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## The New Intellectuals in Iran

*For a long time intellectuals in Iran have been at the crossroads of two distinct sources of influence: Western thought and Shiite thought. These two traditions began to exert their contradictory influence from the end of the 19th century onwards. The Islamic revolution was the result of a social movement and an intellectual trend, resulting in the renewal of Islamic thought exposed to Western Marxist and Third-worldist ideas. Since then, three generations of intellectuals have been active. There has been a divergent new intellectual trend since the beginning of the 1990s in which the second and the third generations question the legitimacy of the radical Islamic thought of the first generation in the name of civil society and a tolerant Islam. The main topic of this article is the interaction between these three generations and the advent of a new group, made up of journalists who belong to the second and third generations.*

**Key words:** *intellectuals · Iran · Islam · journalists*

*En Iran, les intellectuels ont été longtemps à la croisée d'une double influence: la pensée occidentale et les divers courants chiïtes. Ces deux traditions ont exercé leur influence contradictoire depuis la fin du 19e siècle. La Révolution islamique a été la conséquence d'un mouvement social et d'un courant intellectuel qui a abouti au renouvellement de la pensée islamique exposée au marxisme et au tiers-mondisme occidentaux. Depuis lors, trois générations d'intellectuels ont été actifs. Il existe une nouvelle tendance intellectuelle depuis le début des années 1990 qui s'écarte de celle d'avant. En accord avec cette nouvelle tendance, les intellectuels de la deuxième et de la troisième générations remettent en cause la légitimité de la pensée islamique radicale (l'islamisme) de la première génération au nom de la société civile et d'un islam tolérant. L'interaction entre les trois générations et l'avènement d'un nouveau groupe, composé de journalistes qui appartiennent à la deuxième et à la troisième générations, sont les principaux thèmes de cette recherche.*

**Mots-clés:** *intellectuels · Iran · islam · journalistes*

**Iranian Intellectuals from a Historical Perspective**

Intellectual life in Iran during the 20th century has been a tormented one. It has had two sources of influence: from the West but also from Islam in its Shiite version. The old intellectuals were invariably from a clerical background: Shiite sons of clergymen who went to the religious centres in Iran

(Meshed, Qom, Isfahan) and in Iraq (Nadjaf, principally) to study Islam with the great and learned “*akhund*” in its Shiite tradition, and came back to Iran to teach and to preach religion. In the second half of the 19th century, a timid modernization took place in Iran and, as a result, many sons of these clergymen or of the aristocracy travelled to foreign countries (some to the Ottoman cities other than Nadjaf; many to England, France, Belgium and, later, Germany). Some of the intellectuals came from the religious minorities (mainly the Armenians) who were more closely in touch with Europeans, inside Iran or outside it, than were the Muslims. This generation developed a critical view of the Iranians and the reasons for their backwardness. The West was the paragon of virtue, and this allegedly explained its progress in the material field. It is mainly with the advent of Marxism and the attraction that it exerted on Iranian intellectuals that the view of the West changed radically until it was seen more and more as the cause of Iran’s backwardness in terms of imperialism.

The first time new intellectuals came to the fore, with a distinct identity different from the traditional clerical one, was during the Constitutional Revolution (1906–1911) when some of them defended the idea of liberty, of a political system responsible to the people and of an autonomous judiciary. Afterwards, mainly during the Reza shah period (1925–1941) and its intense secularization, the new secular intellectuals became major figures in society and eclipsed the clerical ones. Many of these new intellectuals turned Marxist, even communist.

In the second half of the 20th century a new generation of intellectuals appeared, some of them from a middle-class, non-clerical background. Yet, many were the sons of clergymen (a famous intellectual like Ali Shariati was from a clerical family, Djalal Al Ahmad, the intellectual who wrote extensively about the “Westtoxication” had the same roots).

