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THE NEW MIDDLE CLASS ISLAMIC REPUBLIC OF IRAN

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Abstract

One of the important discussions for studying political and social upheavals in different countries and regions is to pay attention to the new middle class and investigate about how they have been established and developed and also the performance of this class which naturally results in sociopolitical upheavals. In the present study, by hypothesizing that the new middle class is among forces influencing sociopolitical upheavals in Iran both before and after the Islamic Revolution, and regarding the issue of its rapid growth after the Islamic Revolution, demands for political participation on the part of this group increased in social and civil institutions. Influenced by the theory of James Bill and Bourdieu, the structure of the IRI was analyzed. What is obvious is that this class enjoys an independent identity and can affect some sociopolitical upheavals lonely and without dependency to other social classes.

However, mental inputs and outputs of this class is different from those of other classes and provide the grounds such as transference of values, political socialization and threats such as non-native formation of this class with the traditional society and classes in Iran as well as expansive migration of the members of this class. The objective of the present study is to answer questions such as: what does it mean by the new middle class in Iran? What factors cause the development of the new middle class in Iran in the years after the Iraqi-Iranian War?

Key words: Middle Class, Islamic Republic of Iran, social upheavals, political socialization.

Introduction

In Iranian sociology, the new middle class is divided into two traditional (early) and (late) groups each of which covers several layers, statuses and ranks. The traditional class includes two social layers of clergymen and traditional businessmen and marketers, and the new middle class is the result of the process of economic reconstruction,

development and growth, urbanization development, bureaucracy, and higher education in Iran, and nowadays, they are quantitatively increasing. Social layers include such as employers, managers, scholars, intellectuals, students, professionals, or specialists including engineers and physicians. The review of the historical events in contemporary Iran indicates that “the new middle class” including particularly those who have finished their higher education, plays a significant role in creating and guiding Iran. The active role of the new middle class is represented in organizing the 1920 Coup d'etat in Iran and Department of Administrative Organization of Reza Shah and then that of Muhammad Reza Shah on the one hand, the fundamental role of this class in the establishment of the Left Movement, the role of educated people of the middle class in the Oil Nationalization Movement, creating modern cultural attitudes and tendencies in new arts such as cinema, novel-writing, and new poetic styles. The expansion of religious intellectuals, Islamic Revolution and the Second of Khordad Movement (Reformist Movement) are other historical instances of active presence of the new middle class in Iran (Motallebi, 2007: 80).

In the new middle class of Iran, there have been two main tendencies which have been present from the beginning and been influenced by the degree of being influenced from the religious culture in the Iranian society. These two tendencies can be classified as the new religious and secular middle classes. Religious intellectuals are considered as burghers related to religious institutions and some part of the bureaucrats can be considered as the new religious middle class which in the Islamic Revolution in Iran, in alliance with clerics of whom a main part were among this class. In addition, they played significant roles in the alliance with the traditional middle class.

After the victory of the revolution, the mentioned alliance took the power. The traditional middle class in this alliance gradually in confrontation with issues of after the revolution indicated that have intellectual tendencies which are influenced by the intellectual micro-discourses within this new classes, in confrontation with political, economic, and cultural issues which can be classified in two religious reformist and fundamentalist micro-discourses.

Along with this group which mostly consists of the new middle class after the revolution, there is the new liberal middle class including some part of the political movements such as Freedom Movement, National Front and some private sector entrepreneurs and collection of clumps familiar with Western societies, and new media. This group is advocate of a kind of secularism in the domain of politics and epistemological pluralism, in the second decade after the revolution, gradually expanded and does their efforts for reinforcing their roles in the society (Fozi-Ramazani, 2009: 13).

1. Grounds for the establishment of identity disorder and generational differences in contemporary Iran.

Reza Khan's Renovation with the forceful formation of modern institutions such as army, new government administrations and modern media became the grounds of the establishment of a common economic and live class. This class gradually showed similar behaviors and actions in social and cultural situations; for example, the number of individuals working in the army of Reza Khan during 15 years from 1925 to 1941 increased as triple times (125 thousand individuals) and this issue constructed the first core of the establishment of a new urban middle class (Araghi, 2007: 35).

