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"Dropping a Thick Curtain of Forgetting and Disregard"

Modern Shiʿite Quietism Beyond Politics

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The past more than three and a half decades of Middle Eastern history have been characterised by a dramatic advance of the significance of religion in general and of fundamentalist movements in particular. The key year was 1979, and although there were two other major events in that year (the Soviet invasion in Afghanistan and the assault on the Great Mosque in Mecca), the one event that sticks in everybody's head is of course the revolution in Iran that swept, for the first time in modern history, a decidedly Islamic / Islamist regime into power. It also thoroughly changed the image of Islam, especially of Shiʿite Islam, in the rest of the world, and while the two basic tendencies of activist and quietist thinking have always existed in Islamic history side by side, it raised the question whether Shiʿite Islam, even more than other currents in Islam, is an intrinsically activist religion, even a revolutionary ideology.[1] With Khomeini becoming an icon as popular (at least in some parts of the world) as Ché Guevara or Ho Chi Minh in other parts, this was and is understandably a pertinent concern, although one should remember that "what is" questions are always problematic, as far as religions are concerned – at least when looked upon from outside.[2]

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[1] A short overview of these two basic currents of thought is given by Bernard Lewis, "On the Quietist and Activist Traditions in Islamic Political Writing", *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 49 (1986), 141-47; on the Shiʿite (and Persian) context specifically, see Saïd Amir Arjomand, "The Conception of Revolution in Persianate Political Thought", *Journal of Persianate Studies* 5 (2012) 1-16; Denis Hermann, "Political Quietism in Contemporary Shīʿism: A Study of the *Siyāsat-i mudun* of the Shaykhī Kirmānī Master ʿAbd al-Riḍā Khān Ibrāhīmī", *Studia Islamica* 109 (2014) 274-302; a number of 20th-century case studies are treated in Juan Cole / Nikkie Keddie (eds.), *Shiʿism and Social Protest*, New Haven (Yale University Press) 1986.

[2] A recent (and widely discussed) book has it even in its title: Shahab Ahmed, *What Is Islam?*

Religions, like any other human intellectual activity, are a product of time and space, influenced by the respective political, social and economic circumstances – which then, in turn, may be influenced by religious developments. Islam is by no means an exeption to this rule, and Shiʿite history in particular is a striking example for this observation. The current in Shiʿism that is by far dominant today is, as is generally known, Twelver Shiʿism (*al-shīʿa al-ithnā ʿashariyya*), and this is probably the reason why the depiction of Shiʿism, both in Muslim and non-Muslim historiography, more often than not comes across as remarkably teleological, as if Shiʿite history, from its outset, had been Twelver history in the making, and as if all other factions – Zaydiyya, Kaysāniyya, Ismāʿīliyya, Nuṣayriyya / ʿAlawiyya, etc. – were more or less only splinter groups that had split off this so to speak "orthodox" lineage. Nothing could be further from reality. On the contrary: as Hassan Ansari has convincingly stated, it does not make much sense to draw artificial demarcation lines between the diverse Shiʿite tendencies during the first three centuries. Instead of speaking of "Shiʿite currents", one should rather speak of "Ecoles de différentes cités et/ou régions formées autour de personnalités notoires."[3] With regard to what was later called Twelver Shiʿism, it comes across as the result of a long process in the course of which basic doctrinal tenets were repeatedly reworked and the broad genealogical claims to succession to Muḥammad as leader of the community were more and more narrowed down.[4] The path led from the Hashimites (who were in favour of the Banū Hashim in general) to Alides (who supported only ʿAlī), to Ḥusaynids (who followed the latter's son Ḥusayn), to Imamites (who moulded

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The Importance of Being Islamic, Princeton and Oxford (Princeton University Press) 2016.

[3] Hassan Ansari, *L'imamat et l'Occultation selon l'imamisme. Etude bibliographique et histoire des textes*, Leiden (Brill) 2017, x.

[4] For a concise description of the many currents in early Islamic Iraq, especially in Kūfā, which finally gave way to the beginnings of Twelver Shiʿism proper, see Josef van Ess, *Theologie und Gesellschaft im 2. und 3. Jahrhundert Hidschra. Eine Geschichte des religiösen Denkens im frühen Islam*, Berlin, New York (Walter de Gruyter) 1991-97, I/233-403; this volume is now also available in English translation: *Theology and Society in the Second and Third Centuries of the Hijra. A History of Religious Thought in Early Islam*, Leiden (Brill) 2017, 268-473; for the early phase of Shiʿism, see also Najam Haider, *The Origins of the Shīʿa. Identity, Ritual, and Sacred Space in Eighth-Century Kūfa*, Cambridge (Cambridge University Press) 2011. An overview of Shiʿite history and the various branches of Shiʿism that is still unsurpassed is Heinz Halm, *Die Schia*, Darmstadt 1988 (English translation: *Shiʿism*, New York [Columbia University Press], second edition 2004).

the very specific theory of the Imams), and only in the late ninth and early tenth centuries gave way to the nascent Twelver Shiʿites who eventually limited the number of legitimate imams once and for good to the ominous number twelve.[5]

The entire development of several centuries was characterised by an intense to and fro with regard to activist and quietist phases. While the very beginnings in the seventh century with all the hallmarks between Ṣiffin and Karbalāʾ were of a decidedly activist nature, the theory of the Imamate as it was conceived mostly during the tenures of the fifth and sixth Imams, Muḥammad al-Bāqir (d. around 733) and Jaʿfar al-Ṣādiq (d. 765), was a lesson in quietism.[6] The imamate as the central institution of religious guidance was separated from the power-political caliphate. Henceforward, it was possible to be imam without having to be caliph at the same time. In view of the fact that Shiʿites had, until then, been fighting against the Umayyads in a way that was as relentless as it was futile, and in view also of the fact that they had been quickly ousted by the Abbasids after the latter's victory over the Umayyads, this as it were quietist revolution was a makeshift solution and quite simply a survival strategy. The defeat on the battlefield was compensated for by the assurance to be the chosen community and by the exaltation of the figure of the imam, as the whole theory rests upon the conviction that the world – past, present, and future – cannot exist without an imam.[7] And since he is divinely appointed, sinless and omniscient, he cannot possibly go wrong, even if he is devoid of all mundane means to enforce his will. This is, needless to say, an ideal precondition for quietism: you don't have to have political power, you will be saved all the same. Indeed, Jaʿfar al-Ṣādiq himself, like most imams after al-Ḥusayn, kept

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[5] Ansari, *L'imamat et l'Occultation selon l'imamisme*, 12-119.

