence and distinction. Fifth, themes were refined, named, and interpreted in relation to the study question and relevant socio-legal literature. Reflexive memos were written throughout the process to record analytical decisions, emerging interpretations, and possible researcher assumptions.

To enhance trustworthiness, several strategies were applied. Credibility was supported through member checking with six participants who reviewed short summaries of the interpreted findings. Dependability was strengthened through an audit trail documenting sampling decisions, interview procedures, coding stages, and category development. Confirmability was supported through peer debriefing between two researchers who independently reviewed selected coded transcripts.

Transferability was enhanced by providing detailed descriptions of the study setting, participant characteristics, and analytical categories, consistent with Lincoln and Guba's (1985) criteria for qualitative rigor. Ethical principles included voluntary participation, informed consent, confidentiality, anonymization of transcripts, and the right to withdraw at any stage before data analysis.

Findings

The participants included 24 individuals from Tehran. Of these, 13 were women and 11 were men. In terms of age, 5 participants were between 25 and 34 years, 9 were between 35 and 44 years, 7 were between 45 and 54 years, and 3 were 55 years or older. Regarding professional background, 7 participants were lawyers or legal consultants, 4 were university academics in law or social sciences, 5 were civil society or NGO workers, 3 were cultural or community mediators, 3 were social workers involved in family or community disputes, and 2 were former judicial or administrative legal officers. In terms of education, 6 participants held bachelor's degrees, 12 held master's degrees, and 6 held doctoral or professional legal qualifications. Participants reported experience in areas including family disputes, women's rights, informal mediation, cultural minority concerns, access to justice, legal education, and rights-based advocacy.

Translation of international norms into culturally meaningful language. The first main category concerned the need to translate international legal norms into language that local communities perceive as morally legitimate and socially understandable. Participants repeatedly stated that international law was often respected in abstract terms but resisted when presented as foreign, confrontational, or disconnected from local values. Lawyers and NGO workers explained that terms such as "human rights," "non-discrimination," or "individual autonomy" sometimes became more acceptable when connected to familiar concepts such as dignity, fairness, justice, compassion, family responsibility, or protection from harm. One participant stated, "When I use only the language of international conventions, some families think I am speaking from outside their world. But when I explain the same principle as dignity and justice, they listen differently" (P07, lawyer). Another participant noted, "People do not always reject the right itself; they reject the feeling that someone is humiliating their culture" (P12, NGO worker). This category shows that the local force of international law depends not only on legal validity but also on communicative legitimacy. Participants emphasized that translation should not erase the normative content of rights but should make rights intelligible within local moral frameworks.

Coexistence and tension between formal law and informal cultural authority. The second category reflected the coexistence of state law, international norms, religious-cultural expectations, family authority, and informal dispute-resolution practices. Participants described many situations in which individuals did not approach formal legal institutions immediately, even when legal remedies were available. Instead, they first consulted family elders, religious figures, community mediators, or trusted professionals. This was especially common in family disputes, inheritance disagreements, marriage-related conflicts, and community conflicts involving reputation or social belonging. One participant explained, "In many cases, the first court is not the official court; it is the family meeting" (P03, mediator). Another stated, "Formal law may say one thing, but the person is also thinking about family pressure, social judgment, and whether they can continue living in that community afterward" (P16, social worker). Participants did not describe informal authority as wholly negative. They recognized that it could reduce conflict, provide emotional support, and preserve relationships. However, they also warned that informal mechanisms could pressure vulnerable individuals to compromise their rights. The interaction between international law and local practice therefore occurred within a plural normative field where people navigated multiple sources of authority.

Cultural practices as both protective resources and sources of rights restriction. The third category captured participants' ambivalent understanding of culture. They rejected the assumption that culture is always an obstacle to rights, but they also rejected the claim that culture should be immune from legal critique. Cultural practices were described as protective

when they created solidarity, care for elders, community responsibility, respect for family bonds, and preservation of identity. However, participants also reported that cultural arguments could be used to justify silence, hierarchy, gender inequality, or exclusion. One participant stated, “Culture can protect people from loneliness and social fragmentation, but the same culture can also tell a woman or a young person to remain silent when they are harmed” (P05, academic). Another explained, “The difficult question is where respect for culture ends and tolerance of injustice begins” (P20, legal consultant). Participants emphasized that culture is not fixed. Many described generational differences in how traditions were interpreted, especially among younger urban residents who were more familiar with international rights language. This category suggests that the interaction between international law and culture is not a battle between modern law and traditional society, but a process through which communities reinterpret their own practices.

Trust, procedural justice, and accessibility in rights implementation. The fourth category concerned the institutional conditions that shape whether international legal norms can be implemented in practice. Participants argued that rights-based principles are ineffective when people distrust legal institutions, fear social consequences, cannot afford legal representation, or experience procedures as humiliating and inaccessible. Several participants explained that local communities may not oppose international norms themselves but may doubt whether formal mechanisms will protect them. One participant stated, “People ask, ‘If I claim this right, who will stand beside me after the case is over?’ This fear is stronger than the legal text” (P14, civil society worker). Another said, “Rights need a pathway. Without a safe procedure, a right remains only a sentence on paper” (P09, former legal officer). Participants linked procedural justice to respectful communication, confidentiality, affordability, and culturally sensitive legal counseling. They argued that international law becomes locally meaningful when institutions provide reliable mechanisms for protection rather than symbolic recognition alone.

