

Vestiges of the Iranian Revolution in Contemporary French-Persian Literature

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The history of a revolution

“History has just put its red seal upon the page that authenticates the revolution. The religion has just played its part to lift up the curtain; the Mullah’s are now going to scatter into a flight of black and white gowns,” (1) thus Foucault commented on the Iranian revolution of 1979. It was without a doubt one of the most radical events of the twentieth century, sealing the destiny of politics and religion for decades. This revolution, in which the Mullah’s and their phalangists (*Pasdarans*) quickly got the upper hand, has led to the advent of an Islamic republic in the world. Since then, the expanding Islam has not stopped to impose itself upon global, geopolitical affairs while continuing to provide matter for reflection, debates and concern until the present day.

Back then, Foucault expressed his concern about the hidden dangers behind the revolution in a report he wrote for an Italian newspaper, giving it the provocative title: “Une poudrière appelée Islam” (“A time-bomb called Islam”). But this menace has only progressively reached the people that became victim of its anti-dictatorial uprising. Of course, like all major revolutions, this one was characterized by an expeditious and systematic process of eliminating each form of *antirevolutionary* opposition. The intelligentsia was directly targeted by the new administration: artists, writers, theoreticians and militant politicians were put in prison, executed and many of them opted for exile as explained by the sociologist Chahla Chafiq (*Le nouvel homme* 77).

Today, more than three decades after the abrupt transition between the old, monarchical regime of the Pahlavis (1925-1979) and the Islamic republic, the revolution has not stopped to haunt the minds and thoughts of this specific generation of exiled writers, from which a portion came to

1. A current in the literature of the French language that emerged in the 1990s. It started out with Persian-French translations and expanded since the 2000s to writing directly in French in the case of certain writers. Hybrid from a stylistic, linguistic and narrative point of view, this current explores the mixture of the French-Iranian and eastern-western cultural paradigms.

2. French-Iranian writers mostly borrow their inspiration from their lives and personal experiences, which confers an autobiographical dimension to their works that is often organized in a series of fictions.

3. New York, Society for Iranian Studies, 198.

4. The *coup d'État* of the CIA against Mohammad Mossadegh (1953), the prime minister of Iran that nationalized petrol in 1951.

5. Jean-Paul Sartre, Ernesto Che Guevara and ideologies like Maoism and Stalinism.

France. In a contemporary and modern form, certain themes related to the Revolution, the Islam and Islamism (politicized and activist Islam) reappear systematically in French-Persian literature.¹ Indeed, those writers study this period of history endlessly, despite the space-time distance of the exile that separates them from their native country. This genre of 'fictional autobiography'² particularly puts forward the personal history of writers who stay in close touch with a whole group of exiled people. Above all, their works present contemplations and inquiries on cultural and religious paradigms as indicators of the deeper causes of this socio-political evolution. The link between the personal and collective experience of the Islamic Revolution shows to what extent its mention is ontologically important for this category of writers. Which profound link connects them to the revolution, and how do they look at this event? What has been the impact of an expatriation of more than three decades on their expression and contemplation through literature? Has there been an evolution in the consideration and the way of looking at the relation between the revolution and Islam?

In order to understand this, we should first contextualize the sociopolitical and intellectual climate of the prerevolutionary period that has marked those writers, because germs of the revolutionary movement, as experienced during that period, are later explored and criticized in their post-exile literature published in French. Then we will examine the vision and the expression they transmitted a posteriori through their approach of the revolution in France. And finally it will be noteworthy to study if the evolution of this dialectics between literature and revolution leads to a new perspective or

discourse. To concretize this, we have selected several writers who were exiled during exactly the same period of the 1980s: Shahrokh Meskoob (1924-2005), a writer, translator and university teacher, from which we will present an excerpt of *Chronique du voyageur* (*The chronicle of a traveler*)³ the first short story of his trilogy: *Partir, rester, revenir* (*To leave, to stay, to return*). It is his only fictional work (translated from Persian). Intervals of six and eight years separate the time he wrote each of those short stories (which, judging from a qualitative level and the contents, shows an evolution of his writing during exile). After that, we will have a look at three other writers: Goli Taraghi (1939), Ali Erfan (1946) and Chahla Chafiq (1954), whose works were published much later, in the 2000s. Of those, only Erfan's novel was written in French, but all of them recall the revolution and its consequences in an intimate and symbolic way by shedding a new light on its deeper and more essential causes.

