



## ISLAMIZATION, SHIA, AND IRAN: The Historical Background of Shia-Iran Sensitive Issues

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### ABSTRACT

After the Syrian civil war broke out in the year 2011, many news outlets around the world have accused the Iranian Shia regime of interfering in the region by means of promoting sectarian violence. The chain of issues can be tracked back to emergence of Iran as an Islamic Republic in 1979 after which many countries including Pakistan and Indonesia feared revolutions like Iran. This resulted in negative perceptions of the Iranian regime. This Research shows that negative perceptions about the current Iranian regime among many Sunnite-Majority countries exist because of past conflicts between the Sunnite and the Shia. Islamization of present-day Iran or Persia in the past along with spread of Islam in Iran by Arabs in the early days of Islam has always caused conflicts between Arabs and Persians e.g. Shiasization of Persia under Shah Ismail I of Safavid Dynasty and atrocities against Sunnis.

### ABSTRAK

Setelah perang saudara Suriah pecah pada tahun 2011, banyak outlet berita di seluruh dunia menuduh rezim Syiah-Iran mencampuri wilayah tersebut dengan cara mempromosikan kekerasan sektarian. Rantai masalah dapat dilacak kembali pada kemunculan Iran sebagai Republik Islam pada tahun 1979 setelah banyak negara, termasuk Pakistan dan Indonesia, takut pada revolusi seperti Iran. Ini menghasilkan persepsi negatif tentang rezim Iran. Penelitian ini menunjukkan bahwa persepsi negatif tentang rezim Iran saat ini di antara banyak negara mayoritas Suni ada karena konflik masa lalu antara Suni dan Syiah. Islamisasi Iran di masa kini atau Persia di masa lalu yang bersamaan dengan penyebaran Islam di Iran oleh orang Arab di masa awal Islam selalu menyebabkan konflik antara orang Arab dan Persia seperti Syiasisasi Persia di bawah Shah Ismail I dari Dinasti Safawi dan kekejaman terhadap orang-orang Suni.

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### Introduction

When the escalation of armed conflict occurred in the center East, especially during the civil war in Syria began in 2011, the report linked it to the role of Iran is also spread. With the ability to access the internet network, various types of information can be reached easily. The



problem that arises is the information contents of it, is not credible, even hoaxes and spread of hatred each other were found.<sup>1</sup> It is ignoring that the civil war in Syria is a sad humanitarian disaster, there are still elements of social media users who are actually busy in sharing sensitive content and narratives. Some support Bashar Al-Assad's government forces, while rebel supporters accuse Al-Assad with Iranian support of being "a Shiite dictator of the Sunnite massacre."<sup>2</sup>

Related to the cooperation between Iran and Syria, Ali Ansari and Aniseh Bassiri Tabrizi in a paper on the title "*Understanding Iran's Role in the Syrian Conflict*" gave an opening of the study by emphasizing the political and religious aspects. This paper believes that Syria has long been known as an "important" ally for the Islamic Republic of Iran when it became the only Arab country supporting Iran during the Iraq-Iran war (1980-1988). The Alawi regime and the existence of Shiite holy sites in Syria are seen as strengthening strategic bilateral relations based on a measure of ideological support, while for Tehran whose revolutionary government has an interest in maintaining a connecting area with Hezbollah (Shia Islamic militia) in Lebanon, all it helps to streng the second country's alliance better.<sup>3</sup>

In the fact, if we take time back, about three decades ago, then we will get the same phenomenon in assessing the existence of Iran. Inayatullah, an intellectual scholar supporting democracy and secularism from Pakistan, also wrote about the issue of Iran in his country as follows:<sup>4</sup>

"The Iranian Revolution, for the first time in history, gave rise to Shiite ambitions to export the revolution to other Islamic countries. This kindled a revolutionary spirit among the Shiite groups in Pakistan. This Shiite political views and activism has led to latent sectarianism among Sunnite groups in Pakistan who have an ambivalent attitude towards the position of Shiites in the Moslem community."

Pakistan is geographically located in South Asia, but Inayatullah's writing provides an additional picture of Iran's ability to be able to exert influence directly and "worries" around the world, which is precisely caused by political constellation within the internal nation itself, namely from the 1979 Iranian revolution.

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<sup>1</sup> Arafah Pramasto, et. al., *Makna Sejarah Bumi Emas: Kumpulan Artikel Sumatera Selatan dan Tema-tema Lainnya* (Bandung: Ellunar Publisher, 2018), p. 61.

<sup>2</sup> One example is Abu Nasim Mukhtar bin Rifa'i, "Iran Dalang Kekacauan Global," *Asy Syariah*, 8 August 2017, [www.asyariah.com/iran-dalang-kekacauan-global](http://www.asyariah.com/iran-dalang-kekacauan-global), accessed 2 August 2019.

<sup>3</sup> Anniseh Bassiri Tabrizi and Raffaello Pantucci (eds.), "Understanding Iran's Role in the Syrian Conflict," *Royal United Service Institute (RUSI) for Defence and Security Studies Occasional Paper* (August, 2016), p. 3.

<sup>4</sup> Ulil Abshar-Abdalla (ed.), *Islam & Barat: Demokrasi dalam Masyarakat Islam* (Jakarta: Friedrich-Naumann-Stiftung (FNS) Indonesia dan Pusat Studi Islam Paramadina, 2002), p. 71.