Intermediaries as bridges between international law and local communities. The fifth category highlighted the role of lawyers, social workers, NGO staff, academics, translators, mediators, and culturally trusted figures as intermediaries between global legal norms and local practices. Participants described these actors as essential because they understand both rights-based frameworks and local cultural expectations. Intermediaries help reframe disputes, reduce defensiveness, explain legal options, and prevent harmful compromise. One participant explained, “A good mediator does not simply repeat the law; they help people see that justice is not against their culture” (P18, community mediator). Another stated, “The bridge person is very important. Without someone who speaks both languages—the language of rights and the language of the community—the two sides become suspicious of each other” (P22, academic). Participants emphasized that intermediaries need training, ethical boundaries, and institutional support. Without these, mediation may reproduce existing inequalities rather than promote rights. This category demonstrates that the implementation of international law is not only a legal process but also a relational and communicative practice.

Discussion

The first major finding showed that international legal norms require culturally meaningful translation in order to gain local legitimacy. This finding strongly aligns with Merry’s (2006) argument that international human rights law becomes effective through translation into local justice frameworks. Participants did not suggest that international law should be weakened to satisfy local expectations; rather, they emphasized that the language of rights must be communicated in ways that resonate with local moral vocabularies. This reflects Levitt and Merry’s (2009) concept of vernacularization, in which global rights ideas are appropriated and rearticulated in local terms. The finding also supports An-Na’im’s (1992) argument that cross-cultural legitimacy is essential for human rights implementation. In the present study, participants described dignity, fairness, protection from harm, family responsibility, and justice as culturally meaningful concepts through which international norms could be introduced. This suggests that resistance to international law may sometimes reflect resistance to perceived cultural disrespect

rather than rejection of rights themselves. Therefore, legal implementation should distinguish between opposition to rights and opposition to the manner in which rights are framed. When international law is communicated as an external command, it may provoke defensiveness. When it is translated through internal ethical concepts, it may become a resource for cultural self-reflection and reform.

The second finding concerned the coexistence of formal law and informal cultural authority. This result is consistent with legal pluralism theory, which emphasizes that multiple normative orders often operate within the same social field (Griffiths, 1986; Moore, 1973; Tamanaha, 2008). Participants' descriptions of family meetings, elder mediation, religious consultation, and community negotiation demonstrate that individuals rarely encounter law as a single unified system. Instead, they navigate overlapping sources of obligation and authority. This supports Merry's (1988) view that legal pluralism is central to understanding everyday legal consciousness. The finding also indicates that international law enters local life indirectly. It may be invoked by lawyers, NGOs, educated family members, or social workers, but its effects are mediated through informal settings before reaching formal institutions. This pluralism can be both enabling and constraining. Informal mechanisms may provide accessible, relational, and culturally familiar forms of dispute resolution. However, they may also pressure individuals to prioritize family reputation, social harmony, or obedience over rights-based claims. Thus, legal pluralism should not be romanticized as community empowerment, nor dismissed as backward or unlawful. It should be examined as a field of power in which different actors possess unequal capacities to invoke, resist, or reinterpret norms.

The third finding revealed that cultural practices function as both protective resources and potential sources of rights restriction. This ambivalence is central to contemporary debates on culture and rights. UNESCO (2001) affirms cultural diversity as an ethical imperative linked to human dignity, but it also makes clear that cultural diversity cannot be used to limit internationally guaranteed human rights. Participants in this study expressed a similar position. They valued culture as a source of identity, solidarity, care, and continuity, while also recognizing that cultural arguments may justify exclusion, silence, or inequality. This finding aligns with Cowan et al. (2001), who argue that culture and rights should not be treated as separate or opposing domains. Culture is not a static container of tradition; it is continuously produced through social interpretation. Goodale (2009) similarly emphasizes that human rights are lived and reimagined within local moral worlds. In this study, participants' attention to generational reinterpretation suggests that cultural practices in Tehran are dynamic and contested. Younger actors, educated professionals, women's rights advocates, and community intermediaries may reinterpret cultural values in ways that support rather than obstruct rights. Therefore, the key policy question is not whether culture should be protected or transformed, but how cultural interpretation can be opened to inclusive participation, especially by those most affected by restrictive practices.

The fourth finding demonstrated that trust, procedural justice, and accessibility are essential to the implementation of rights-based norms. Participants repeatedly emphasized that individuals may hesitate to claim rights when they fear social retaliation, institutional indifference, financial burden, or procedural humiliation. This finding complements CEDAW General Recommendation No. 33, which stresses that access to justice requires more than formal legal recognition and must include availability, accessibility, quality, accountability, and remedies (United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, 2015). The finding also supports socio-legal scholarship showing that rights become meaningful only when people believe that institutions can protect them. Donnelly (2013) emphasizes the normative importance of universal rights, but the present study shows that universal norms require practical pathways. Participants' statement that "rights need a pathway" captures a core implementation problem: international law may be symbolically powerful but practically weak when legal institutions are inaccessible or culturally alienating. Procedural justice therefore becomes a bridge

between international normativity and local legitimacy. Respectful treatment, confidentiality, affordability, and culturally informed counseling may determine whether people experience international law as protection or as abstraction.