At that time, Iran had two distinct groups of intellectuals, each with its own identity: on the one hand, those who wrote as laymen with reference to the modern world, avoiding any reference to religion but deeply influenced by Marxism or other leftist ideologies, and, on the other, those who worked for the revival of religion and its renewal in order to respond to the double challenge from Marxism and from the technocratic ideology of the Pahlavi monarchy.

From its inception in the 1920s, the Iranian Communist Party (*Tudeh*) has played a major role in organizing intellectual life even after its repression by Reza shah, the founder of the Pahlavi dynasty. The party re-emerged in the 1940s after the forced abdication of Reza shah by the Allied forces in the Second World War and it gained momentum during the Mossadegh Period of the 1950s, only to be repressed again after the 1953 *coup d'état* by Mohammed Reza shah. After the Islamic revolution of 1979 it reappeared again, to be repressed anew once the Islamic regime was firmly established at the beginning of the 1980s. During the half-century preceding the Islamic revolution of 1979, the Islamic component in the main intellectual life in Iran seemed dormant, and it is only in the 1970s that an Islamic revival in intellectual life set in under the influence of Ali Shariati, Mehdi Bazargan, Morteza Motahhari, Ayatollah Khomeyni and Taleghani, among others.

Before that, Islamic theology and ideology seemed doomed to failure, and many historians of Iran predicted that they would disappear from the public sphere and be confined to closed circles of traditional and backward people. It is the conjunction of a 1970s' social movement of protest against the shah's autocracy and the revival and modernization of Islamic ideology that has given birth to the Islamic revolution.

In the 1990s, new tendencies emerged in Islamic ideology in Iran, which called into question the revolutionary tenets of the 1970s and 1980s. Since then, the main intellectual trend in Iran has been religious reformism, whereas it is in the Sunni world—and particularly in Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, Egypt and Palestine—that new versions of radical Islam have emerged, gaining momentum with Al Qaeda. In Iran, the introduction of new Islamic ideas challenged the supremacy of revolutionary Islam. This marks the end of religious radicalism in the mainstream intellectual life and the move towards a new kind of religious reformism.

The new generation of Iranians who did not take part in the revolutionary movement but who resent its consequences in terms of moral restrictions, economic strain and political intransigence show no fascination with religious radicalism. In reaction against the revolutionary Islam which combined Marxist categories and chiliastic Shiite notions, this generation is giving expression to new tendencies through the second- and third-generation intellectuals who no longer highlight martyrdom, a glorious death for a religious ideal, the struggle against imperialism and the longing for a moral community. Instead, they stress the need for individual freedom, sexual autonomy, cultural openness and peaceful coexistence with the West (the reformist President Khatami refers to this as the “dialogue between civilizations”).

### **The Three Types of Intellectuals**

Three types of intellectuals are noticeable in post-revolutionary Iran. The first, going back to the last years of the shah's regime and the first period of the revolution, is characterized by radical Islamic thought. The representative figures of this period were Shariati and Khomeyni as well as Djalal Al Ahmad and many other intellectuals, Marxists, Islamic radicals or syncretists, who combined chiliastic Marxism (the advent of a classless society) and eschatological Islam in its Shiite version (the advent of the Twelfth Imam, heralding the end of time).

The salient features of this period are its identification of politics and religion, of intellectual goals with political and social activism and the refusal to abide by any individual choice that was independent of holistic goals such as the idealized Islamic city (*madine ye fazeleh, jamee ye qest*) or the culturally harmonious, economically homogeneous society of communism. This trend of thought subordinated the individual to the community—either Islamic (*Umma*) or communist (the classless society) or both—in a syncretistic Islamic Marxist idiom of the “unitary classless society”, which was one of Shariati's expressions. Another feature of this trend of thought was its radical critique of the West and the attribution of the major ills within Iranian

and, more generally, Islamic societies to the imperialist hegemony of the West. The third trait of this tradition of thought was its orientation towards extreme affects, and particularly, to absolute heroism, glorifying the ability to die in the service of Islam or the proletariat or both. One further feature of this thought was the insistence on some Shiite notions that were revisited and reinterpreted through the looking-glass of modernity. At its centre was undoubtedly the notion of martyrdom, which underwent major changes and became an expression of the revolt of the “oppressed” (*mostaz’afin*) against the “oppressors” (*mostakbarin*). In this way, modernized youth in urban areas saw the convergence between progressive leftist ideologies and a renewed Islamic thought. The seminal figure of this current of thought was Shariati. He gave birth to two trends, one based on radical Islam and the other on leftist Islam, with the Mojahedin Khalq as its key organization (Abrahamian, 1989).