Training specialist human forces appropriate for modern institutions is itself a movement for institutionalizing the western educational system and placing the system of western values in the semi-traditional Iranian society. This process as long as basically the new middle class called "bureaucrats" which covers the meanings of utilizing technical skills and the power of administering governmental organizations. This interpretation indicates well that the influence of training this class from western education (Faizollahi, 1997: 53).

Some intellectuals such as Bourdieu basically define the middle class by the rationality of consumption. With this definition, the new middle class is the transmission belt of classes which is satisfied with the old bourgeois lifestyle which considered ethics as their task and is not similar to the working class. In addition to the similar economic status which draws the grounds of the establishment of the new middle class, briefly educating and being interested in higher education, flexibility and reduction in religious bias and renovation in its modern sense can be considered as the most important characteristics of this class in Iran. The middle class in Iran are not necessarily westernized, but in a lot of aspects, it has no reason to conflict with acquiring western values and at last, apparently it has tendencies towards them. In other words, its members are "modern-oriented" and even in their religious methods, they behavior appropriate to the relatively luxurious and modern appearance. This issue sometimes results in a kind of wastage in religiosity or the so-called religious tolerance so that some western scholars believe that by increasing the population of the new modern class which is less concerned with its religious rituals and traditions, the level of radicalism and fundamentalism will decrease in the world and tensions and conflicts, however not political, reduce (Progressive bourgeoisie..., 2008). This is the same thing which Iranian reformists count on in their political conflicts. But the most important characteristics of this class is its relation with media. A principle is always present in analyzing political action of the new middle class and that is that contrary to the common image, individuals of this class in our age rather than being in search of their class demands, are

in search of individual satisfaction. However classically, in the sociology of classes and social inequality, the middle class is considered as the promoter of luxury and dependent on bourgeois morality, the history of contemporary institution indicates that even the prevalence of anti-imperialist discourses have been able to motivate the social body of this class. 60's and 70's in Iran were years of severe tendency of some of the social forces of the middle class residing in Tehran such as intellectuals, students, and even wage earners to anti-imperialist and Marxist discourses. In fact, this class enjoyed a kind of non-consumption, anti-US, and generally anti-western rationality. Intellectuals such as Jalal Al Ahmad who is an agent for literary and cultural fight against the west, is a symbol of persistence of the middle social class for its intellectual demands (Yaminpour, 2009: 14). Media, by providing facilities, shape our perception of other groups, organizations, and events.

McQuail believes that the institution of media is involved in production, reproduction, and distribution of knowledge in its expansive term, i.e. meaningful and capable of being experienced symbols or references in social world. This knowledge capable us to give meaning to our own experiences, organize our perception of these experiences, and help us to keep our previous knowledge and continue our current understanding. Media have the responsibility of diffusing different kinds of knowledge, then act instead of other knowledge institutions (education, university, etc.)(Malekpour, 2011). Therefore, it can be claimed that in Iran, media reproduce the middle class and reinforce their cultural dimensions and lifestyle. This is that expectations which classical sociological theories of communication refer to.

2. The effects of meaning and functional changes of family in difference (or generational gap).

It is clear that media in the path of macro planning and futurism is forced to having a realist estimation of the state of family and intergenerational relations in the society because keeping and reinforcing family is consistent with different principles of the constitution and is considered as one of the objectives of the Islamic system in the thought of the founders and authorities of the Islamic Revolution, however this thought for westernized intellectual is considered more in the theoretical liberalist framework as some part of patriarchal tendencies of the Islamic Republic (Bashiriyeh, 1999: 34). Changes in the everyday lifestyle is among those phenomena receiving the attention of experts and has created concerns about the future of families in them. Family in Iran is perceived as a religious system, but social evidence develops concerns in the domain of secularization of this meaning system. Producing meaning from family naturally will be effective in the shape and content of intergenerational relations and at last, its function.

From the viewpoint of sociological studies, changes in social and economic conditions result in changes in family functions, in other words, it may that we observe evidences such as the acceptance of sexual needs outside the framework of families, reduction of supportive tasks of husbands for spouses, weakening the control and supervision of families over children and neglecting sexual differences in accepting main roles, etc. on the other hand, from the religious viewpoint, balanced family functions are absolute values which due to having roots in the human nature and the objective of his creation, should not be defined as a function of social conditions.