Concerns about Iran's Shia could also be a strategic issue in the political dynamics of Indonesia, a nation does not have a dominant Shia population. In 2014, Mahfud MD seized public attention. He mentioned that there are three dangerous movements operating in Indonesia, namely: *first*, a movement wants Indonesia to become a country like the era of the empire or the Ottoman Empire. *Second*, a movement wants Indonesia to become a *mullah* state like Iran. *Third*, the Wahhabi movement wants to displace the understanding of *Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jamâ'ah* Islam.<sup>5</sup> The problem is Mahfud MD brings up Iran and Shia issues.

Since the news about the civil war in Syria has surfaced in the international public, resistance in the name of the Sunnis addressed to the Iranian state along with Shia schools has also been circulating, even at the lower levels of the Moslem community. A concrete example is the *At-Taqwa* bulletin published by the Ikhlahul 'Amal Foundation in Palembang. The bulletin, which is often circulated after Friday prayers, contains a historical headline of the emergence of Shia. At that time, this bulletin stated that Shias were divided into five main sects, namely Kaisania, Imamia (Rafida), Zaidia, Ghulat, and Ismailia. From the five sects gave birth to many branches of other sects. Interestingly, the edition of the bulletin mentioned,

“From the five sects, the most important one to be promoted are the Imamia or Shia Rafida sects who always struggled to destroy Islam and Moslems from the past. In various ways this group continues to try to spread its various deviations, especially after the establishment of the Iranian Shiite state which toppled the Shah Reza Pahlavi regime.”<sup>6</sup>

Apart from being mistaken in mentioning the name of the ruler of the Pahlavi Dynasty who was overthrown in 1979, namely Syah Muhammad Reza Pahlavi, son of Syah Reza Pahlavi, the writing in this bulletin tends to contain historical confusion. The Shiite sect which clearly committed violence against the universal symbols of Moslems was the Qaramitha in the Bahraini region. They carried out the massacre of the pilgrims, and the most sadistic of them is their invasion of the Grand Mosque on Tarwiyah Day, 8 Zulhijah 317 H. Apart from slaughtering, they even stole Hajar Aswad (the Black Stone).<sup>7</sup> Qaramitha is a non-orthodox Shiite sect (*madzhab ghayr mu'tabar*) that has become extinct.

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<sup>5</sup> Sigit Pinardi, “Mahfud Tegaskan tak Perlu Bingung Tiga Capres PKB,” *Antara*, 21 February 2014, <https://www.antaraneews.com/berita/420343/mahfud-tegaskan-tak-perlu-bingung-tiga-capres-pkb>, accessed 2 August 2019.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Ardison Muhammad, *Iran: Sejarah Persia & Lompatan Masa Depan Negeri Kaum Mullah* (Surabaya: Penerbit Liris, 2010), p. 99.



On a regional scale of the Middle East in contemporary times, Iran is accused of being behind the Yemen conflict in 2015. After Ali Abdullah Saleh resigned as president of Yemen in 2012, the Houthi rebels of the Shiite Zaidia sect, which had initially moved against the government since 2004, starting to get a breath of fresh air. At the end of 2014, the Houthis improved their relations with the ousted president, Ali Abdullah Saleh, and were able to control several cities including the national capital, Sana'a. The attack caused the government of President Abdrabbuh Mansour Hadi, who came to power since February 27, 2012 to replace Abdullah Saleh, to fall. Hadi left Yemen on March 26, 2015 under the protection of Saudi Arabia.<sup>8</sup>

It shows the tendency of the concern of the Moslem world community, the majority of whom are not Shia followers, on issues that integrate the school with Iran. The Shia-Iran problem arises in the thinking of Moslems outside geographical and sectarian boundaries. This is interesting to study, because actually the two identities are different; Iran is a nation, while Shia is an Islamic school. Both become a single entity that gives such an impact. This paper tries to answer it based on the dynamics of Iranian history. For this reason, this paper will explore far to the starting point which has often been ignored in issues around Iran, namely the encounter of this nation with Islam and the process of its formation as a Shia state.

### Pre-Islamic Persian Collapse Period

Modern Iran is geographically located between 25°-40° N and 44°-64° East. The area of this country reaches 1,648,195 km<sup>2</sup>. Iran is neighboring to several countries, such as Azerbaijan, Armenia, and Turkmenistan in the north (around the Caspian Sea), Afghanistan and Pakistan in the east, and Iraq in the west. Of the total area of Iran, 1,636 million km<sup>2</sup> of them are dry land. The length of the land border reaches 5,440 km, while the coastal area reaches 2,440 km along the Arabian Gulf and the Gulf of Oman, and approximately 740 km along the Khazar Sea.<sup>9</sup> Iran's population in 2016 was around 79 million, an increase of about nine million according to the census a decade earlier, in 2006 which numbered 72 million. According to the 2009 United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction Global Assessment Report (GAR) in 2009, since 1881 the country's population has increased from 7.7 million to 65 million. In

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<sup>8</sup> Tempo Magazine, edition 26 April 2015.