A second type of intellectual was epitomized by the towering figure of Khomeyni and by his followers. He proposed a new logic of action in contrast to the quietist one of the other grand ayatollahs and tried to “islamize” politics by justifying radical social change in Islamic terms. He coined the notion of “*velayat faqih*”, which gives legitimacy to the appropriation of political power by Islamic jurists on religious grounds.

The Islamic revolution of 1979, its aftermath in the next decade—including a long war (1980–88) with Iraq and the loss of around half a million of people killed or maimed on both sides—and the poor state of the Iranian economy, prepared the ground for disenchantment in the following decade. Thinkers, most of whom had been revolutionaries, started to come to the fore with their mainly Islamic thought. These new intellectuals were either laymen or clergymen. Among the former, the most notable was Abdolkarim Soroush. Among the clergymen, one can cite Ayatollah Montazeri and Sane’ee.

A younger, third generation, in their thirties or forties, emerged in this period. They included clergymen as well as laymen, among whom the most notable were: Mohsen Kadivar (who spent a year and a half in prison for doubting the *velayat faqih*, the rule of Islamic jurists, as it was conceived by Khomeini), Mohsen Saeed-Zadeh (who spent more than a year in prison and was forbidden to wear clerical dress for having questioned traditional Islamic jurisprudence, *fiqh*, and its differential treatment of women as inferior beings), Hussein Yousefi Eshkavari (who is serving a long prison term for having taken part in the Berlin Conference in 2001 and for questioning Islamic tenets on apostasy, inequality between men and women and many other aspects of traditional religion) and Mostafa Malekian (who defends the reconciliation of Islamic faith and reason and respect for human reason in social matters).

In generational terms, there are, as we have seen, these three age groups that interact with each other. In occupational terms, we find people who are close to the second and third groups, promoting reformist Islam. This group is made up of journalists who play the role of “intermediary intellectuals”: they spread the ideas of the promoters of reformist Islam and they inaugurate a new style of intellectualism which, combining journalism and

abstract ideas, has its own distinctive features. Some of the highbrow intellectuals occasionally indulge in “noble journalism”, that is writing articles for monthly journals which were widely read (such as *Kian* in which Soroush, Shams ol Waezin and others published their articles).<sup>1</sup> But the new style of intellectualism inaugurated by journalists is sociologically separate from the “grand intellectuals”, although its thought takes inspiration from them, but it holds to its own course and trend. This group can be considered, in its age, mainly as a subgroup of the second and third generation of intellectuals.

### The “Grand Intellectuals”

There is a major rift between, on the one hand, the revolutionary intellectuals like Shariati, Khomeyni or Motahhari who make up the first generation of Islamic intellectuals and, on the other, the reformists or the so-called “post-Islamist intellectuals”.<sup>2</sup> Although there are major differences between Shariati and Khomeyni, on one major issue they unwittingly shared the same idea, namely, that religion and politics are closely related to each other, and the separation between them is either atheist (Khomeyni) or ideologically biased (Shariati) because it tries to dispossess the Muslim Umma of its most precious good, namely, the Islamic idea of justice within a society of equity (*jamee ye qest*). In Shariati’s thought, the direct and close connection between political and religious tenets was exemplified by two major ideas: one was the Islamic community (*Ummat*), and the other was the Shiite notion of the Imamate (the sacred leadership of the descendants of the Prophet). Shariati used them to develop an eschatological conception of history which would result in the “unitary classless society” (*jamee ye bi tabaqe ye towhidi*). To achieve this, one had to fight for it until death; and this sacred death, or martyrdom, gave its revolutionary tinge to Shiism in its modernized form in which the martyr was closely linked to the emotions of the individual. From this standpoint, the Islamic community is unified by the Imam; and his role consists in bringing about social justice and political unity by fighting against the “oppressors” (*mostakbarin*).