The fifth finding highlighted the importance of intermediaries who bridge international law and local cultural communities. This finding is highly consistent with Merry's (2006) discussion of translators, activists, and intermediaries who adapt global legal ideas to local contexts. Intermediaries do not merely transmit information; they interpret, reframe, negotiate, and sometimes strategically soften rights language to make it socially actionable. Levitt and Merry (2009) similarly show that vernacularization depends on actors capable of moving between global and local discursive fields. In the present study, lawyers, mediators, NGO workers, academics, and social workers were described as "bridge persons" who speak both the language of rights and the language of community. However, this role carries ethical risks. If intermediaries are insufficiently trained, they may reproduce dominant cultural expectations and encourage vulnerable individuals to accept unfair compromises. If they are too detached from local culture, they may fail to build trust. Therefore, intermediaries require training in international law, cultural competence, trauma-informed communication, gender sensitivity, and ethical mediation. Their role should be recognized as institutionally important rather than informal or secondary.

Limitations. This study has several limitations. First, the sample was limited to 24 participants in Tehran, which restricts the transferability of the findings to rural communities, smaller cities, other provinces, or different national contexts. Second, the study relied on participants with professional or community-based experience, meaning that the perspectives of ordinary rights claimants, especially marginalized individuals directly affected by harmful cultural practices, may not have been fully captured. Third, because data were collected through semi-structured interviews, the findings reflect narrated experiences rather than direct observation of legal proceedings, mediation sessions, or community negotiations. Fourth, the sensitivity of law-culture conflicts may have led some participants to speak cautiously or avoid politically sensitive examples. Finally, translation from Persian to English may have affected the nuance of culturally specific terms, although careful review was used to preserve meaning.

Suggestions for future research. Future studies should examine the interaction between international law and local cultural practices across multiple Iranian cities and compare urban, semi-urban, and rural contexts. Comparative research could also investigate how different professional groups, such as judges, lawyers, social workers, religious leaders, teachers, and NGO activists, interpret the same rights-related conflicts. Future research should include the voices of individuals directly affected by cultural-legal tensions, including women, youth, migrants, ethnic minorities, and economically marginalized groups. Ethnographic studies observing mediation sessions, legal aid consultations, and community dispute-resolution practices would provide deeper insight into how rights are negotiated in real time. Longitudinal research could also explore how cultural interpretations change across generations and how exposure to international legal discourse affects local legal consciousness over time.

Suggestions for practice. Legal institutions, NGOs, and professional training bodies should develop culturally informed rights education programs that explain international law through locally meaningful concepts such as dignity, justice, fairness, protection, and responsibility. Lawyers and mediators should be trained to recognize both the protective and restrictive dimensions of cultural practices. Community-based dispute-resolution mechanisms should be supported only when they include safeguards against coercion, discrimination, and unequal bargaining power. Legal aid services should become more accessible, confidential, and sensitive to social consequences faced by rights claimants. Finally, policymakers should strengthen the role of trained intermediaries who can bridge international law and local communities while maintaining clear ethical commitments to equality, non-discrimination, and protection from harm.

Conclusion

This study explored how legal professionals, civil society actors, and cultural intermediaries in Tehran understand the interaction between international law and local cultural practices. The findings indicate that this interaction cannot be reduced to a simple opposition between universal rights and local culture. Instead, it is a negotiated and dynamic process shaped by translation, legal pluralism, cultural reinterpretation, institutional trust, and intermediary action. Participants viewed international law as normatively important but practically effective only when communicated through culturally meaningful language and supported by accessible procedures. They also viewed culture as neither inherently oppressive nor automatically legitimate, but as a living field of interpretation that can support dignity and solidarity while also requiring critique when it restricts rights.

The study contributes to socio-legal scholarship by showing that rights implementation depends not only on formal legal adoption but also on local legitimacy, trust, and communicative mediation. International law becomes meaningful when actors can connect universal principles to local moral vocabularies without surrendering the core commitments of equality, dignity, and non-discrimination. Local cultural practices, in turn, are reshaped when communities engage with rights-based ideas through internal dialogue and practical problem-solving. The findings suggest that effective rights implementation requires a balanced approach: respecting cultural identity while maintaining clear normative limits against harm, coercion, and exclusion. In plural societies, the future of international law depends not only on treaties and institutions but also on the everyday work of interpretation through which people learn to see justice as both locally meaningful and universally protective.

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Authors' Contributions

All authors equally contributed to this study.

Declaration of Interest

The authors of this article declared no conflict of interest.

Ethical Considerations

All ethical principles were adhered in conducting and writing this article.

Transparency of Data

In accordance with the principles of transparency and open research, we declare that all data and materials used in this study are available upon request.

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