[6] On Muḥammad al-Bāqir see Arzina R. Lalani, *Early Shīʿī Thought. The Teachings of Imam Muḥammad al-Bāqir*, London, New York (Tauris) 2000; on Jaʿfar al-Ṣādiq see Robert Gleave et al., "Jaʿfar al-Ṣādeq", *Encyclopaedia Iranica* XIV/349-66 (online: http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/jafar-al-sadeq); Ronald P. Buckley, "The Writings of Jaʿfar al-Ṣādiq", in Robert Gleave (ed), *Books and Bibliophiles. Studies in Honour of Paul Auchterlonie on the Bio-Bibliography of the Muslim World*, Exeter (Gibb Memorial Trust) 2014, 14-28.

[7] Muḥammad b. Yaʿqūb al-Kulāynī, *Uṣūl al-Kāfī*, Beyrut 1428/2007, I/103-04 (*bāb anna al-arḍ lā takhlū min ḥujja*). For the idea of Shiʿism as a religion of the "chosen community", see Etan Kohlberg, "In Praise of the Few", in: G.R. Hawting et al. (eds.), *Studies in Islamic and Middle Eastern Texts and Traditions, in Memory of Norman Calder*, Oxford (Oxford University Press) 2000, 149-62.

ostentatiously away from politics,[8] and two subsequent imams, Muḥammad al-Jawād (nine) and ʿAlī al-Hādī (ten) were minors when they assumed the imamate and thus could not be but quietist.

In 874, the eleventh imam, al-Ḥasan al-ʿAskarī, died, and the vast majority of his followers was unaware of the existence of a male successor.[9] The ensuing severe crisis and the impending complete decay of the imamate could only be settled by yet another compromise that was, in a sense, the completion of the previous development. In the course of the following decades, the idea gained acceptance that there was in fact a successor imam who, however, was taken by God into occultation.[10] At the end of this transitory period, when the greater occultation was proclaimed in the middle of the tenth century, not only was the number of imams limited to twelve, but the system was apparently stable enough also to work in the imam's absence. It comes as no surprise therefore that al-Kulaynī, the compiler of the earliest of the canonical hadith collections in Shiʿism, transmits a number of traditions according to which every form of political rule in the absence of the imam is illegitimate; but since "he who seeks leadership perishes" (*man ṭalaba al-riʾāsa halaka*), the believer must not revolt, but instead has to endure the vicissitudes of life and patiently wait for the return of the imam at the end of time.[11] It is quite patent that this development

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[8] On "la vie 'politique' des imâms", see Mohammad Ali Amir-Moezzi, *Le guide divin dans le shîʿisme originel. Aux sources de l'ésotérisme en Islam*, Lagrasse (Verdier) 1992, 155-65.

[9] Saïd Amir Arjomand, "Imam *Absconditus* and the Beginnings of a Theology of Occultation: Imami Shiʿism *circa* 280-90 A.H. / 900 A.D.", *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 117 (1997), 1-12, on 1 (reprinted in idem, *Sociology of Shiʿite Islam. Collected Essays*, Leiden [Brill] 2016, 74-95).

[10] While Abū l-Ḥasan ʿAlī b. al-Ḥusayn b. Mūsā b. Bābawayh al-Qummī (d. 940/42) in his *Kitāb al-Imāma wa-l-tabṣira min al-ḥayra* avoids any clear statement concerning the exact number of the imams, his contemporary al-Kulāynī does quote several traditions to the effect that there are twelve imams; *Uṣūl al-Kāfī*, I/337-43 (*bāb mā jāʾa fī l-ithnā ʿashar wa-l-naṣṣ ʿalayhim*); also Muḥammad b. Ibrāhīm al-Nuʿmānī (d. after 953) quotes such traditions; on all these, see Ansari, *L'imamat et l'Occultation selon l'imamisme*, 24, 35, 42.

[11] al-Kulāynī, *Uṣūl al-Kāfī*, II/173-74 (*bāb ṭalab al-riʾāsa*); on the transition from Imamite Shiʿism to Twelver Shiʿism see Arjomand, *Sociology of Shiʿite Islam*, 42-120; Etan Kohlberg, "From Imāmiyya to Ithnā-ʿashariyya", *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 39 (1976), 521-34; on Kulaynī and his compilation in particular see Mohammad Ali Amir-Moezzi and Hassan Ansari, "Muḥammad b. Yaʿqūb al-Kulāynī (m. 328 ou 329 / 939-40 ou 940-41) et son *Kitāb al-Kāfī*. Une introduction", *Studia Iranica* 38 (2009), 191-247.

which may be regarded as a quietist freezing of the imams' genealogy happened in a deliberate contradistinction to other Shiʿite groups[12]: both Zaydīs and (especially) Ismāʿīlīs / Fāṭimids continued their respective lines of living and present imams, and both were (for the time being) much more activist and far more successful than the Imamis, who only during the rule of the Būyid dynasty (945-1055) started to become promoted, without, however, exercising political power themselves.

Theoretically, this could have been the end of the story, and the (Twelver) Shiʿites could have ended up as a slightly esoteric and messianic sect without further ambitions. But religious scriptures and traditions need constant interpretation in order to stand the test of time, and interpretation is an ongoing human preoccupation. Thus a process was set in motion in Shiʿite intellectual history that went on for many centuries and that may arguably be described as the clericalisation of Shiʿite religious scholars – which went hand in hand with a far-reaching rejection by the nascent stratum of Shiʿite jurists of their own tradition, aptly called "tradition originelle ésotérique non-rationnelle".[13] First, some eminent scholars of the eleventh century, such as al-Shaykh al-Mufīd (d. 1022), al-Sharīf al-Murtaḍā (d. 1044) and Muḥammad b. al-Ḥasan al-Ṭūsi, surnamed "Shaykh al-ṭā'ifa" (d. 1067), declared it allowed, even necessary, to collaborate with the political powers that be if this helps to serve the cause of Shiʿism[14]; later on, the juristic method of individual reasoning

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[12] Ansari, *L'imamat et l'Occultation selon l'imamisme*, 11-17; on the Ismāʿīliyya see Farhad Daftary, *The Ismāʿīlīs. Their History and Doctrines*, Cambridge (Cambridge University Press), second edition 2007; on the evolution of Zaydī doctrine, see Wilferd Madelung, *Der Imam al-Qāsim ibn Ibrāhīm und die Glaubenslehre der Zaiditen*, Berlin (Walter de Gruyter) 1965; Najam Haider, *Shīʿī Islam. An Introduction*, Cambridge (Cambridge University Press) 2014, 103-22, 169-81; Patricia Crone, *Medieval Islamic Political Thought*, Edinburgh (Edinburgh University Press) 2004, 99-109 (and 197-218 on the Ismāʿīlīs).