This holistic view of society is shared, in another way, by Ayatollah Khomeyni who considered that the Islamic *Ummat* was unified by the eschatological desire for the End of Time as promised by the Twelfth Imam, a Messiah whose advent precedes the End of Times and the beginning of the Day of Reckoning. Muslims should preserve their unity through their confidence in the Islamic Leader (*rahbar*) who happens to be the Islamic Jurist (*vali faqih*) during the period of “occultation” of the Twelfth Imam.

In this revolutionary view, there is no distance between religion and politics, between the religious State and Muslim society. A good society is one which is ruled by Islam defined in accordance with the norms as interpreted by genuine Muslim intellectuals (be it Shariati or Khomeyni).

Reformist intellectuals challenged this fundamental tenet from the 1990s onward. The basic idea of the interrelatedness of religion and politics was radically contested in this decade by the idea of “civil society”, which has

been mythically related by some to the Golden Age of Islam and its supposedly pure community where the diversity of ideas was not curtailed by the State.

Abdolkarim Soroush, Mojtabeh Shabestari, Mostafa Malekian, Mohsen Kadivar and Yousefi Eshkavari are the most notable intellectuals who reject this identity of politics and religion. In this matter, there is no gulf between the clergy and the laity. The line of tension cuts across the clergy as well as laymen: some members of the laity, as well as clergy, defend revolutionary ideas, whereas other members of both groups support the reformist idea of separating religion from politics. The reformists, whether they are laymen (like Soroush or Malekian) or clergymen (like Kadivar, Eshkavari or Shabestari), all share one idea in common: the refusal to justify the intervention of religion into politics on the basis of any kind of Islamic argument and the aspiration to assert the independence of society from the powers-that-be.

Soroush's ideas are well known in the West.<sup>3</sup> He proposes a new civil society, which, ambiguously, would include the religious dimension by taking into account the individual faith of believers. This religious civil society would not need any Islamic norms from above that would not be approved by it. The notion of civil society was widespread among the reformist intellectuals as distinct from *velayat faqih* in which the State, dominated by Islamic leaders (*rahbar*), would impose religious norms regardless of society's acquiescence or rejection.

Shabestari is one of the most influential religious thinkers who have challenged the holistic picture of Islam on which *velayat faqih* is based. In one of his major books (Shabestari, 2000–2001), he observes that a double crisis is shaking official discourse (that means the ideology of the Islamic regime in Iran) on Islam. The first crisis is due to the belief that Islam encompasses a political and economic system offering an answer relevant to all the times; the second crisis is entailed by the conviction that the government has a duty to apply Islamic law (*shariah*) as such. These two ideas have emerged, according to the author, in relation to the Islamic revolution and the events that culminated in it. The “official version of religion”, which is at the same time “juridical Islam” (*eslam e feqahati*), is based on the historical conditions in which the conviction arose that religion had to dominate politics. In this version, the government, founded on divine legitimacy, would enjoy the people's acceptance (*mashru'iat e elahi/maqbuliat e mardomi*). This complex of ideas is, according to Shabestari, based on a threefold principle.