<sup>9</sup> Samih Said Abud, *Minoritas Etnis dan Agama di Iran* (Jakarta: Pustaka Al-Kautsar, 2014), p. 1.



other words, population growth has also increased, from 0.6% to 3.9% over the past 120 years. Higher population concentrations are found in the north and west of the country.

Persia is a large nation has an old history since around 600 AD, so it cannot be denied this nation often witnessed the rise and fall of many other civilizations. The problem is the way Persia, which is currently known to Iran, it can be one of the symbols of Islamic power in the world. There is a beginning that underlies the meeting of “two worlds” between established Persian civilization and Islam as a *Samāwī* religion born in different places, although relatively not too far from the Persian lands. Geopolitically, the Middle East at the time of Islam's arrival was experiencing the spread of hegemony due to political competition between the Eastern Romans (Byzantium) facing the Persian-Sassanian Empire. These two empires were involved in a dispute in the struggle for power, which was followed by religious hostility; Eastern Rome embraced Christianity, while Persia embraced Majūs/Zoroaster.

During the reign of Khosrow II Parvez (Parviz) in power since 590 AD, Persia was involved in a fierce conflict versus Eastern Rome. The war lasted from 604 AD to 630 AD Persian forces achieved extraordinary success against Byzantium by conquering Syria and conquering Palestine and Jerusalem in 614 AD The Persians then seized the original cross which is believed that Jesus was crucified on it. The Persian takeover of Jerusalem was inseparable from the help and direction of the Jews during the battle. In 616 AD, Khosrow conquered Egypt and then succeeded in besieging Constantinople for quite a long time. Heraclius asked for peace, but Khosrow responded with pride. For Persia peace would be achieved if the Eastern Romans were willing to follow and spread the Zoroastrians. Heraclius, whose heart was on fire, immediately overhauled the military order in Constantinople, which was destroyed by Persia. That spirit led the Romans to take control of the war in 623 AD The Persians suffered a series of defeats which culminated in the Nineveh War.<sup>10</sup> After Khosrow II died, Jerusalem fell back into the hands of Christians after being captured by Heraclius, Roman Emperor, in 629 CE.<sup>11</sup>

The Romans regained the holy land of their religion and their relics (sacred objects), the holy cross, which had been captured by the Persians. This victory is in accordance with the message in the word of God in al-Rûm [30]: 4, which outlines that the Romans will regain victory after suffering defeat, and that Roman victory will make the believers happy. This shows that the Persians and Romans were among the important issues raised in the Islamic holy

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<sup>10</sup> Ahmad Mahmud Sulaiman, *Tuhan dan Sains* (Jakarta: Serambi Ilmu Semesta, 2001), p. 65.

<sup>11</sup> Imam Khomeini, *Palestina dalam Pandangan Imam Khomeini* (Jakarta: Pustaka Zahra, 2004), p. 5.



book. In the year 6 H./627 AD, Khosrow II received a letter from the Prophet Muhammad, which was brought by 'Abd Allāh ibn Hadhaqah. The substance of this phenomenal letter in Middle Eastern history is as follows: *first*, a prayer of salvation for anyone who follows Allah and His Messenger. *Second*, the apostolic statement of the Prophet Muhammad. *Third*, the invitation to embrace Islam for good. *Fourth*, the loss for those who refuse the invitation. The letter sent to the Shahanshah or King of the Persian Diraja was torn apart. Prophet Muhammad PBUH responded firmly to the dismissal of the letter: "Tell him (Khosrow II), my religion and power will reach areas never reached by Kisra (Persian Emperor)!"<sup>12</sup>

Khosrow II was killed in a crossbow in 628 AD when his son, Kavadh II, was carrying out a coup after his father's defeat at the Battle of Nineveh (627 CE). Kavadh II Shiruyas only led for a short time in 628 AD, which is about seven months, because he died of an outbreak. Kavadh II's replacement, whose Christian is Diofisit, is Ardashir III, his eight-year-old son. Because he was still unable to govern, Ardashir III was under the influence of the *wuzurg framadar* (prime minister) named Mah-Adhur Gushnasp (Arabic: *Mahadarjusynas*). A year after the promotion of Ardashir III's throne, Sharbaraz/Sharvaraz, a former *spahbed* (general) during the Kavadh II period who was also a member of the *sahrdaran* (nobility) of the Mihran clan, rose to revolt. Sharbaraz succeeded in capturing Ctesiphon and executed Ardashir III and Mah-Adhur Gushnasp. Sharbaraz was killed by Mah-Adhur Gushnasp's cousin Farrukh Hormizd, a prince and spahbed from Atropatene, on 9 June 630 AD Boran or Puran, daughter of Khosrow II, succeeded in ascending the throne and binding the peace treaty with Heraclius.<sup>13</sup>

The Persian Empire was torn to shreds due to internal friction in the post-war years against the Romans. Until 631 AD, Persia repeatedly experienced a bloody throne. Boran abdicated after being ousted by his political opponents, then Shapur-i-Shahrbaraz, Sharbaraz's son, was crowned. After leading briefly, Shapur was deposed and his fate was then unknown. His successor was Azarmidokht, Boran's younger brother. Farrukh Hormizd was killed by Azarmidokht after he presumptuously wanted to marry the Persian queen. Not accepting the death of his father, Rostam Farrokhzad or known by the name 'Rustum' immediately killed Azarmidokht. Rostam put Boran back on the throne. But the political ferocity of the Persian court took Boran as a victim. Nobody knows about his death. Some people believe Boran was

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<sup>12</sup> Roger Crowley, 1453: *Detik-detik Jatuhnya Konstantinopel ke Tangan Moslem* (Jakarta: Pustaka Alvabet, 2011), p. 10.