[13] Mohammad Ali Amir-Moezzi, *Le Coran silencieux et le Coran parlant. Sources scriptuaires de l'islam entre histoire et ferveur*, Paris (CNRS Editions) 2011, 190 note 187 (English translation: *The Silent Qur'an and the Speaking Qur'an. Scriptural Sources of Islam Between History and Fervor*, New York [Columbia University Press] 2015).

[14] For the general background see Crone, *Medieval Islamic Political Thought*, 110-24; on Mufīd see Tamima Bayhom-Daou, *Shaykh Mufīd*, Oxford (Oneworld) 2005; for the (not totally undisputed) specific case of al-Sharīf al-Murtaḍā, see Wilferd Madelung, "A Treatise of the Sharīf al-Murtaḍā on the Legality of Working for the Government "(*Mas'ala fī 'l-ʿamal maʿa 'l-sulṭān*)", *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 43 (1980), 18-31; on al-Ṭūsī see Hassan Ansari and

(*ijtihād*) that had been strictly prohibited by the imams during their presence became permitted, eventually even incumbent upon the scholars during their continued absence. Finally, starting from the sixteenth century during the rule of the Safavid dynasty in Iran, the scholars began to appropriate several of the most important prerogatives of the imam for themselves: collecting religious taxes, exercising jurisdiction, leading the communal Friday prayer, and finally, in the nineteenth century, calling for *jihād*. The preliminary result of this development – which can be depicted here of course only in its most condensed and rudimentary form – was the stratification of the class of scholars and the emergence of a hierarchy with (ideally) one supreme scholar / jurist at the top, the *marjaʿ al-taqlīd*, the source of emulation.[15]

All this is not to say that Shiʿism thereby was already thoroughly politicised so that Khomeini only had to throw the lever in order to switch on Shiʿite activism. By far most Shiʿite scholars in pre-modern times understood themselves as the collective representatives and gatekeepers of the hidden imam, but they did not have any ambition of their own to assume power, let alone to establish a Shiʿite theocracy. Neither the fatwā issued by the *marjaʿ al-taqlīd* Mīrzā Ḥasan al-Shīrāzī (d. 1895) that triggered the famous Tobacco revolt in 1891/92, nor in fact the active participation of several leading *ʿulamāʾ* in the Constitutional Revolution from 1905 onward were intended to lead to a government run by the clergy.[16]

Sabine Schmidtke, "Al-Shaykh al-Ṭūsī: His Writings on Theology and their Reception", in: Farhad Daftary and Gurdofarid Miskinzoda (eds.), *The Study of Shi'i Islam: History, Theology and Law*, London (I.B. Tauris) 2014, pp. 475-97.

[15] Literature on the development of Shiʿite political thought nowadays abounds; for general overviews see Mohammad Ali Amir-Moezzi, "Islam in Iran, x: The Roots of Political Shiʿism", *Encyclopaedia Iranica* XIV/146-54 (online: http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/islam-in-iran-x-the-roots-of-political-shiisms); idem: "Réflexions sur une évolution du shi'isme duodécimain: tradition et idéologisation", in: E. Patlagean / A. de Boulluec (eds.): *Les retours aux écritures. Fondamentalismes présents et passés*, Louvain (Peeters) 1993, 63-81; Saïd Amir Arjomand, *The Shadow of God and the Hidden Imam. Religion, Political Order and Societal Change in Shiʿite Iran from the Beginning to 1890*, Chicago, London (The University of Chicago Press) 1984; Abdulaziz Abdulhussein Sachedina, *The Just Ruler in Shiʿite Islam. The Comprehensive Authority of the Jurist in Imamite Jurisprudence*, New York, Oxford (Oxford University Press) 1988; Rainer Brunner, Shi'ite Doctrine – ii: Hierarchy in the Imamiyya", *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, online: http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/shiite-doctrine-ii-hierarchy-emamiya.

[16] On Shīrāzī and his fatwā – that he issued much against his will, mainly on the instigation of

But it is true that the considerably extended framework of the Shiʿite jurist's authority time and again inspired individual scholars to step forward with somewhat bolder claims, such as Aḥmad al-Narāqī (d. 1829) who was the first to speak of "the sovereignty of the jurist" (*wilāyat al-faqīh*)[17], or Shaykh Faḍlallāh Nūrī (d. 1909) who was the most outspoken clerical opponent of constitutionalism in Iran.[18] And it is also true that without this development, Khomeini would have had a much harder time in getting his theory across. And yet, it would be misleading to walk into another teleological trap and read Shiʿite history of the post-occultation period as inevitably running up to Khomeini.[19] Even for the twentieth century, this would mean an overemphasis of the latter's significance. Khomeini's star was rising only after the mid-1970s, and even following the revolution, consent to his political theory within Shiʿism continued to be far from unanimous. Not without good reason did his eventual successor, Khāmeneʾī, find it rather difficult to be installed as the new "leader of the revolution" in 1989. Shiʿite critics of the *wilāyat al-faqīh* abound, both within Iran and beyond, and Iraqi clerics are often anything but enthusiastic about their famous Iranian

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the well-known activist of Muslim reformism, Jamāl al-Dīn al-Afghānī (d. 1897) – see Werner Ende, "Der amtsmüde Ayatollah", in: Gebhard Selz (ed), *Festschrift für Burkhart Kienast zu seinem 70. Geburtstage dargebracht von Freunden, Schülern und Kollegen*, Münster (Ugarit-Verlag) 2003, 51-63; Fatema Soudavar Farmanfarmaian, "Revisiting and Revising the Tobacco Rebellion", *Iranian Studies*, 47 (2014), 595-625; Nikki R. Keddie, *Religion and Rebellion in Iran: The Tobacco Protestof 1891-1892*, London (Cass) 1966 – On the Constitutional Revolution, one of the most researched areas of modern Iranian history before 1979, see Abbas Amamat et al., "Constitutional Revolution", *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, VI/163-216 (online: http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/constitutional-revolution-index); Vanessa Martin, *Islam and Modernism. The Iranian Revolution of 1906*, Syracuse (Syracuse University Press) 1989; eadem, *Iran Between Islamic Nationalism and Secularism: The Constitutional Revolution of 1906*, London (I.B. Tauris) 2013.

[17] On Narāqī and his contribution to Shiʿite jurisprudence see Arjomand, *Sociology of Shiʿite Islam*, 176-78; idem, *The Shadow of God*, 232 and index, s.v.

[18] On Nūrī who was executed because of his radical stance see Martin, *Islam and Modernism*, 165-200; eadem, "Nūrī, Faẓl-Allāh", *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, online: http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/nuri-fazl-allah.