The first principle is the unicity of the source of knowledge, which is supposed to be exclusively religious. This in turn can be reduced to Islamic law (*fiqh*). The second principle is the non-historical idea of the birth of religion and its evolution. All the deeds of the Prophet are to be applied as a universal norm to society, independent of culture, history and societal evolution. The third principle is that of the exclusive validity of one interpretation. There is an official Islam which excludes the others. It is the only legitimate interpretation of religion, and this is embodied in the *velayat faqih*. These three principles cannot be defended, and they lead to a stalemate (Motaghi, in pro-

gess). The fact is, according to Shabestari, that Islam does not have all the answers to social, economic and political life at all times in history. The second point to be made is that no single hermeneutics of Islam exists as such, and there are different types of knowledge that are not religious. Islam is the quest for spirituality and it leaves the social and historical field open to understanding by mankind as such. In other words, the close connection between religion and politics is simply unacceptable and leads to the desacralization of religion.

Two different groups of intellectuals oppose these principles: some are traditional thinkers, apolitical in their world-view, but refusing to develop a world-view free from religion. Others are neo-conservatives who, like the Ayatollah Mesbah Yazdi, Ma'refat, Jonnati, and lay intellectuals like Davari Ardakani (1994) and many other minor figures like Qolam-Ali Haddad Adel, Seyd Majid Zahiri,<sup>4</sup> atol eslam Hamid Parsa (1996; Khosrokhavar, 2001), hojatol eslam Sadeq Larijani and Ahmad Va'ez.<sup>5</sup> By neo-conservative intellectuals we mean those who defend a type of ideology that pretends to offer the only legitimate Islamic interpretation of politics in the light of *velayat faqih*. This interpretation is not "traditional" and differs from the dominant view of Shiism in which *velayat faqih* used to be, at best, a marginal tendency (many go so far as to doubt that it ever existed). The main tenet of these intellectuals is the identification of *velayat faqih* with true Islam and the condemnation of other views of religion, particularly any view which aims to separate religion from politics. For instance, Ayatollah Hadi Ma'refat sharply distinguishes between Islamic society and civil society as understood by the reformists (particularly Soroush). The two are incompatible in so far as civil society is grounded in man-made laws, whereas Islamic society is based on rules grounded in divine revelation (Ma'refat, 1999). He refers, in this respect, to the *velayat e motlaqeh ye faqih* (the absolute rule of the religious jurist) which precludes any opposition to ideas that are defined by Islam.

There are as well non-religious intellectuals like Dariush Shayegan, Javad Tabatabai, Aramesh Dustdar and others who are influential even in religious circles. Dariush Shayegan criticizes a view of religion that does not take into account the major trends of the modern world where cultural homogeneity and religious absolutism are questioned. The quest for a holistic identity based on a monolithic view of Islam is alien to the evolution of modern world and means the isolation and regression of the (Iranian) society. Aramesh Dustdar and Javad Tabatabai, each in his own way, deplore the deep roots of religion in the Iranian culture. For Dustdar (1980, 1997), the Iranian culture is based on an unconscious religious attitude which prohibits the understanding of the modern world based on secularization and rationalization. Even when the Iranian intellectuals seem to think in a non-religious way, it is the domination of a religious thought that characterizes them. For Tabatabai (1994), the decline of the Iranian political thought goes back to the 9th and 10th centuries and, since then, it has been impossible for them to adequately understand the modernity. The social sciences, according to him, have been introduced in Iran without the secularization of thought and its rationalization and therefore, they reproduce in an unconscious way the

ancient prejudices and the inability to think adequately. Both authors have a holistic approach to Iranian society and thought and they do not take into account the diversity of thought and the new modern trends within Iranian society. Furthermore, they take for granted that the rupture between religion and thought is the main characteristic of the modern world. In spite of their shortcomings and their monolithic view of Iranian intellectual life, both have benefited from a large audience in Iran. The crisis due to the Islamic Revolution and the problems faced by a society confronting a theocratic state have increased the attractiveness of wholesale and monolithic views that might put an end to the political and cultural crisis induced by the revolution. Dariush Shayegan, who writes mainly in French (but has been extensively translated into Persian), shares some of the views of these particular intellectuals, but his major contribution is to invite Iranians to accept the “fragmented identity” of the modern world and to renounce a unitary view of the Self which leads to a fascination with utopian and mythological ideologies. He insists that, since Iran has undergone the change directly from tradition to postmodernity without the mediation of modernity, it is experiencing a strong malaise (Shayegan, 1989, 1991, 1992). His solution is to open up Iran to the new multicultural world in which one has to accept the diversity of the perspectives and, therefore, to be tolerant towards others who do not think and behave in the same way as the Self. This invitation to become open-minded and to give up the idea of a homogeneous culture exerts an undeniable influence on many young people in Iran.