In modern societies and societies in which there is no modernity, in the process of identity creation, difficulties and turmoil emerge. The prevalence of individualism and enjoyment in such societies, expands ill-like movements one of which is the prevalence of narcissism and the presentation of narcissist personality. Giddens believes that in the modern society, people are involved in themselves and under the light of modern values and criteria, they rethink about themselves. As a result, the occurrence of identity challenges is one of the characteristics of modern societies.

3. The value gap resulting from transformation at the level of elites in the new middle class in Iran.

Some intellectuals in recent years in Iran interpret the changes and upheavals of elites in politics, transformation, membership and entrance of political elites to the power cycle of the country as a kind of “transformation”. It means that revolutionists reach the concerns of everyday life and become pragmatists and this event gradually leads younger generations with changes in their political attitudes (Samti, 2003: 99). In analyzing the constructive component of generational gap in Iran, the evolved state at the level of elites should be explicated. What is important in this regard is that the most important upheavals occur in the social middle class which are the most active class of sociopolitical activists. May be the first serious political transformation in years after the revolution which makes the analysis of cultural and political action of the new middle class a bit complicated, is the election held in 23 May 1997 in Iran. In analyzing this event, most of reformist intellectuals used the theoretical framework of Max Weber in analyzing political and sociological upheavals. Reformist intellectuals evaluate the demise of Imam Khomeini in 1988 as the beginning of changes in attitudes from the charismatic power to modern rationality. From Max Weber’s viewpoint, the charismatic leader with a unique personality, organizes around himself a large number of faithful people in a purposive and idealized collection and by shaping a kind of holiness raised from this charisma, give new and comprehensive identity and meaning to his followers, but this legitimacy is transient and in a process, it will become trivial.

Reformist intellectuals believe that first years of the 90's, the replacement of modern rationality and people's tendency to the products of secular religious intellectuals caused their rejections of traditional consideration of religion and joining them to the movements demanding democracy and revision in fixed principles. Religious intellectualism is the title mostly used for an array of new theories based on revision in the principles of Islamic thoughts (Bashiriye, 1999: 25).

The significant and influential presence of disciples of the secular religious movement in different political layers of the reformist state under titles such as counselors, agents, or even journalist under the support of the state caused the occurrence of a large amount of secular and revisionist literature in the cultural and political space in the country.

4. Considerations of policymaking in media with the understanding of generational relations

One of the most important groups targeted by the national radio and TV, as mentioned in the green book of the Radio and TV Organization (the most important axes of programming developed at the center of planning and programming the Radio and TV Organization), the third and fourth generation of the Revolution are generations which are in search of identity and making themselves distinctive from previous generations. These two generations that resort to each modern component of cultural sphere to construct their identity. Modern affairs with their large parts which are media products and services of the liberal western culture whose significant characteristics are the lack of traditional limitations and forbiddances; the reason of changes which are the result of the process of globalization and the expansion of modern ICT (Khashei, 2011). Therefore, without considering generational differences and also social gaps, designing media policies can be impossible and invalid. By relying on all issues discussed in the analysis of the state of generational relations and its constructive components, specific considerations can be counted in the domain of policymaking of national media. These considerations are generally centralized in three fields: firstly, attention to the reduction of verbal communication and emotional gap; the disturbance of socialization and transference of norms and occurrence of self-alienation with the reduction or the lack of presence of social participation; and changes in the political behavior influenced by the transformation at the level of elites as the most important considerations should be considered by media (Yaminpour, 2011: 44).

New middle class: concepts and components

In determining the new middle class, different criteria such as the level of education, lifestyle, employment, conditions of settlement, class knowledge, the necessity resulting from the texture of industrial societies, and the social status are

considered. In the third world, some people try to introduce renovation as a factor for creating this class. More Burger believes that in the countries of the Middle East, the new middle class is considered as the main force of political upheavals and if the political power is be available at the service of this class, the country will be led to renovation. Therefore, the role of the new middle class in creating socioeconomic renovation by most of researchers is considered as important. Dr. Ahmad Ashraf states that the new middle class is constructed of traditional families, free professionals, and bureaucratic literate people. He believes that the factor of having education is significantly effective in social movement of the lower class to the middle class. The presence of Iranian intellectual groups among this class and its effects on other groups of this class is so much that Al-Ahmad considers the new middle class in Iran owned by intellectuals and believes that the intentionally or non-intentionally, they were at the service of Pahlavi Regime. James Bill speaks of three concepts in definition of the new middle class in Iran: Intelligencia, Bureaucratic, and Professional and considers the educated members and founders of the University of Tehran as the core of the new middle class. He summarizes the main characteristics of the mentioned class in Iran as follows:

1. The members of the developing part of this class reject the acceptance of the traditional power relations which dominate Iranian society;
2. Members of intelligecia enjoy higher education or they are obtaining it;
3. Principally, the power of the members of this group results from skills and techniques which they have achieved due to official education;
4. The members of the new middle class are familiar at different levels with western thoughts and philosophy;
5. Members of this class are free from each kind of religious rigor or imitated questions of the past times (Bill, 1963: 100).