The writers and the revolutionary climate

On the eve of the Iranian revolution, the global, geopolitical context of the late 1970s was still strongly marked by the cold war and the global bipolarity. Iran is a strategically important country in the region and the Middle East because of its geographical location and its petrol. The monarchic regime of Mohammad Reza Pahlavi (1919-1980) was unstable and the interference of Britain and the U.S.A. in the country's affairs was considerable.⁴ The sociopolitical dissatisfaction of the people then coincided with the opinion of the left-wing intellectuals of that time: this was in accordance with the anti-capitalistic and anti-imperialistic climate that was in fashion, and the red revolutions all over the world.⁵ As a result of the rigorous influence of morals and values by Islam, traditionalism, pan-Iranism and ravages happened all over the country because of poverty, superstitions and analphabetism. The people found an incarnation of dissatisfaction (as a reaction to the injustice and unfairness of the monarchy and 'westernized' government) in the Islamism of Rouhollah Khomeiny (1902-1989), an exiled religious man who became the supreme spiritual guide and the chief of the resistance against the Shah and the presence of the western forces.

In this period, the young intellectuals of the left-wing hoped to find their ideals of freedom realized in a revolutionary Islam. They expected that the Revolution would put an end to injustice, corruption and privileges. In reality, however, their ideas were an amalgam of communist idealism and a belief in the power of Islam. The growing influence of

6. The closing of universities from 1980 to 1982; institution of the Islamic veil, executions and censorship (Vahabi 91).

7. "A district next to the cemetery of Rey, in the southern part of Teheran, where the bodies of opponents, heretics and other impious persons were thrown into graves so the faithful could piss on them to wash off their sins" (Annotation of the writer about the cemetery on the same page).

8. An episode superbly illustrated by Marjan Satrapi (*Persepolis* 2001).

Islamism made that their ideals of a free and equal society would never be realized in the post-revolutionary Islamic regime. With the wave of the social Islamization, 'the hunt on intellectuals'⁶ began from 1980 onwards. A part of the exiled writers has settled in France as a host country. A choice that was not always deliberate, but due to the urgency to leave the territory (Vahabi 10).

From then on, a literary production based on introspection, nostalgia and the fight against memory loss began to emerge. In fact, the literature of exile evolves because the creative instinct is sharpened in the course of one's life, and the approach of the revolution through literature becomes more profound.

The revolution and Islamism in Meskoob's works

Feelings of frustration, anger and hatred are reflected in the first writings of the writers that evoke the Revolution and Islam. It goes without saying that, during the first years of expatriation, the pain is still noticeable and the nostalgia increasing. Often the feeling of failure and homesickness destabilize the psyche and the identity of expatriated writers. Moreover, one has to add the difficulties of integration in the new society where the scrutinizing look and judgment of others weigh heavily. This is explicitly mentioned in the first short story of Meskoob's trilogy: *Chronique du voyageur* (*The chronicle of traveler*) (19).

The first-person narrator is an exiled Iranian in Paris who has to take the plane every week to give classes in London. He is melancholic, has a destabilized identity and is deeply hurt by the scrutinizing look of others, which brings back a lot of memories from his past in Iran;

he compares the Inquisition from the Middle Ages to the horror of the revolution and Islamism. His attitude towards others is bitter and cynical, but also turned against a narrative self, an 'I' that is generalized and shifts to a 'one' (the Inquisition in the West), in order to point to a 'we' that indicates the Iranians:

During the Inquisition even the dead were judged. The angel of justice pursued them right into the other world. If they were condemned, one opened their graves, one dug out their bones, exhibiting them in front of the counsel before burning them. As an example for others, for witnesses. We also, we judge the dead. Except that we do not burn their bones, we, on the other hand, piss in their mouths. With sincerity and a warm heart. Kofr-Abad⁷ is filled with dead people, mouths that can be pissed in. It even is a duty (to do so). A religious duty. Apparently, one pisses there with faith. For the salvation of one's soul. As if it were a sort of spiritual ejaculation, like a coitus with a houris of paradise. (25)