[19] Arjomand, *Sociology of Shiʿite Islam*, 361-90; on Khomeini's political theory and its impact see Vanessa Martin, *Creating an Islamic State. Khomeini and the Making of a New Iran*, London (Tauris) 2007; on the gamut of Shiʿite political thought in the twentieth century see Reza Hajatpour, *Iranische Geistlichkeit zwischen Utopie und Realismus. Zum Diskurs über Herrschafts- und Staatsdenken im 20. Jahrhundert*, Wiesbaden (Reichert) 2002.

peer.[20]

But I do not want to go into this now; instead, I would like to focus to another realm which has always been far less in the limelight than the political debate proper, which may, however, add an important aspect to what we may understand when we are talking about quietism. So far, activism and quietism have been considered as largely political terms: the activists are those who strive for political authority and power, the quietists are those who don't. It goes without saying that this is correct to a large extent. But there is something else, and one of the standard arguments of the quietist faction gives us a hint: it is preferable, they say, to obey a despotic government for 60, 70, 100 years, to suffering chaos or civil war even for one day.[21] The term for "chaos" which is mostly used in this context is *fitna*. This of course immediately reminds us of the first civil war in Islam, after the killing of ʿUthmān, and the deep split of the community that resulted thereof.[22] According to this reading, those who try to avoid *fitna* are quietist, those who do not care about *fitna* or who keep turning their knives in this wound by insulting the other side and composing polemical treatises are activist. Seen from this perspective, the question of quietism is also closely related to the problem of how to deal with history.

That ideological government and compliant historiography go perfectly well hand in

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[20] On Khomeini's critics within Shiʿism see Mariella Ourghi, "Shiite criticism of the *welāyat-e faqīh*", *Asiatische Studien* 59 (2005), 831-44; Katajun Amirpur, "Aktuelle Aushandlungsprozesse des Verhältnisses von Religion, Staat und Politik: Eine Positionsbestimmung der heutigen Gegner und Befürworter der *velāyat-e faqīh* in Iran und im Irak", *Asiatische Studien* 66 (2012), 521-64; on Shiʿite constitutional thought after 1979, cf. Arjomand, *Sociology of Shiʿite Islam*, 413-41.

[21] Ulrich Haarmann, "'Lieber hundert Jahre Zwangsherrschaft als ein Tag Leiden im Bürgerkrieg'. Ein gemeinsamer Topos im islamischen und frühneuzeitlichen europäischen Staatsdenken", in: Udo Tworuschka (ed.), *Gottes ist der Orient, Gottes ist der Okzident. Festschrift für Abdoljavad Falaturi zum 65. Geburtstag*, Cologne, Vienna (Böhlau) 1991, 262-69; Crone, *Medieval Islamic Political Thought*, 135-37.

[22] G. H. A. Juynboll, "The date of the great *fitna*", *Arabica* 20 (1973), 142-59; G.R. Hawting, " The Significance of the Slogan *lā ḥukma illā lillāh* and the References to the *ḥudūd* in the Traditions about the Fitna and the Murder of ʿUthmān", *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 41 (1978), 453-63; for modern ramifications (in the nineteenth century, *fitna* was also used for "revolution") see Ami Ayalon, "From Fitna to Thawra", *Studia Islamica* 66 (1987), 145-74; Helga Rebhan, *Geschichte und Funktion einiger politischer Termini im Arabischen des 19. Jahrhunderts* (*1798-1882*), Wiesbaden (Harrassowitz) 1986, 111-13.

hand is a truism; every ideology needs its fuel, and the fuel usually comes from the past. As far as Shiʿism is concerned, one needs only to think of the skirmish of Karbalāʾ and Imam Ḥusayn's death in 680, and the usefulness this event proved to have before and during the revolution in 1979: "Every day is *ʿāshūrāʾ*, every land is Karbalāʾ", was a highly popular slogan at the time. What is astonishing here, however, is how late this ideologization of Karbalāʾ happened: Neʿmatollāh Ṣāleḥī Najafābādī (d. 2006), a former student of Khomeini's whose book *The Eternal Martyr* came out only in 1968, was the first to reinterpret the traditional view of Karbalāʾ in a more politically activist light,[23] and it was only ʿAlī Sharīʿatī (d. 1977) who coined this slogan in the 1970s.[24] But the revision came at a price: for many centuries (though not unanimously backed by early sources), the image of Ḥusayn had been a much more quietist one, moulded by Wāʿeż Kāshefī in the fifteenth century and resting on the assumption that Ḥusayn knew beforehand of his impending martyrdom which was preordained by God and which he thus accepted ungrudgingly. That according to the revised view Ḥusayn did by contrast not have any foreknowledge when he rebelled against the Umayyads, was an important part of the activist call for resistance against unjust rule; that this considerably undermined the belief in the imam' omniscience must be regarded as inevitable, if not intentional collateral damage.[25]

Karbalāʾ is an obvious example of a quietist historical myth turned into activist ideology. There are other areas where dealing with history, and with controversial history in particular, played also a decisive role, but on a more subtle and at the same time more fundamen-

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[23] Evan Siegel, "The Politics of *Shahīd-e Jāwīd*", in: Rainer Brunner / Werner Ende (eds.), *The Twelver Shiʿa in Modern Times. Religious Culture & Political History*, Leiden (Brill) 2001, 150-77.

[24] Hans G. Kippenberg, "'Jeder Tag ʿAshura, jedes Grab Kerbelaʾ. Zur Ritualisierung der Straßenkämpfe in Iran", in: K. Greussing / J.-H. Grevemeyer (eds.), *Religion und Politik im Iran*, Frankfurt 1981, 217-56. This deliberately political reading of the events of Karbalāʾ should, however, not distract from the general overwhelming significance that Ḥusayn's defeat had for the genesis and sectarian self-understanding of Shiʿism; Heinz Halm aptly described the skirmish of Karbalāʾ as "the 'big bang' that created the rapidly expanding cosmos of Shiʿism and brought it into motion": *Shiʿa Islam: From Religion to Revolution*, Princeton (Markus Wiener Publishers) 1997, 16.