<sup>13</sup> Henry Smith Williams, *The Historians' History of the World*, vol. 8 (London: Hooper & Jackson, Ltd., 1909), p. 32.



killed by a conspiracy designed by Piruz Khosrow. Another strongest possibility is that Boran planned to surrender Persia to be led by Rostam Farrokhzad for 10 years, after which the throne had to be returned to the Kisra family (the ruling Sassania Dynasty).<sup>14</sup>

### The Islamic Conquest of Persia

Internal turmoil in Persian politic resulted in weaknesses of coordination in the military sector. During the Caliphate of Abû Bakr al-Shiddîq there was a rebellion, but it was successfully overcome by the Commander-in-Chief Khâlid ibn al-Walîd. Persia provoked Arab tribes in Iraq to attack Moslem whose territory extended to Nejd in the north. In the Persian view, its main rival was indeed the Eastern Roman Empire/Byzantium, but the increasingly strong existence of Islam also made Persia hot. After Boran's death in 632 AD, the fact that Persian politics was in the hands of elite-military groups such as Piruz Khosrow and Rostam Farrokhzad could no longer be hidden. If it is true that Piruz Khosrow is behind Boran's murder, Rostam must be careful. Piruz was a figure of the Sassanian political faction called *Parsig* (Persian), while Rostam's father, Farrukh Hormizd, was a figure of the Parthian or Pahlav factions. To create constructive collaboration between the two factions, Rostam and Piruz agreed to appoint Yazdegerd III, the son of Shahriar and grandson of Khosrow II Parvez, as the new emperor on June 16, 632 AD. At the very least, with the appointment, the Rostam-Boran conspiracy could be covered up and as if not otherwise proven. In fact, the Parsig-Pahlav collaboration did not have much impact on the future of Persia. Between the years 11-12 H, precisely in the month of Muharam or the third week of March 633 AD, Ibn al-Walîd departed for Iraq after quelling the rebellion in Yamamah with 10,000 soldiers. Another 8,000 Moslem troops under the leadership of Mutsannâ ibn Hârîtsah, Deputy Commander-in-Chief, were waiting for Ibn al-Walîd in Khaffan south of Hira. Ibn al-Walîd then brought 18,000 troops. He made it through 11 battles against Persia with a perfect victory.<sup>15</sup>

In contrast to friction, division, intrigue, and slander on the Persian Sassanian side, Islam as a power of their opponents instead to display a solid and noble attitude. Islamic power is not comparable to Persia in terms of territory, military and hegemony. After Abû Bakr died on the 22<sup>nd</sup> of July the 13<sup>th</sup> of 13/22 August 634 CE, 'Umar ibn al-Khaththâb succeeded him as the

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<sup>14</sup> Abu Jannah, *Umar bin Khatthab Raudhiyallahu'anhu* (Jakarta: Pustaka Al-Inabah, 2017), p. 108.

<sup>15</sup> Qasim A. Ibrahim dan Muhammad A. Saleh, *Buku Pintar Sejarah Islam* (Jakarta: Penerbit Zaman, 2014), p. 114.



caliph. He did not like the military leadership of Ibn al-Walid which he considered too royal and irregularly sent reports. Although instigated to stage a coup, Ibn al-Walid dismissed it while saying, “Abū Bakr has died and ‘Umar became caliph, let us listen and obey!” He said it when he asked Moslem in Syria to pledge allegiance to ‘Umar, the new caliph.<sup>16</sup> The loyalty of Ibn al-Walid is an anti-thesis of the attitude of the Persian aristocratic elite who played a lot of intrigue around the succession of the appointment of the emperor.

Under the Caliphate ‘Umar, the Arabs entered Iraq, Syria and Egypt by winning a series of amazing victories. They defeated the Persian army at the Battle of Qadisiyah in 637 AD, which led to the downfall of the Sassanian capital, Persia, in Ctesiphon. After having employed manpower, the Moslems were able to occupy the entire territory of the Persian empire.<sup>17</sup> It is important to note it in the latter part of the phase the Islamic army under command of Sa‘ad ibn Abū Waqqāsh participated in utilizing Persian resources which had advance in military technology. After Rostam Farrokhsad was killed by Hilāl, a Moslem soldier, in the Qadisiyah war, they also succeeded in conquering Burs and Babil after crossing the Euphrates River until finally reaching Madain (Ctesiphon). Moslem use 20 large slingshots (*manjaniq*) made by Persians who have converted to Islam.<sup>18</sup> The prototype of the modern Islamic country of Iran which is famous for the development of nuclear technology has actually seen in the phase of the conquest of Persia Sassania by Islam.