The feelings are strong, the sentences short, spaced out with breaks that heavily put the emphasis on the horrors of the regime. The feeling of helplessness, the repulsion and the injustice of the judges of the revolution and the Islamic republic are clear. It is about a nightmare that the writer describes in a very realistic manner with, for instance, the name and the location of the cemetery and the way young members of the opposition were treated. The outcome of the revolution is a disaster for the narrator, who symbolizes the archetype of exiled intellectuals. He finds himself in a 'no man's land' where, from his perspective, there is nothing except the horrors of a medieval Inquisition to express the actual conditions in his country. The disaster is carried out in the name of God; whether it concerns the Inquisition or the Islam the result is the same, or even worse with Islamism as it is still going on. It is this partnership of (the reigning) power and religion that led to barbaric acts the narrator is aiming at, because the revolution has put in place a theocratic administration. Islam is also being criticized because of the concepts of 'houris' and 'paradise' that the government promised to lead youngsters to a certain death. For it was by means of those promises, proselytism and use of force that thousands of adolescents were sent to the mines during the war between Iran and Iraq (1980-1988), holding the keys to paradise in their hands.⁸ Sociologist Chafiq (*Le nouvel homme* 135) explains that those religious concepts have

9. "Herbert didn't ever begin an edition of Père Duchêne without writing a few words like 'fuck' and 'fool.' Such rudeness didn't mean anything, but it indicated. What? Quite a revolutionary situation" (Barthes 7).

10. Sarcastic reference to the bridge of the *Sirat* (Koran XVII, 79), build above hell (Gehenna) and which could be crossed depending on the merits of one's deeds.

also been used for education, indoctrination and the legislation of the collective rape of adolescent virgins in prisons.

Literary writings of Meskoob start within the democratic framework that makes it possible to give a good account of his actual existence and of his roots. The revolution and its consequences drive the writer in a new space-time framework and play a part in the socio-historical cohesion of his new existence. Roland Barthes stated: "[writing] is the relationship between creation and the society, it's the literal language transformed by its social destination, it's the form understood in its human intention and thus linked to the major crises of History" (14). The writing of Meskoob sticks to and reflects upon historical 'crises' born from revolutions and exile, in the present state. The tone, *the delivery*, the phraseology and raw expressions from his writing like: "piss in their mouths," "coitus," "livid beak" or "ejaculation" linked to fanatical Islam, transmit the naked reality of this violence, anxiety, helplessness and the narrator's deep-rooted fear of things of his past. The mentioned set of quotes contains signs that suggest a revolutionary situation, like the example of the revolutionary journal that Barthes gave.⁹

Aside from the political dimension (reflected through the comparison of post-revolutionary Islamism and the Inquisition), the short story claims to be a autofictional creation by focusing on the psychological and identity-related state of the crises of an exiled person that tries to live as good as he can in a new environment. But, despite all his efforts, the past catches up with him and, at that moment, he projects the hard political reality of his native country on

his current situation elsewhere. The story is about a memoir in exile that reconsiders the past, with its short flashbacks and its images. By recalling the massacre and the torments of members of the opposition, the writer acknowledges: "The dead (victims) of the Inquisition were in most cases but a handful of rotten bones. Ours are of a better quality. Fresh and in good health! The warmth of their bodies is still perceivable, as if they are still breathing. Our Inquisition is brand new" (26).

This series of signs, perceivable throughout the text, also creates a link between the psychological state of the narrator and the collective point of view, given the fact that other writers have expressed those pains and melancholia in relation to the same causes. The torn apart consciousness and the post-revolutionary trauma that tries to put things back together during the chaos of mental exile are, although expressed through a short story, putting history into its perspective.

On the other hand, the hate and the denunciation of the ideological Islam are clearly enunciated in the short story that was written in a transitory period between the departure from Iran and the integration in France. The writers of this generation are practically the only ones that are able to describe this "brand new Inquisition" (*Partir, rester, revenir* 26) of Islamism with which the world would get acquainted later on under the names of Hezbollah, the Jihadists, the Taliban, Hamas etcetera. The essence of the writing of Meskoob resides in this painful link between the context of the exile and the revolutionary events.

The writer is thereby *linked* to the society that welcomes him while living at the same time in the post-revolutionary society of his native country. The police officer at the airport that stares at the narrator to compare him to his identity-picture gives rise to an occasion of a new immersion into the past and thought of what has become his 'motherland' after the revolution: "He reminds me of the officers back home, the last time when I saved myself, frightened by the grip of the motherland that had become a big, slimy, misshapen octopus as large as the Earth" (*Partir, rester, revenir* 34). Haunted by Islamism, the lexical field that characterizes his thinking indicates a deep-rooted trauma due to the violence and the fear of the religious concepts 'hell,' 'the bridge of salvation,'¹⁰ 'paradise,' 'Islamic veil,' etcetera.