[25] On the evolution of the image of Karbalāʾ from Kāshefī to twentieth-century thinkers see Kamran Scot Agaie, *The Martyrs of Karbala. Shiʿi Symbols and Rituals in Modern Iran*, Seattle, London (University of Washington Press) 2004, 87-112.

tal level. Among these count the initiatives of Sunnite and Shiʿite scholars in the twentieth century to come to terms with one another and to reach a kind of ecumenical rapprochement (*taqrīb*) between Sunnism and Shiʿism. For approximately one and a half decades, between 1947 and 1961, there existed in Cairo a pan-Islamic association, *Jamāʿat al-taqrīb bayn al-madhāhib al-islāmiyya*, whose declared aim it was to establish a permanent forum for exchange between Shiʿite and Sunnite scholars and thus enable a learned debate beyond a polemical know-it-all attitude.[26] The Sunnite participants came mostly (although not exclusively) from the ranks of the Azhar university,[27] while on the Shiʿite side a number of eminent scholars, mostly from Iraq and Lebanon, were involved. The Shiʿites – mention may be made of Muḥammad al-Ḥusayn Āl Kāshif al-Ghiṭāʾ (d. 1954), ʿAbd al-Ḥusayn Sharaf al-Dīn (d. 1957), or Muḥammad Jawād Mughniyya (d. 1979), to name but a few – acted mostly as corresponding members and hardly came to Cairo.[28] On the other hand, however, the general secretary of the organisation, a young Iranian scholar by the name of Moḥammad Taqī Qommī (d. 1979), was acting on behalf of the supreme *marjaʿ al-taqlīd* of the time, the Iranian Āyatollāh Ḥosayn Borūjerdī (d. 1961), who thus was the *éminence grise* of this institution.[29]

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[26] For the history and intellectual background of this association, see Rainer Brunner, *Islamic Ecumenism in the 20th Century. The Azhar and Shiism between Rapprochement and Restraint*, Leiden (Brill) 2004.

[27] Among the founding members were the Azhar rectors Muṣṭafā ʿAbd al-Rāziq (d. 1947), ʿAbd al-Majīd Salīm (d. 1954) and Maḥmūd Shaltūt (d. 1963) who were also closely connected to various reformist endeavours within Azhar university; see also Wolf-Dieter Lemke, *Maḥmūd Šaltūt (1893-1963) und die Reform der Azhar. Untersuchungen zu Erneuerungsbestrebungen im ägyptisch-islamischen Erziehungssystem*, Frankfurt/Main et al. (Peter Lang) 1980.

[28] On Kāshif al-Ghiṭāʾ see Silvia Naef, "Un réformiste chiite – Muḥammad Ḥusayn Āl Kāšif al-Giṭāʾ", *Die Welt des Orients* 27 (1996), 51-86; on Sharaf al-Dīn see his own two-volume account of his family: *Bughyat al-rāghibīn fī silsilat Āl Sharaf al-Dīn*, I-II, Beirut 1411/1991; Sabrina Mervin, *Un réformisme chiite. Ulémas et lettrés du Gabal ʿĀmil (actuel Liban-Sud) de la fin de l'Empire ottoman à l'indépendance du Liban*, Paris et al. 2000, 430 and index, s.v.; Brunner, *Islamic Ecumenism*, 51-81; on Mughniyya (occasionally spelt Maghniyya) see his autobiography *Tajārib Muḥammad Jawād Mughniyya*, Beirut 1400/1980; Chibli Mallat, *Shiʿi Thought from the South of Lebanon*, Oxford (Centre for Lebanese Studies) 1988, 16-25; Lynda Clarke, "ʿAql (Reason) in Modern Shiite Thought: The Example of Muḥammad Jawād Maghniyya (1904-79)", in: Alireza Korangy et al. (eds.), *Essays in Islamic Philology, History, and Philosophy*, Berlin, Boston (de Gruyter) 2016, 281-311.

[29] On Qommī see Brunner, *Islamic Ecumenism*, index, s.v.; on Borūjerdī ibid., 189-93 and Hamid

Throughout its regular existence, the ecumenical society published its own journal, *Risālat al-islām*.[30] When sifting the articles, one quickly notes that a decidedly quietist approach, in the sense of avoiding every possible *fitna*, was the order of the day. It does not come as a surprise that there was no detailed and thorough discussion, for instance, of the legitimacy of the caliphate, of the trustworthiness of the companions of the Prophet or the authenticity of the traditions they had transmitted – all topics that were the roots of countless mutual polemics, both classical and modern.[31] To be more precise: there was *no* discussion whatsoever of these issues, as the few voices, mostly of Sunnite historians suggesting that the study of history should not be neglected, were quickly given short shrift both by Shiʿite authors and the editors of the journal. Instead, the appeal for deliberate forgetfulness was the central thread that ran through the journal's pages from the beginning. For example, the Iraqi Shiʿite scholar Muhammad Ṣādiq al-Ṣadr stated (in the very first year of the journal) in regard to the problem of the caliphate that since it was impossible to undo the past, it would be better to forget it or at least pretend to do so (*an natanāsā l-māḍī*).[32] And when the renowned Egyptian historian Aḥmad Amīn published his book on the Mahdī and Mahdist thinking (outside the *Jamāʿat al-taqrīb*),[33] Moḥammad Taqī Qommī criticised him severely for digging up the dark sides of enmity and hate, and passionately called for letting the reasons for antagonism for good disappear behind a "thick curtain of forgetting and disregard" (*sitār ghalīẓ min al-nisyān wa-l-ihmāl*).[34] It is precisely for this reason

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Algar, "Borūjerdī, Ḥosayn Ṭabāṭabāʾī", *Encyclopaedia Iranica* IV/376-79 (online: http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/borujerdi-hosayn-tabatabai).

[30] The sixty issues of the journal (which appeared between 1949 and 1972) can nowadays be consulted online: http://www.taghrib.org/?p=tex&gr=3; Brunner, *Islamic Ecumenism*, 143-49.

[31] On the scope of topics and the modes of argumenting in the journal see in detail Brunner, *Islamic Ecumenism*, 208-48.

[32] Muhammad Ṣādiq al-Ṣadr, "Ilā Jamāʿat al-taqrīb", *Risālat al-islām* 1 (1949), 358-64 (on 359).

[33] *al-Mahdī wa-l-mahdawiyya*, Cairo 1951. The small book is not restricted to Twelver Shiʿism, but covers a whole range of mahdist thinking, including the former Būyid general Abū l-Ḥārith Arslān al-Basāsīrī (d. 1060), the Bābiyya and Bahāʾiyya, the Qādiyāniyya, the Senusis and the Sudanese Mahdī in the nineteenth century.