The Islamic Republic and unwanted policies resulting in the expansion of the new middle class:

Population growth, getting higher the level of education and literacy, and the development of educational centers in the age of the Islamic Republic have had deep effects on recent political and economic upheavals in Iran and in the future decades they will be more.

As the expansive movement of rural youth to urban regions affected the social revolution of 1978-1979; the youngness of the population provided the emergence of the democratic reformist movement presided by Seyyed Mohammad Khatami.

The population of Iran for two decades (1976-1996) got twice and reached about 60 million people in 1996. What is important in the population upheavals of Iran is the mode of age distribution and the proportion of the youth in its arrangement (60% of the population of Iran in 1996 were under 25 years old) (Planning and Budget Organization, 1999: 62). This event known as demographic revolution and generation gap, has not provided such a chance to the Islamic Revolution to transfer previous values to the new generation in a calm and natural process. This event which has influenced the two groups in the middle class (students which according to Huntington are the most coherent and effective revolutionary forces within the intellectual society and university students which are the origin of cultural articles of the middle class) and has put them in a situation which basically has no common emotional feeling with the past glories and with a new view to their worlds, demand a future with perceptions and values particular to themselves. From other developments, one can refer to the changes in the rate of literacy after the Revolution (Araki, 2007).

Intellectuals, the core of the new middle class:

Intellectuals are considered as the core of the new middle class and particularly in Iran, they are considered as one of the main groups involved in the domain of politics, the Islamic Revolution is the result of traditional and modern forces. Clergymen united people and religious intellectuals had the responsibility of guiding the revolution and gave them a modern profile. The first state after the revolution indicated this coalition. The modern middle class in the time period from 1963 to 1978 developed significantly and Pahlavi Regime considered it its own social base, but neglecting the ideals of this class particularly its political demands by the regime caused that they gradually get alienated from the political system and join the opponents of the regime. In the Islamic Revolution, this class including intellectuals, the nascent industrial bourgeoisie, students and administrative staff joined the revolutionaries. The main demands of them were freedom and political participation and after the revolution, Bazargan's state was considered as the representative of the new middle class and it was expected that this class receive its share from the revolution, but the traditional middle class and lower social classes gradually rejected this group, the interim government resigned and attacks on intellectuals (liberals) began.

Organizations representatives of the new middle class including the National Front, the Freedom Movement, the party and the nation ... gradually were removed from the political scene and in addition, leftist student organizations, due to some radicalism and not accepting rules of the game, were excluded. As a result, the new middle class got deprived of having

any organizational system in the political domain. Islamic associations replaced the previous institutions in offices and universities. Due to the severe control over individuals and groups dependent to the new middle class imposed by relative institutions, a lot of specialists, employees, students and professors preferred to migrate to western countries and the government was the representative of traditional classes, clergymen and the poor. After the war, the nature of the state gradually changed. The fall of two legitimating sources of the Islamic Revolution, i.e. the charisma of Imam Khomeini and the war and the necessity of economic renovation caused that a state took the power which unconsciously contributed to the growth of the middle class. Policies of Hashemi's government in economy gradually provided the grounds for the emergence of a modern economic middle class. Encouraging investment and welcoming university educated managers in the atmosphere of the post-war economy provided the ground for the development of modern forces. In fact, it can be said that the state-nation contradiction which is the result of the entrance of modernity to Iran, has always been changed into the main concern of the members of the new middle class particularly intellectuals. This concern is the ground for social and political movements in recent decade which have changed our political lives as seriously as possible. However, it seems that the new middle class in Iran, due to specific reasons, is going to miff and go; in other words, it emerges on the one hand, and is vanished on the other hand. Some people are struggling disappointment and depression and others migrate. Therefore, the new middle class in Iran are not advancing and determining contrary to the modern middle class in the US and Europe because it suffers from the lack of two situations; firstly this issue that it lacks any party or organization and secondly, it lacks philosophy. Contemporary intellectuals in Iran lack identity creating elements. These issues are merely in the criticism of tradition of intellectualism in the previous period belonging to Al-Ahmad (anti-western) and Shariati (changing tradition into ideology) and influence individuals and groups in the new middle class, but in the positive profile of their thoughts and intellect, they have no definition of modern philosophy because their thoughts is the cause of the fall of inconsistent and heterogeneous thoughts which cannot attain internal interaction in a single container. Students in Iran in the positive profile of their thoughts feel the lack of identity and each group and sect can influence their thoughts and intellect; groups which themselves claim political thought and development. Thoughts of religious forces belong to 60's and 70's and it has been long time that they have lost the nature of being up to date. Modernist groups are in search of limited democracy and they do not follow the democratic rules in power relations; as a result, the foundation of democracy as a part of modern philosophy has been neglected and influenced by their political