However, the 'literature of exile' does not cling to its unpleasantness. It evolves from an intercultural point of view, namely that there is a progress in the sense of a reciprocity of cultural paradigm exchanges between

11. Duodecimain shi'ism became the national religion, during the dynasty of the Sefevides in the sixteenth century.

the two cultures. It progressively transcends the psychological and identity-related conflicts of exile by evolving towards French-Persian literature. Even if it will always keep a sturdy socio-historical dimension and continue to be fundamentally influenced by the issue of the revolution and the Islamism, it will discuss more deeply and analytically in its form and expression the new situation where different cultures interfere.

The perspective through literature, in search of the causes of the revolution

With the learning of the language, the integration and the acquisition of citizenship, those French-Iranian writers diligently predestine their works to the French and French-speaking public. Writing about and looking at the Iranian revolution is sharpened and examines more subtly and indirectly the events for which they draw comparisons with history of the host country. Indeed, one notices a special interest for deep, cultural and psychological paradigms, as well as the society and the collective imagination of the people. This new look based on introspection generally sheds a new light on those paradigms and raises thoughts and questions about the real causes of the pre- and post revolutionary, socio-political evolutions.

In this phase, new clues and pre-revolutionary elements get off the background and the space-time distance of exile leads to a perceptive evolution. This genre of literature reveals the fact that the impact and the evolution of age-old¹¹ religious paradigms on complex and diverse domains of ordinary life (politics, society, psyche, education, the collective imagination, etcetera) have engendered a truly existing *religious culture*.

Actually it is by means of different themes (such as tradition, superstition, the family, the position of the father, the power, etcetera) that leads and clues appear, which reveal the direct or indirect influence of Islam on daily life and the collective imagination. This would partly explain the orientation of the revolution towards an ideological government in view of the earlier activated paradigms in the collective and subconscious imagination of the people. And, the essential difference between the literature of exile (at the early stages) and its progression towards French-Persian literature lies in the fact that the lament leaves space for an examination which is partly caused by getting in touch with the French culture and the experience of democracy and modernism.

Different themes like the undisputed and vertical authority of the father in the hierarchy of the family that echoes the governance of the patriarchal Islamic state, are remarkably treated in the novel of Taraghi: *La maison de Shemiran* (*The house of Shemiran*), or in the short story *La blessure* (*The wound*) by Chafiq (*Chemins et brouillard/Roads and mist*). Other aspects like the unconditional believe in supernatural powers and superstition show the roots of religious obscurantism in the deepest paradigms of collective imagination and social relations in Iran (such as the afterlife, rituals, the Djinn, the reappearance of the twelfth imam). These are discussed in a humorous and ironical manner by Reza Ghassemi (*Harmonie nocturne/Nocturnal harmony*). Yet another aspect is the intimate and general dimension of 'evil' and the hate of individuals both in France and in Iran, which emphasizes the similarities between Nazism and Islamism as ideologies.

In Taraghi's novel, the father is a symbol of strength, authority and firmness: an undisputed force that serves to protect as well as to cast its shadow on the freedom of the protagonist. The objects and the space that belong to him also symbolize the power of the patriarch: "The garden of Shemiran is occupied by animal statues. At the foot of the stairway that leads to the terrace, two gigantic lions are seated, with opened mouths, ready to devour the guests. [...] The northern part of the room is the privileged place of the father" (168). The authoritarian family system is an allegory for the old, dictatorial, monarchy. During the revolution, the whole 'empire' of the father and the house of Shemiran collapse to give way to another, even more fierce, theocratic authority. After the revolution and with the new developments, the environment also changes in a symbolic way. The female narrator recounts this family-schism which begins

to look like an accomplishment: “The government has put into place a new urbanization project that connects the two extremities of the city to each other by means of a highway. This imperial road crosses the house of Shemiran in its very center. We have ten days to evacuate the house. Father is still out there and we are lost” (191). So, in the absence of a legally constituted state and a democracy, the social relationships are also evolving on strength and the ‘survival of the fittest.’ Because of the absence of the father, the state penetrates and bursts open the inner part of the family, which is the core of this society. The revolution also allows treason and denunciation to enter the family, in the shape of the most faithful servant of the house: “on the eve of the revolution, he betrayed us, and lodged a furious complaint before the new authorities” (195).