[34] Moḥammad Taqī Qommī, "al-Aqlām fī l-mīzān", *Risālat al-islām* 4 (1952), 147-51 (on 148); the book sparked several Shiʿite counter-polemics, e.g. Muḥammad ʿAlī al-Zuhaylī, *al-Mahdī wa-Aḥmad Amīn*, Najaf 1950; Muḥammad Amīn Zayn al-Dīn, *Maʿa al-duktūr Aḥmad Amīn fī ḥadīth al-mahdī wa-l-mahdawiyya*, Najaf 1951 (new edition Beirut 1413/1992); on Aḥmad Amīn's (1886-1954)

that the editors of the journal also vehemently abstained from offering any forum for their readers. Contrary to many other religious journals such as the Lebanese *al-ʿIrfān*, or Muḥammad Rashīd Riḍā's classical *al-Manār*,[35] there were neither letters to the editor nor requests for fatwās in *Risālat al-islām*. Fearing that such a forum would focus mainly on controversial issues and thus put an emphasis on sectarian disagreement, it was again the call for a "cloak of forgetting" (*thawb al-nisyān*), which should be cast over many of the inherited controversies and polemics, that was at the centre of the editors' apologetic reasoning.[36]

The question of how to deal with controversial issues was, however, not unanimously answered by the call for intentional and artificial amnesia.[37] In the face of their opponents' unrelenting attacks, but also following their own standardised protestation to enhance mutual knowledge among Sunnites and Shiʿites, some authors from time to time decided to take the bull by the horns and to address topics that had for a long time been objects of mutual polemics. It goes without saying that it was primarily the Shiʿite scholars who had a keen interest in addressing these points of contention, but they never did so by simply turning the tables and writing counter-polemics. Rather, they tried to "rectify" what they

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polemical exchanges with Shiʿite scholars over more than two decades and his complicated relationship with the ecumenical association see Brunner, *Islamic Ecumenism*, 174-79; in general: Emmanuelle Perrin, "Le creuset et l'orfèvre: le parcours d'Ahmad Amîn (1886-1954)", *Revue des mondes musulmans et de la Méditerranée* 95-98 (2002), 307-35 (online: http://remmm.revues.org/index238.html).

[35] On *al-ʿIrfān* which was edited in Ṣaydā by Aḥmad ʿĀrif al-Zayn (1881-1960) from 1909 onward see Silvia Naef, "Aufklärung in einem schiitischen Umfeld: Die libanesische Zeitschrift *al-ʿIrfān*", *Die Welt des Islams* 36 (1996), 365-78; Tarif Khalidi, "Shaykh Ahmad ʿĀrif al-Zayn and *al-ʿIrfān*", in: Marwan al-Buheiry (ed.): *Intellectual Life in the Arab East*, 1890-1939, Beirut (American University of Beirut) 1981, 110-24. – On Muḥammad Rashīd Riḍā (1865-1935) and his famous journal see, e.g., Umar Ryad, "A Printed Muslim 'Lighthouse' in Cairo: *al-Manār*'s Early Years, Religious Aspiration and Reception (1898-1903)", *Arabica* 56 (2009) 27-60; Stéphane Dudoignon et al. (eds.), *Intellectuals in the Modern Islamic World. Transmission, transformation, communication*, London, New York (Routledge) 2006, 1-158.

[36] *Risālat al-islām* 3 (1951), 108-09; see in detail Brunner, *Islamic Ecumenism*, 210-11.

[37] Aleida Assmann, *Formen des Vergessens*, Göttingen (Wallstein) 2016, 30-68, distinguishes seven modes of forgetting; in the context of the *taqrīb* debate, "constructive forgetting" ("Konstruktives Vergessen – *tabula rasa* im Dienste eines politischen oder biographischen Neubeginns", 57-64) probably comes closest to the intentions of those who participated in this discussion within

perceived to be incorrect views held by Sunni authors both within the ecumenical movement and beyond. It also goes without saying that their way of treating hot topics was inevitably apologetic.[38]

Three basic directions for use when dealing with the differences can be distinguished: the first and easiest way was simply to declare specific contentious points obsolete. The authors claimed that the circumstances that in the distant past had caused these issues and later on contributed to their anchoring in polemical disputes had in the meantime ceased to exist. The controversies themselves that were therefore by consequence also regarded as no longer valid could thus could not be an obstacle to rapprochement anymore. In this manner, e.g., Muḥammad Jawād Mughniyya played down the practice of *taqiyya* or the temporary marriage (*mutʿa*).[39] Although theoretically still valid, he insisted, after defending them in great detail, that they were practically no longer in use and were even looked upon disapprovingly by modern Shiʿites.[40]

The second approach was of a more legalistic nature, and it was somewhat more de-

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the *jamāʿat al-taqrīb*.

[38] For what follows, see Brunner, *Islamic Ecumenism*, 218-28.

[39] On *taqiyya*, see Louis Medoff, "Taqiya, i: In Shiʿism", *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, online: http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/taqiya-i-shiism; the different categorical aspects are dealt with by Yarden Mariuma, "Taqiyya as Polemic, Law and Knowledge: Following an Islamic Legal Term through the Worlds of Islamic Scholars, Ethnographers, Polemicists and Military Men", *The Muslim World* 104 (2014), 89-108; in Sunnite Islam, *taqiyya* was mainly discussed in the context of the Moriscos' forced conversion to Christianity after the *reconquista* in the sixteenth century: Devin Stewart, " Dissimulation in Sunni Islam and Morisco *Taqiyya*", *al-Qanṭara* 34 (2013), 439-90. – On temporary marriage, see in general Shahla Haeri, "Motʿa", *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, online: http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/mota; on the discussions in the twentieth century in particular Werner Ende, "Ehe auf Zeit (*mutʿa*) in der innerislamischen Diskussion der Gegenwart", *Die Welt des Islams* 20 (1980), 1-43; a modern case study is Sabrina Mervin, "Normes religieuses et loi du silence: le mariage temporaire chez les chiites du Liban", in Barbara Drieskens (ed.), *Les métamorphoses du mariage au Moyen-Orient*, Beirut (Presses de l'Ifpo) 2008, 47-58 (online: http://ifpo.revues.org/452); on similar concepts in Sunnite islam see Roswitha Badry, "'Not macht erfinderisch' oder Sexualmoral im Umbruch? Die 'Genuss-Ehe' (*mutʿa*) im sunnitischen Kontext", in: Lorenz Korn et al. (eds.): *Die Grenzen der Welt. Arabica et Iranica ad honorem Heinz Gaube,* Wiesbaden (Ludwig Reichert Verlag), 307-19.