There is a supernatural story about the Persian conquest war by Moslems. In 642 AD when they troop a led by Sarīyah ibn Zanim al-Du’alī, an officer, carried out a military campaign to Nahawand, the old city and now located in Hamedan Province, the Moslem had to fight the Persian forces under the leadership of Piruz Khosrow and Mardanshah Dzū al-Hājib (thick eyebrows). During the battle, ‘Umar was delivering a sermon in Medina, “O Sarīyah, mountains, mountains!” Strangely, at that time the Sarīyah forces who were being pushed in the doorway of Nahawand could hear suara Umar’s voice in Medina. Finally, the Sarīyah army moved to the other side of the mountain muttering, “Isn’t this the voice of *amīr al-mu’minīn* (‘Umar)?” Moslem forces in Nahawand survived the insistence of the Persian army. They finally

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<sup>16</sup> Abu Fatah Grania, *Panglima Surga* (Jakarta: Cicero Publishing, 2008), p. 120.

<sup>17</sup> Karen Armstrong, *Sejarah Islam: Telaah Ringkas Komprehensif Perkembangan Islam Sepanjang Zaman* (Bandung: Mizan, 2014), p. 76.

<sup>18</sup> Abu Jannah, *Umar bin Khatthab*, p. 133.





won against five times more enemy troops.<sup>19</sup> Piruz and Mardanshah died on the battlefield against fewer enemies.

In warfare, especially in the modern context, an army cannot win if there is no integrity in the ranks of the military, that is between the highest minister and the commanders, between the commander and officers, and between the officers and his army. It is amazing that Moslems could defeat Persia, because they were not a large and old empire like Persia. After that, the Persians could no longer gather such a large army. Yazdegerd, Emperor of Persia, fled east. According to al-Thabari (838-923 AD), the Persian Moslem historian, Yazdegerd III sent a letter to the Emperor of China in 651 AD, the kings of Bangalore, Gabriel (now Kabul), and the Khazars to ask for help. But this poor Persian emperor was robbed and killed by a small mill owner. Peroz III, Yazdegerd's third son, continued to head east with 1,000 of his followers to seek help from the Tang Dynasty in China. At the same time, Emperor Gaozong of China was at war with the Western Turks, so he was reluctant to get involved in another war.<sup>20</sup> This is the end of the Sassanian dynasty, the Persian Empire, which later became part of the Islamic civilization.

### Persian Shiism in the Safavid Dynasty

Safawia is a ideology which it is originally Sunnite, then it changed its flow to Shia Imamia and participated in spreading the Shia's sect after successfully reaching the peak of power as an imperial dynasty in Persia. After the Mongol invasion in the 13<sup>th</sup> century AD, demoralization and pain hit Persia. Persians have a tendency to live alone. Mystical belief is increasingly striking. The center of the Sufis, called *khan kah* (Persia: *khaneqan*), in Iran grows everywhere like mushrooms. One of the most famous *khaneqans* is in Ardebil, under the leadership of Safiuddin Ardebili (d. 1334 AD). Most prominent figures of the time, including the princes and commanders, became followers of Ardebili who were respected by the people as *mursyid* of the *thariqah* or *khaneqan* spiritual leaders.<sup>21</sup>

Safiuddin Ardebili is also known as Safiuddin Ishaq. He lives as a trader and expert in politics. However, he lacks ambition to power, because this field is not his main concern. He

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<sup>19</sup> Cahaya Sufi Magazine, edition 84, 2013.

<sup>20</sup> Paulos Z. Huang, *Yearbook of Chinese Theology 2018* (Leiden: Brill, 2018), p. 47.

<sup>21</sup> Muhammad Hasyim Assagaf, *Lintasan Sejarah Iran: Dari Dinasti Achaemenia ke Republik Revolusi Islam* (Jakarta: The Cultural Section of Embassy of the Islamic Republic of Iran, 2009), p. 325.



was more interested in protecting the poor and the weak and had a mission to convert the Mongols. The network of students and their representatives stretches from the Oxus region to the Persian Gulf, and from the Caucasus region to Egypt. In the beginning, this movement aimed to fight the deniers and heretic experts. The influence and followers of the Safawia movement are getting bigger and bigger.<sup>22</sup> Safiuddin and his successor son, Sadruddin, were Sunni followers, but Khwaja Ali, Sadruddin's son, who succeeded Sadruddin as chairman of the movement in 1399 AD was a moderate Shiite school. His successor, Ibrahim, adopted a more extreme Shiite (*ghulât*). Likewise Junaid, his son, who was killed in a war against the Sunnis in Dagestan in 1455 AD Haidar, his father's successor, Junaid, gave his followers from the Turkoman class, a purple hat with 12 red strokes (12 indicating the number of *imams* in the Shia Imamia), so they are nicknamed qizilbasy or gizilbasy (red heads).<sup>23</sup> Qizilbasy is known as a military wing who has absolute loyalty to Safawia leaders.