games. Traditionalists are both conservative and fundamentalist. They lack communicative instruments for dialoguing with the new middle class. Leftists live in the modern world physically, but mentally, they have been underdeveloped and cannot speak with the emerging middle class. Therefore, the new middle class in Iran are continuously evaporated and cannot be established (Iran Newspaper, 2003: 9).

The role of the new middle class and its micro-discourse in the political upheavals of Iran are as follows:

1. Affecting the elements of political power

The new middle class in years after the revolution, gradually tried to rise its status in the domain of political decision making and followed this objective via influencing the domain of election. By establishing the IRI while the new secular middle class, due to the lack of mass status, was not be successful in this domain, the new religious middle class, by improving its social status, could influence the political domain of the society and achieve important statuses among elements of political powers in the IRI.

2. Affecting groups and parties enjoying influence on the political domain

Political groups and parties are other ways of conducting influence and affecting the political domain. Gradually, in the second and third decades of the revolution, parties and sects which were based on the needs of this class were established. Establishing the Executives of Construction Party can be considered as the beginning of these upheavals. These parties which can also be called Islamic Technocrats, with the support of Hashemi Rafsanjani's state, influenced significantly the political and economic domain of Iran and construct a specific development process in Iran. Other parties such as Participation, Mojahedin of Islamic Revolution, Moderation and Development, Abadgardan, the Islamic Society of Engineers and a lot of other parties are among groups working within the new middle class. The origin of the parties are most of universities and religious intellectuals as well as new social layers.

3. Trying to influence the cultural-political domain

The new middle class, after the revolution tried to play some roles in the domain of political culture building and by providing new interpretation of the religion-politics relation, it could keep the interests of its own. By presenting its own attitudes by media and new communication instruments and by influencing the cultural and educational domain particularly journals and media, it tried to be influential.

Conclusion

It seems important that always, the new middle class as a part of the social body of identification which actively tries to make relations with intellectuals and their intellectual products for enjoying a more serious level of analysis and understanding of situations in its time. Accordingly, upheavals at the level of elits and fundamental changes in their views can make the society be encountered with value upheavals which can be effective in the field of inter-generational gaps. Comparing briefly the internal situation in Iran, before and after the constitution, indicates that this class, due to having non-conservative characteristics, has always criticized power from a non-traditional perspective; the criticism which has been sometimes consistent with the critical views of the traditional middle class. In this class, two groups of religious middle class and new secular middle class can be identified. In recent years, the new religious middle class with two reformist and fundamentalist tendencies, entered the political domain and in each three domains of political power, political parties, and political culture enjoyed power and influence in such a way that the upheavals of the second and third decades of the revolution can be considered as the age of severe political competition and going hand-in-hand the political power between the two reformist and fundamentalist movements in the new middle class, each of which tries to make coalition with other classes and movements and increase its power in the political domain and dominate the main elements of The legislature and the executive powers. But new upheavals in the domain of these upheavals for the future of religious government seems important, the effort of the new liberal middle class for improving its influence in the two domains of political parties and political culture which can be conducted directly or in coalition with religious movements. These calm upheavals indicate the significance of more investigation on the new classification of the new middle class and its effect on the future of the Islamic Revolution and illustrate the necessities of more expansive researches in this domain.

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