[40] Muḥammad Jawād Mughniyya, "al-Taqiyya bayn al-sunna wa-l-shīʿa", *Risālat al-islām* 14 (1963), 39-43; idem, "al-Mutʿa ʿind al-shiʿa", *al-ʿIrfān* 37/10 (October 1950), 1095-96; both articles are reprinted in his book *al-Shīʿa fī l-mīzān*, Beirut 1974, 48-52 and 373-74.

manding inasmuch as it consisted in a distinction between the fundamental obligations of the religion (*dīn*) on the one hand and those of the legal school (*madhhab*) on the other. The method as such was not entirely new: already in the 1930s, the Azhar rector Muḥammad Muṣṭafā al-Marāghī (d. 1945) and the Iraqi Shiʿite scholar ʿAbd al-Karīm al-Zanjānī (d. 1968) had met in Cairo and later on corresponded for a while in order to fathom the chances for sectarian rapprochement.[41] As far as I am aware, they were the first in the context of inner-Islamic religious dialogue to come up with a tripartition of the categories of religious law: the indisputable *uṣūl al-dīn* which were restricted to merely three points – the belief in the unity of God (*tawḥīd*), in Muḥammad's prophethood (*nubuwwa*) and in the hereafter (*maʿād*) –, the inoffensive legal norms (*furūʿ al-dīn*) which were accessible to legitimate *ijtihād* and where unity was therefore not considered a prerequisite, and, finally, the "principle of the legal schools" (*aṣl madhhabī*). The latter section was more or less exclusively reserved for the institution of the (Shiʿite) imamate, which was thus rendered innocuous, since – although it was certainly more than merely a secondary and derivative matter – it did not touch on the very foundations of Islamic religiosity. Whoever rejected the imamate, but accepted the three overriding principles was, according to this logic, not a Shiʿite but could absolutely be considered a Muslim.[42] In the context of the *taqrīb* debate of the 1950s, it was once again Muḥammad Jawād Mughniyya who adopted this principle and thus described the imamate as a "principle of the Shiʿite *madhhab*" (*aṣl li-madhhab al-tashayyuʿ*).[43]

The third method was to a certain extent the most risky one, as it consisted in reinterpreting contentious points in a way so as to make them compatible with the Sunnite point of view, without denying their existence or their significance out of hand. This was, for instance, the approach of the two Iraqi scholars Tawfīq al-Fukaykī (d. 1969) and Āyatollāh

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[41] On these endeavours (and their ulterior failure) see Brunner, *Islamic Ecumenism*, 103-20.

[42] Muḥammad Hādī al-Daftar, *Ṣafḥa min riḥlat al-imām al-Zanjānī wa-khuṭabihi fī l-aqṭār al-ʿarabiyya wa-l-ʿawāṣim al-islāmiyya*, Najaf 1366/1947, Beirut [3]1417/1996, 46-50; see Brunner, *Islamic Ecumenism*, 109-10.

[43] Muḥammad Jawād Mughniyya, "Ḍarūrāt al-dīn wa-l-madhhab ʿind al-shīʿa al-imāmiyya", *Risālat al-islām* 2 (1950), 387-89 (on 389).

Abū l-Qāsim al-Khū'ī (d. 1992) in their respective articles on the thorny issue of the alleged falsification of the Qur'anic text (*taḥrīf*).[44] In many pre-modern Shiʿite sources – above all in al-Kulaynī's compilation *al-Kāfī* – there are traditions to the effect that the Sunnite compilators of the scripture intentionally omitted all references and hints to ʿAlī and the imams (which were supposed to have been included in the original revelation), in order to reject any divine backing of the Shiʿite claim for leadership of the *umma*.[45] al-Fukaykī, however, after quoting a number of classical and modern scholars came to the conclusion that all hadiths in which the authenticity of the Koran is questioned had themselves undoubtedly been forged. al-Kulaynī, according to him, had quoted these traditions only "in order to depreciate those who uphold such an absurd claim".[46] As to al-Khū'ī, he went further than that – he basically accepted the authenticity of the traditions in question and did not flatly dispute the theoretical possibility of additions in ʿAlī's version of the Qur'an. But he emphasised that these additions could easily be explained as explanations of an exegetical type (*ta'wīl*) or as (nota bene non-qur'anic) "revelations sent down by God in order to clarify the meaning of individual passages".[47]

Beyond these three defensive approaches to history, there were a number of more or

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[44] On the evolution of this debate see Rainer Brunner, *Die Schia und die Koranfälschung*, Würzburg (Ergon) 2001.

[45] al-Kulāynī, *Uṣūl al-Kāfī*, I/347-50 (*Kitāb faḍl al-qur'ān – bāb al-nawādir*). One of the most important classical key texts has recently been edited by Etan Kohlberg and Mohammad Ali Amir-Moezzi, *Revelation and Falsification. The* Kitāb al-qirā'āt *of Aḥmad b. Muḥammad al-Sayyārī*, Leiden (Brill) 2009; on the general significance of the classical dispute and its implications for Islamic history in general, see Amir-Moezzi, *Le Coran silencieux et le Coran parlant*, 15-23, 63-100, 207-18.

[46] *fī tasfīh al-qā'ilīn bi-hādhihi l-daʿwā al-bāṭila*: Tawfiq al-Fukaykī, "Fī sabīl al-tafāhum", *Risālat al-islām* 12 (1960), 65-73 (on 67); Fukaykī also distingished himself as an apologist of the *mutʿa*, see Ende, "Ehe auf Zeit", 18-21. See in general Karl-Heinrich Goebel, *Moderne schiitische Politik und Staatsidee nach Taufīq al-Fukaikī, Muḥammad Ǧawād Muġnīya, Rūḥullāh Ḫumainī* (*Khomeyni*), Opladen (Leske + Budrich) 1984, 12-63.

[47] *al-tanzīl min Allāh sharḥ^an^ li-l-murād*: Abū l-Qāsim al-Khū'ī, "Ṣiyānat al-qur'ān min al-taḥrīf", *Risālat al-islām* 10 (1958), 186-89 (on 188); the article was an extract from a long chapter devoted to this issue in his book *al-Bayān fī tafsīr al-qur'ān*, Najaf 1375 / 1955-56, 156-72, an English translation of which is Sayyid Abū al-Qāsim al-Mūsawī al-Khū'ī, *The Prolegomena to the Qur'ān. Translated with in Introduction by A.A. Sachedina*, New York, Oxford (Oxford University Press) 1988, 135-77; on al-Khū'ī's reasoning see in more detail Brunner, *Die Schia und die Koranfälschung*, 88-92; on his biography see Sachedina's introduction to the aforementioned translation.

less standardised arguments with regard to the self-image of the *Jamāʿat al-taqrīb* and its main goals which revealed also a decidedly quietist attitude. The most important evidence in this context was the protestation that the main task of the association was to bring about a rapprochement of the legal schools, but by no means to strife for their unification, let alone their elimination.[48] The question was therefore not about converting Sunnites to Shiʿism or vice versa, but rather to establish Shiʿism as a fifth *madhhab* alongside the four Sunnite schools of law. This was a remarkable contrast to an earlier attitude among Shiʿite scholars in this regard: when Nādir Shāh held his famous conference in Najaf in 1743 and tried to subdue the Shiʿite clergy, he attempted to achieve this goal by moving the Ottomans to recognise Shiʿism as a fifth *madhhab*. The Shiʿite scholars understood the underlying motive of degradation perfectly well and refused to cooperate.[49] 200 years later, the same idea was brought forward by the Shiʿites themselves and reinterpreted as the noblest goal of ecumenical thought in Islam. It came to fruition in the famous fatwā issued by the Azhar rector Maḥmūd Shaltūt in summer 1959 in which he fully acknowledged Shiʿism as a fifth *madhhab*, on a par with the Sunnite schools, and even allowed mutual conversions. Until today, it is hailed by ecumenically-minded ("quietist", so to speak) Sunnite and Shiʿite scholars alike as the most remarkable step towards reaching a sectarian accord, its rather short-lived success and rather abrupt failure on the ground notwithstanding.[50]