Haidar then married Marta, daughter of the leader of the Confederation Ak Koyunlu (White Sheep), Uzun Hasan. Haidar, who is a militant Shiite began to gain strong political access, especially Marta's mother is Despina Katerina, daughter of Trebizond's last non-Moslem ruler, Kaolo Joanis. This period is known as the consolidation of the establishment of Safawia as a dynasty. After the death of Uzun Hasan, Ak Koyunlu changed his attitude towards Safawia because of concerns about the rapid development and strength of this *tharîqah*, so that Haidar was killed in 1488 AD Then in 1494 AD, Ismail took control of the Safawiah order when he was seven years old. Ismail was protected by Mirza Ali Kirkaya, ruler of the Lahijan region (near the Caspian Sea), and was educated by seven Qizilbasy commanders about the military world. Qizilbasy's support made Ismail able to defeat Georgia and Sirvan in 1500 AD The following year, he and his troops succeeded in taking revenge on Ak Koyunlu by capturing Tabriz and establishing himself as Shah Ismail I.<sup>24</sup> Since then, Safawiah was no longer a *tharîqah*, but changed into a dynasty.

By spending the first 20 years expanding political power, Ismail I controlled large areas including India, the Caspian, Gurgan, Yazd, Diyar Bakr, Persian, Sirvan, and Khurasan. Qizilbasy under Ismail's leadership became an army of soldiers loyal to the Shah, which was a continuation of his loyalty to a *shaykh* when Safawia was still a *tharîqah*. Ismail I proclaimed the

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<sup>22</sup> Didin Saefudin, *Sejarah Politik Islam* (Jakarta: Pustaka Intermedia, 2009), pp. 248-9.

<sup>23</sup> Assagaf, *Lintasan Sejarah Iran*, p. 326.

<sup>24</sup> Yasin Arslantas, *Depicting the Other: Qizilbash Image in the 16th Century Ottoman Historiography* (Thesis, Ihsan Doğramacı Bilkent University, Ankara, 2013), pp. 50-1.



Shia Imamia (Twelve *Imams*) as the official school of his country while claiming that he had dreamed of meeting ‘Alī ibn Abū Thālib and encouraged him to establish a Shia *daulah* (kingdom). Ismail even used the aspect of the *tharīqah*’s secularism by claiming he had obtained *ijāzah* (permission) from al-Imām al-Mahdī al-Muntadzar to defeat Ak Koyunlu who controlled Persia.<sup>25</sup>

Before 1501 AD, Persia was a region with a majority Sunni population. Many Sunni thinkers came from this region. Safawiah was the main political motor that succeeded in turning the majority of Persians into Shiites. The era of Shah Ismail I was a major factor behind the Persia-Iran syiaization. This school was forced by Ismail I with various violence which befell many Sunni followers, as happened in Tabriz, Herat, and Baghdad. Safawia even required insults to the Companions of the Prophet, such as Abū Bakr al-Shiddīq, ‘Umar ibn al-Khaththāb, and ‘Uthman ibn ‘Affān and anyone who heard him had to answer by saying, “Add and don’t subtract!” If there are people who are reluctant to say it, he will be cut as hard as possible with a sword and machete. For example in Tabriz, Safawia slaughtered more than 140,000 Sunnis and turned the city into a total Shia.<sup>26</sup> The reason for this insult is because they believe the reign of the Caliphate of Islam should be handed over to ‘Alī ibn Abū Thālib after the Prophet’s death, and extreme Shiites consider the three companions to be legitimate usurpers of ‘Alī.

Even though it imposes coercion on the Sunni community to embrace the Shiite Imamia (Twelve *Imams*), but the Safavid act is not a two-way horizontal problem between Sunni-Shiite denominations. In fact, Shah Ismail I was not an orthodox Shia follower (Twelve *Imams*), but he was an extreme Shia follower (*ghulāt*). The term ghulat comes from the word “*ghuluw*”, namely belief in two types of belief that do not exist in Islamic orthodoxy, namely: *first*, the incarnation of the supernatural *imam* (al-Imām al-Mahdī al-Muntadzar), and *second*, belief in the divinity of someone. According to Karen Armstrong, Ismail I knew very little about the Shiite orthodoxy of Imamia, because he adhered to an extreme view that believed in a messianic utopia was at hand.<sup>27</sup> By quoting from Roger Savory, Arslantas argues further about *ghuluw*, namely that since under Junaid’s leadership, the leader of the Safavid order is believed to be a

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<sup>25</sup> Abud, *Minoritas Etnis*, p. 175.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., p. 279-280.

<sup>27</sup> Armstrong, *Sejarah Islam*, p. 178.



“god” by his followers.<sup>28</sup> A doctrine held fanatically that often creates a desire to rule among his followers.<sup>29</sup>

Safavid is also believed to be a regime that supports a ritual that seems to be a Shia stereotype. That was illustrated in the booklet titled *Kesesatan Aqidah Syiah* by M. Amin Djamaluddin. The back cover of this book contains an illustration of the commemoration of the Day of Ashura Shia with self-injury called *talwar zani* which is usually by bleeding from the head with a sword, a method of warning that has now been widely rejected, opposed, even prohibited by Shia scholars themselves. Unfortunately, in this book, the author did not review the warnings of Ashura or *Talwar Zani*, but rather discussed the differences around the creed, prayer, adhan, ikamat, and wudu.<sup>30</sup> *Talwar Zani* in the Ashura rituals among the Shiites is believed to appear in the era of Shah Ismail I, namely Shah Tahmasp. Michelle Membre, a European traveler, in 1540 AD witnessed the Ashura day at Tabriz commemorated by a procession of self-mutilation and “fighting”, but there was no evidence regarding the role of the government as its patron.<sup>31</sup>