### **The Intermediary Intellectuals**

“Intermediary intellectuals” borrow some intellectual ideas from the “grand intellectuals” but with considerable independence due to their involvement in Iran’s current political and social affairs. They include both men and women and many who are between their late twenties and their fifties (Mashayekhi, in progress). They mainly work in the field of journalism. Their contribution has been essential to the diversification of thought in Iran. Although many dozens of newspapers and weekly or monthly magazines have been closed down in Iran, their number is still close to a thousand.

Many of these journalists are behind bars. Some have spent months or even years in prison in the recent past. Among these intellectuals, many have a stance that is radically secular, in keeping with their interpretation of Islam. Some like Akbar Ganji (1999) refuse any accommodation between democracy and Islam, rejecting any interference of religion in the political realm. The Islamic Revolution and the popular vote for its leader Khomeyni were decisions made by the citizens, and this can be revoked through another collective vote. Ganji distinguishes between “the religious State” (*dowlat e dini*) and a “State-related religion” (*dine e dowlati*) in which Islam cannot answer all the social and political questions and the popular vote has to decide these issues. The religious government imposes Islamic precepts independently of the people, in the name of the Sacred. The State-related religion



supposes the autonomy of the citizens in their sovereign decisions concerning the government of the country. In this way, according to Ganji, there are three different types of discourses about the *velayat faqih*. Monarchist discourse stipulates the same rights for the Islamic leader as for the shah; fascist discourse assumes the unity of society under the leadership of a religious jurist; and democratic discourse subordinates the rule of the Islamic jurist to the sovereign will of the citizens. He defends the third alternative.

Sa'eed Hajjarian finds another way of combating the predominance of *velayat faqih* by underlining the de facto secularization of religion by the Leader of the Islamic Republic, Khomeyni. He allegedly showed the supremacy of politics as such over any religious norm when he said that the survival of the Islamic Republic was paramount and that no religious ritual should stand in its way (Hajjarian, 1997–1998). This kind of decision, he states, means that politics are more important than religion and that this acknowledges the secularization of religion. In this context, he argues, it is possible to reassess *velayat faqih* and to reject its supremacy within the political field in Iran.

Radicalizing the thesis of Soroush and Shabestari, some disciples such as Hamid Pardar stress the incommensurability of religion and politics and the impossibility of finding an accommodation between them on the same plane. According to Pardar, it is impossible to reconcile Islam and democracy without completely secularizing Islam. The sphere of thought and opinions is the place to exert one's free will. The major difference between religion and democracy is that it is the uncertainty facing the truth that is paramount for democracy, whereas for religion, truth can be defined univocally. In social life, people have to be free to encounter ideas and divergent opinions in order to make up their own minds, including the choice of opting for, or rejecting, religion (Pardar, 1994–1995).

The opposition to these reformist intermediary intellectuals comes from some conservative intellectuals who are much less influential and who write for the conservative media. Among them, Amir Mohebbian, the head of the newspaper *Resalat*, and the Larijani brothers are important figures (Khosrokhavar, 2001). A major feature of these intellectuals is their circulation between politics and journalism. Many have become reformist members of Parliament; many others dabble in local politics (they are members of local councils). There is no clear-cut boundary separating politics from journalism in their mind. There are some women among them, including Hengameh Shahidi (who worked for *Nowrooz* newspaper before it was closed down) who was the candidate for the Sazandegi Party; Haqiqat-jou, a journalist and Member of Parliament; Fatemeh Rake'ee, poet and member of the Mosharekat Party; Shadi Sadr and Abbas-Gholi-Zadeh.