Yet, by calling this approach (and in fact ecumenical endeavours in general) "quietist", we have to bear in mind that many of those who finally did convert – usually from Sunnism to Shiʿism, as there seem to be far more converts in this direction than the other way round – tended to end up writing that kind of literature which is rather typical of new converts. Aiming at proselytising others and making them "see the light" (the technical term in Shiʿism denoting converts is, rather caracteristically, *mustabṣirūn*)[51] as well, these treatises

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[48] Brunner, *Islamic Ecumenism*, 229-31, with a number of references.

[49] On this episode see in detail Ernest S. Tucker, *Nadir Shah's Quest for Legitimacy in Post-Safavid Iran*, Gainesville (University Press of Florida), 78-93.

[50] On this fatwā in general see Brunner, *Islamic Ecumenism*, 284-305.

[51] See, e.g., Ghulām Aṣghar Bajnūrī, *al-Mustabṣirūn*, Beirut (Dār al-Ṣafwa) 1414/1994; Khalid Sindawi, "*Al-Mustabṣirūn*,'Those Who Are Able To See The Light': Sunnī Conversion to Twelver

are more often than not of a distinctly polemical flavour against their former convictions and thus have much more "activist" leanings.[52] This, then, draws our attention to the fact that the identification of any course of action as quietist or activist cannot and should not be separated from the wider context, i.e. from the more general and overarching intentions of the respective actors. This means that the above-mentioned Shiʿite scholars did not participate in the *taqrīb* movement, because the ecumenical idea as such was necessarily quietist. Rather, Mughniyya or Khūʾī had a distinctly quietist outlook on religion from the beginning and thus found it apparently easy to contribute to an association whose primary goal was to foster mutual understanding, while refraining from political claims.[53] That the *taqrīb* idea could also be used on the firm basis of a thoroughly activist regime, was later on demonstrated by the Iranian government which – significantly after Khomeini's death in 1989 – promoted the foundation of the "World Association for the Rapprochement of the Islamic Schools of Law".[54] While the activist post-1979 regime has been using, for more than 25 years, the ecumenical idea as a vehicle for the proliferation of the Iranian revolution, their quietist predecessors in the 1950s and 60s aimed at defusing the sectarian tensions

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Shīʿism in Modern Times", *Die Welt des Islams* 51 (2011), 210-34.

[52] An early representative of this tendency was Muḥammad Marʿī al-Amīn al-Anṭākī (d. 1963 or 1964) and his book *Li-mādhā ikhtart madhhab al-shīʿa, madhhab ahl al-bayt*, Beirut ca. 1980; while his tone (the book was written around 1960) was predominantly apologetic, the books of his successors since the 1980s (such as Muḥammad al-Tijānī al-Samāwī, Ṣāliḥ al-Wardānī or Aḥmad Rāsim al-Nafis) are much more tinged in polemics; on this phenomenon see Rainer Brunner, "'Then I was guided'. Some Remarks on Inner-Islamic Conversions in the 20th and 21st Centuries", *Orient* 50.4 (2009), 6-15.

[53] Mughniyya was one of the outspoken critics of Khomeini's theory of *wilāyat al-faqīh*; see Ourghi, "Shiite criticism", 842; for Khūʾī's complicated relations with Khomeini, see Elvire Corboz, *Guardians of Shiʿism. Sacred Authority and Transnational Family Networks*, Edinburgh (Edinburgh University Press) 2015, 166-76.

[54] *al-Majmaʿ al-ʿālamī li-l-taqrīb bayn al-madhāhib al-islāmiyya*; on the early history of this institution see Wilfried Buchta, "Teherans *Maǧmaʿ at-taqrīb*: Neubeginn islamischer Ökumene oder trojanisches Pferd Irans", in: Lutz Edzard / Christian Szyska (eds.), *Encounters of Word and Texts. Intercultural Studies in Honor of Stefan Wild on the Occasion of His 60th Birthday, March 2, 1997, Presented ba His Pupils in Bonn*, Hildesheim et al. (Georg Olms Verlag) 1997, 223-40; idem, *Die iranische Schia und die islamische Einheit 1979-1996*, Hamburg (Deutsches Orient-Institut) 1997, 245-344. It has to be recalled that among the early (albeit not overly visible) participants of the Cairene association was also the founder of the Muslim Brotherhood, Ḥasan al-Bannā (d. 1949); see Brunner, *Islamic Ecumenism*, 180-83.

between the main groups in Islam; yet both found ecumenism a viable tool for their principal disposition.

It comes as no surprise that the *Jamāʿat al-taqrīb* throughout its existence energetically emphasised its intention to keep aloof from politics which was blamed for having caused the split between Shiʿites and Sunnites in the first place, for fear of being swept away by it. It is not without a great amount of unintentional humour that this is precisely what happened in the end, when the association fell victim to the political struggle between the Egyptian president Nasser and the Iranian Shah in summer 1960.[55] Its sad ending notwithstanding, the sheer existence of the ecumenical society may be considered as evidence that a defensive, careful, i.e. quietist approach to history can and did exist in modern Shiʿism, and that the offensive, political, i.e. activist approach is not necessarily the only logical outcome of history. Religion, like history in general, it has to be remembered, is what people make of it; this was already clearly recognised by the Greek philosopher Epictetus: "Men are disturbed not by things, but by the views which they take of things."[56] It is likely to hold true of quietists and activists alike.

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[55] Brunner, *Islamic Ecumenism*, 305-37. The association continued to exist until well after the Iranian revolution, but its public visibility vanished more or less completely; also later attempts to re-open it (in 1992 and 2008) failed; cf. Rainer Brunner, "Interesting Times. Egypt and Shiism at the Beginning of the Twenty-First Century", in: Meir Litvak / Ofra Bengio (eds.), *The Sunna and Shia in History. Division and Ecumenism in the Muslim Middle East*, New York (Palgrave Macmillan) 2011, 223-41.

[56] Thomas Wentworth Higginson (transl.), *The Works of Epictetus. Consisting of his Discourses, in Four Books, the Enchiridion, and Fragments*, Boston (Little, Brown, and Company) 1866, 377.