During the reign of Shah Abbas I, the fifth Safawia ruler who came to power in 1588-1629 AD, the role of Qizilbash as an elite force that had made many political interventions after the death of Shah Ismail I had been reduced, but it was not easy to erode Qizilbash’s existence. Qizilbash is dominated by Turks, a people from the Safavid dynasty. There are seven tribes that dominate in Qizilbash, namely Ustadjlu, Rumlu, Shamlu (the strongest tribe during Ismail I), Dulkadir/Dzulkadar, Afshar, Qajar, and Takkalu. The early role of the Qajar Dynasty began when they acted as vassals as well as military forces supporting the Safavid dynasty in the Caspian region.<sup>32</sup>

After Shah Abbas I died, they entered an era of chaos. In 1722 AD, Afghans under the leadership of Mir Wais (former governor under Safavid rule) succeeded in seizing much of the Safavid territories. The chaos only stopped when Nader Qoli, a Safawi general from eastern Iran, recaptured territory from the hands of the Afghans and drove the Ottomans out of Hamedan. Nader Qoli declared himself a ruler with his new dynasty called Afshar. He was

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<sup>28</sup> Arslantas, *Depicting the Other*, p. 50.

<sup>29</sup> Saefudin, *Sejarah Politik Islam*, p. 249.

<sup>30</sup> M. Amin Djamaluddin, *Kesesatan Aqidah dan Ibadah Syiah* (Jakarta: Dewan Dakwah Islamiyah Indonesia, 2014), pp. 34-9.

<sup>31</sup> Stephen P. Blake, *Time in Early Modern Islam* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013), p. 80.

<sup>32</sup> Patricia L. Baker and Hillary A. Smith, *Iran* (Buckinghamshire: Bradt Travel Guide, 2014), p. 13.



finally killed in 1747 AD without having time to control an area as large as the Safavid Dynasty. After the death of Nader Qoli, Karim Khan Zand, who was previously a commander of the Nader forces, succeeded in seizing power and establishing the Zand Dynasty in 1751 AD. Zand was also unable to unite the entire Iranian territory as in the Safavid era. The Qajar dynasty then defeated the Zands in 1794 AD.<sup>33</sup>

The Qajar dynasty which replaced Zand's domination of the former Persian lands was a family of tribes who served as Qizilbash under the Safavid dynasty. From the beginning the placement of the Safavid core was emphasized to the tribes of Qizilbasy (Afshar and Qajar were its two branches), power in this dynasty did not really change hands, but both were a continuation of Qizilbash's intrigue as in the Safavid period.<sup>34</sup> The Qajar dynasty was subsequently overthrown by Reza Khan. He founded the Pahlavi Dynasty since 1925 AD The Pahlavi Dynasty was later torn down by the Iranian Revolutionary movement in 1979 AD.

### Straightening Tendency for Nationality and Tradition

The study of Iran requires a study that is not short and does not merely relate it to the issue of tendentious differences in schools. In the same way, there is the problem of nationality, namely Iran as an old civilization that has existed for a long time even before the presence of Islam. The negative assumption about the Persians began with the murder of the second caliph, 'Umar. This is still a residual suspicion of the Persian identity, which is even circulating in papers in Indonesia. The book by Abū Muḥammad ibn Shālīḥ ibn Ḥasb Allāh mentions that, the Shiites glorified the murderer of 'Umar because they were angry with him as someone who "put out the fire of the Zoroastrians in Iran and the cause of their ancestors to convert to Islam" so they gave the title to the 'Umar's killer, Abū Lu'lu'ah, as "abū syujā' al-din" or "brave father in religion".<sup>35</sup> The belief that Persian Shiism was an attempt at pre-Islamic Persian revivalism was also expressed by Fuad Mohd. Fachruddin. He considered that there was a Shiite spirit among the Persians who was bound to Ḥusayn, son of Alī ibn Abū Thālib, because of his marriage to the daughter of the last king of the Kingdom of Sassania, namely Sharbanu or Princess Shehr Bano, Yazdegerd III's son, so that the Shiites in Persia placed more rights on

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<sup>33</sup> Muhammad, *Iran*, p. 82.

<sup>34</sup> D.L. Bradley, *Dictionary of Iran: A Shorter Encyclopedia* (North Carolina: Lulu.com Publisher, 2016), p. 574.

<sup>35</sup> Abu Muhammad ibn Shalih ibn Hasbullah, *Apa Itu Syi'ah? Penjelasan Kesesatan Syi'ah dalam Masalah-masalah Pokok Disertai Bantahan tentang Keyakinannya* (Jakarta: Pustaka Ibnu 'Umar, 2014), p. 24.



the Imamate to Husayn and his descendants, because in him he met the holy blood of the Arabs and the ‘high’ (royal nobles) of Persia.<sup>36</sup> These opinions are not balanced, considering that before Safawia came to power, Persia was a region with a Sunni majority population.