In *La blessure (The wound)*, Chahla Chafiq also discusses socio-cultural problems by focusing himself on the family as a microcosm and the power of the father as a symbol of a profoundly paradoxical and terrorizing society. The writer portrays the sheer injustice felt by a young revolutionary woman doomed to exile. She recalls the image of a father as a profoundly paradoxical guideline of power that adores perfection and ‘lofty ideals,’ but terrorizes his family by beating his wife:

The fear was palpable. Inside the sound of the powerful beatings that my father gave to my mother’s cheeks. Inside my mouth the horror made speechless. Inside the words that I could not pronounce, inside the feelings we trampled. [...] My father was fascinated by perfection and beauty. Imperfection and ugliness disgusted him. His love for lofty ideals was of the same scope. Humanity. Justice. Love. In order to forget that the instincts of his body made him go after pretty women, he showed the same contempt for sexual love and women. His daughters shouldn’t have to be pleasure objects like his mistresses were. (165-7)

Father, family, religion, the sharing of power, constitute a few among the many symbolical themes of a patriarchal society where good feelings and thoughts don’t escape from the dangers of absolute authority. Those are more signs of the same: of an anti-democratic socio-cultural climate where totalitarianism and injustice are the fundamental characteristics of those who are in power.

After long years of expatriation, the writers present us new leads to reflect on Islamism and the revolution. The religious and socio-cultural

paradigms on which the Iranian revolution is based, also nourish recent debates about the impact of Islamism during the revolutions of the Arab Spring, as well as its consequences for the new, geopolitical structure of the Middle-East and the world. Actually, Foucault already pointed out in his report about the Iranian revolutionary movement and the essence of Islamism that:

It is indeed good for an Islamic movement that it can burn down the whole region, overturn the most unstable state governments and disturb the most solid ones. The Islam—which is not just a religion, but a way of life, an adherence to a history and to a civilization—risks to become a gigantic time-bomb that targets hundreds of millions of men. Since yesterday, each Muslim state can be overturned by a Revolution from the inside, on the basis of its age-old traditions. (5)

Exile, naturalization, work and the learning of a language have had a considerable impact on the cultural hybridity of the mentioned writers, on their writing and the manner in which they consider the revolution and its consequences. This literature makes qualitative progress from a stylistic and narrative point of view, but also quantitatively since the 2000s, probably because of the time required for the maturity of this literature, but also due to the growing interest of multicultural societies for other nearby cultures. The approach and the reviews of the revolution and Islamism are carried out in a more interior and intimate way, by the use of more uncertain and postmodern characters. The particular writings show their maturity by means of formidable introspection, self-criticism and self-irony of the subject on itself.

The narrator of the novel *Adieu Ménilmontant* (*Farewell Ménilmontant*) by Ali Erfan, an exiled Iranian in Paris, finds himself overwhelmed by the impressions of his labyrinthine host country and the vestiges of its dark period during the German occupation. He then starts an investigation on this period of history and its ghosts that still stalk the street and the shop he lives in: “Like this, it became the memory of rue Ménilmontant that, like an unexpected heritage, just fell into my lap” (56). (By means of his protagonist) the writer also leads an investigation into Islamic group-fanaticism by using Nazism from France. Likewise, he sidesteps the usual approach of Islamism and the revolution by using the history of Nazism in this new environment that has become his own. In reality, the bottom line of both problems is common ground; it is about a monstrous human

dimension that hides itself in the labyrinth of the popular masses, waiting for an opportunity to manifest itself. The message is clear: in Iran as well as in France, there exist terrifying beings that personify one ideological, bloodthirsty regime or another. Although writing pretends to be literary and transcultural and cannot be classified under terms as diatribe and militancy, the thoughts that lead the narrator across history deeply penetrate the causes of evil, while progressively erasing the borderlines that separate the native from the foreign-born. For in a multicultural environment the 'other' can be 'me,' and 'me' someone else:

Why wouldn't I put an end to this history? Is it the result of curiosity or a disease: to live inside the skin of others, to identify oneself with them and to recover their memory, to make their past one's own? I simply know that, as an exiled person, and in the absence of a utopia, the prospect of a struggle, I'm involved in a settling of scores that has started long before I came into this world. (98)

From a technical point of view, the narrator indirectly recalls the revolution he witnessed, through others and other memorable historical events, allowing the reader to contemplate more deeply. But the use of *humor* and *irony* are also strong signs that characterize the thought-distance of this writing. The narrator works in a multicultural district and is daily confronted with an old anti-Semitic woman, an ex-mistress of an SS-officer during the occupation. In spite of the changed situation, she continues to track down Jews. She becomes confidential with the narrator and tries to make him her associate. As he gets confidential with the old anti-Semitic woman, the narrator presents his cultural attitude and identity with self-irony:

I have run from the torturers of my country, those that inflicted the worst possible torments on their adversaries, and now I listen without budging to this cynical shrew that could drag the whole world into her grave; and to crown it all, I make copies of her unbelievable list of Jews, without reacting. (111)

Ashamed to listen to the anti-Semitic insalubrities of the old woman "with a politeness full of hypocrisy" (106), the narrator underlines and criticizes his exaggerated Iranian politeness:

I suppose that she's filled with joy, because she has found the most idiotic man of the world; me, who listens to her, who pretends to believe her, who agrees with her by a nod of the head. I'm sure that, had she met me during the occupation, even would I've been a Jew, she could have spared me from deportation and the camps. According to her, this ridiculous and naive man, me, wouldn't have even deserved to be gassed and thrown into the oven. He would just have served as a listener to her stories. (107)

The introspection and the psychological and cultural self-criticism of the first-person narrator are in reality progressively voiced in a collective, exiled, Iranian, French and a global 'I.' The French-Persian literature questions this and indirectly leads an historical investigation in order to discover the mistakes that appeared. The revolutionary, that has brought down a dictatorial regime to help, despite his hopes, a more barbaric 'other,' analyses himself and is surprised by his own weakness, not to say his cowardice, when talking to an old anti-Semitic woman that symbolizes the old French demons or, in a broader sense, a category of mankind. In reality one could say that, if deportations did take place, then denunciation and collaboration would become the order of the day. Who's to blame? So, the intercultural context of France and its history hold up a mirror to the issue of Islamism (as a form of extremism) that has arisen in Iran. If the revolution has been in favour of Islamism and totalitarianism, then wasn't this because most of its root causes were already imbedded in the existing, ancestral, socio-cultural paradigms and the individual and collective imagination and thoughts of the people? Be that as it may, the shadow of 'error,' the fear and the post-revolutionary trauma loom over the narrator all the way up to Paris and express the deep feelings of a whole generation. A generation for which (the propagated) Islamism was in no way less dangerous than Nazism:

Since a few months, the new "All for sale," the third Pakistani has settled himself in the street. And from the first days on, he has provoked fierce reactions. Each morning, Koranic chants from the stereo of his shop fill the public highway, this, to the sheer delight of the bearded grocer. For us, for Kabyle and me, this chant brought back memories about the massacres that were committed in the name of the Holy book by some religious madmen... [...] I asked him to lower the volume and listen to me. [...] he then came closer to me and, with an incredible hate, unleashed the furious words: "I stop this song, but long live Bin Laden." (154-5)

It speaks for itself that the mentioned nationalities of the characters are meaningful and embody the historical events of the last two decades concerning the rise of Islamism.

From revolution to evolution

French-Persian literature concretizes individual histories that pertain to History and the Iranian revolution. The aim is not to transcribe this but put it into perspective from an essentially literary point of view with the goal to understand reality. However, the obsessive fear of those writers has not changed when it comes to the rejection of Islamism, but their approach has become more refined during exile and by their increasing cultural hybridity. They examine the past and the evolution of the revolution in relation to the self by going to the very core of their beings and by using varied characters. The observational and analytical attitude that can be spotted between the lines and in the background of their storylines indicates their eagerness to unravel the causes and effects of the revolution in a fashion that is *psychoanalytical*, *humoristic* and *self-criticizing* rather than simplistic and accusatory.

Nowadays, the intrinsic debate on Islamism exceeds the case of Iran. Multicultural, contemporary societies are invited to reconsider their own norms, democratic values and limits of tolerance when confronted with those kinds of devastating ideologies. We now know to what extent democracy is fragile and that there is really a danger. French-Persian literature heads toward the Iranian revolution and its vestiges like a detective to a crime scene, with the purpose of investigating premonitory signs that were concealed back then, because of everyone's revolutionary euphoria. Whereas contemporary French-Iranian writers progressively succeed in distinguishing certain premises and causes of the revolution, it is unlikely that writers of the time could have foreseen such an insurrection. For the revolution guarded its very mystery for the philosopher that (while reporting the events) stated:

This long lasting transfer of feasts and mourning, those millions of men in the streets praising Allah, the Mullah's at the cemeteries that cried for rebellion and prayer, those sermons on tape that were handed out, and this old man that daily crossed the street of a small city of the Parisian suburbs to kneel down in the direction of Mecca: All of this, it was difficult for us to name it "revolution." (1)

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