Reformist intellectuals reject the idea of a "religious government" (*hokoumat dini*) because true religion should be restricted to spirituality or the inner faith of the individual and not to any kind of social or political order. They believe that Islam should not be ideologized because this would mean the end of its spirituality.<sup>6</sup>

The characteristic feature of the "intermediary intellectuals" is their ability to connect the ideas of the "grand intellectuals" to daily social and political

life in society. Some of them are students or former students who try to bridge the gap between different sections of society, especially women, students, intellectuals and the new middle classes. Some are university professors (such as Hussein Bashirieh, Fayaz Zahed and Agha-Jari, who is serving a prison sentence for having allegedly desecrated Islamic tenets and the clergy). Many have been influential either in the journals where the “grand intellectuals” have published (the most notable journals being *Kian*, *Tarh e Now*, *Iran Farda*, all of them closed down by the Judiciary and the current *Aftab Mahaneh*) or the daily or weekly media, most of which are censored by the Conservatives through the Judiciary.

The conservative intellectuals also have their own media, but they are much less influential than those of the reformists. Many are published in Qom such as *Andishehe Howzeh* (Thought in the Religious School [of Qom]) or in institutions financed by conservative groups like the *Pazhuhesh-nameh Matin* (The Quarterly Journal of the Research Institute of Imam Khomeyni and the Islamic Revolution).

The influence of reformist intellectuals has been spread by lectures in universities (for example, Soroush is a university professor who was still teaching until a few years ago when his lecture room was filled with students) or in private associations. Modern information media (CDs, cassettes and videocassettes) are also being used to spread the reformists’ message. Since Conservatives dominate TV and radio, their intellectuals use these media; but they have been much less influential than the reformists.

Some journals published in the West also exert an influence on intellectuals in Iran. The journals *Iran Nameh* and *Mehregan* (both published in the United States) are good cases in point. Intellectuals from Iranian diasporas as well as those from within Iran write articles for, and exchange their ideas in, these journals.

## Conclusion

The interpretation of Islam has always been divided between those who defended orthodoxy and those who promoted new Islamic ideas and behaviour patterns. The latter usually became deviant, formed sects and were repressed. If they succeeded, they founded a new orthodoxy. The major difference between the Reformist intellectuals nowadays and this cyclical interaction within traditional Islam between the orthodox and the deviant thinkers is that reformism does not constitute a “sect” or a “heresy” and has a large following within the “orthodox” *ulama*. The second major difference with the past is that reformism amounts to a large social movement with modern features that distinguish it from the past. The mottos are freedom, civil society, tolerance, and the non-intervention of religion in politics. These ideas have nothing traditional about them and do not cut across “sectarian” or “heretical” Islam, as in the past. The new Iranian reformism represents a break with an activist view of Islam which was influenced by extreme left tendencies within Marxism and Third-worldism; and in this

respect, it is a bridge between the religion of Allah and the democratic trends of the modern world.

## NOTES

1. *Kian* was closed down by the judiciary for the year 2000–2001.
2. See Khosrokhavar (1994, 1996).
3. See Soroush (1998–1999) on the specific topic of civil society.
4. See Zahiri (1999) in which he criticizes the reformist intellectuals who separate politics from religion.
5. See Va'ez (1997) in which he criticizes Soroush for his religious civil society in which the only Islamic feature is that people allegedly believe in this religion, without its influencing politics.
6. In this respect, intellectuals as different as Mohammad Ghazian (entirely secular) or Mas'oud Behnoud (secular) and Ali-Reza Reja'ee (called "national-religious", *melli-mazhabi*, which means "liberal" or member of the National Front founded by Mehdi Bazargan), Abbas Abdi, Qolam-Reza Kâshi and Shams ol Vaezin are in agreement with each other.

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