Iran also needs to be seen as a political entity in the form of a state with its distinctive characteristics as a non-Arab (Persian) Islamic country, which stands between Arab nations with a diversity of school denominations. Therefore, the dynamics of regional political relations dragged Iran and the schools which the majority embraced by the people and their governments. This has been interestingly reviewed in the title *Kursi Panas untuk Raja Salman* in *Tempo Magazine* as follows:<sup>37</sup>

“Saudi Arabia accuses Iran of being behind the Houthi movement (however Houthis are Shias who are different from the Shiites that are held in Iran). There is no conclusive evidence that can support that accusation, but the rhetoric used follows the “narrative” that Iran has always made the Shias in power or happened to be rebelling against the Sunni government, such as in Bahrain, Syria, Iraq and Lebanon (through Hezbollah) as an extension of his hand.”

The problem of the school cannot be completely denied, in addition to the nationalities mentioned above. But what also needs to be understood is that the sensitivity of the Iranian issue with its school of thought is more likely due to the historical burden of establishing this country as a Shia basis since the early Safavid rule, as explained earlier. Specifically the issue of contempt for the three caliphs who became another crucial point related to Sunni-Shiite tensions, *Buku Putih Madzhab Syiah* published by Ahlul Bait Indonesia (ABI), the Shiite organization, emphasized,

“The *khulafâ’ rāsyidūn* are historical facts that cannot be denied the truth and they are also friends of the Prophet. the noble and the fact that they also have many achievements. Likewise, Imâm ‘Alî related to the general benefit of Islam has sent his sons to participate in *jihād* and fight to defend Islam with them and the Islamic army. Indeed, the Shia argue that Imâm ‘Alî is more entitled to the *khilāfah* as the successor of the Messenger of Allah. However, this did not prevent Shia followers from appreciating the achievements of these caliphs and paying them proper respect. In fact, at a conference in London in 1985, *Majma’ Taqrīb bayn al-Madzâhib*, led by Ayatollah Mahdi al-Hakim, stated that the Shiites recognized the de facto caliphate of the three caliphs before Imâm ‘Alî.”<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> Fuad Mohd Fachruddin, *Sejarah Perkembangan Pemikiran dalam Islam: Khawarij-Syiah-Mu’tazilah-Murjiah-Ahlus Sunnah Waljama’ah-Bahai-Ahmadiyah* (Jakarta: Yasaguna, 1990), pp. 48-9.

<sup>37</sup> Tempo Magazine, edition 26 April 2015.

<sup>38</sup> Tim Penyusun, *Buku Putih Madzhab Syiah* (Jakarta: DPP ABI, 2012), p. 59.



The historical burden left over from the Middle Ages has always been a residue of the prototype of the Shiites in the eyes of the Sunnis. Also in the aspect of familiarity, the relations between Iran and Syria which are not entirely possible due to the affairs of the school (related to the existence of Shiite holy sites in Syria), then described as the reality of the Sunni-Shia war. As comparative information, Iran shows its government policy in giving recognition to the existence of groups outside of Shia, even those of different religions. In their parliament there are representatives of Sunni groups.<sup>39</sup>

Important information to elaborate on is that, based on a report by Chris Zambelis of the West Point Combating Terrorism Center (CTC), Syria is a country with a Sunni percentage of 74%, and Sunnis are estimated to meet 60% to 65% of Syrian government forces (pro-government), despite the mass desertion of most conscripts and middle-ranking Sunni officers accompanied by reports of increased recruitment problems, Sunnis are still the largest representation in Syrian security institutions.<sup>40</sup> Regarding the Shia view of the Alawites, the statement in *Buku Putih Madzhab Syiah* about the Alawis and the issue of the Syrian conflict can illustrate the attitude of the Shiites as follows:<sup>41</sup>

“Specifically with regard to the conflict in Syria that is currently taking place, it is not at all a conflict between *Ahl al-Sunnah* (Sunni) and Shia, but purely a political conflict. In fact, Bashar Assad and his father were ideologically secular Baath leaders. Apart from their belief in the first three Shia *Imams* (‘Alī, Ḥasan, and Ḥusain) the Alawi group itself did not follow the Ja‘fari *fiqh* that the Shia followed, but rather the Ḥanafī and Mālikī *fiqh* like *Ahl al-Sunnah* (although in reality, Alawi is basically do not know or introduce *fiqh* because they do not require their followers to practice any sharia). Even the Shiites themselves refuse to recognize that the Alawi sect is Shia.”

## Conclusion

Based on above explanation, it can be concluded that the issues regarding Iran are not monolithically only dealing with the issue of familiarity (sensitivity in Sunnite-Shiite relations). In fact, it happened as a result of a long historical legacy. One of them is nationalism, an aspect that is often minimized in studies of Iran, as Iran, which was formerly Persian, has an old history as a great nation and had long enough resistance, namely between 633-651 AD, towards the spread of Islam (islamization) brought by the Arabs. This is a prototype of Iran’s

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<sup>39</sup> Ahmad Kholil, *Pesona Cinta di Persia* (Malang: Gunung Samudera, 2014), p. vi.

<sup>40</sup> Chris Zambelis, “Syria’s Sunnis and the Regime’s Resilience,” *CTC Sentinel*, vol. 8, no. 5 (May, 2015): p. 5-9.

<sup>41</sup> Tim Penyusun, *Buku Putih Madzhab Syiah*, p. 66.



competition today against its Arab neighbors. An example of great concern is its tension with Saudi Arabia, a Salafi-rich country. As a result, the conflict led to the sensitivity of the schools between the two countries.

Persia Islam underwent a phase of change into a Shia Imamia country in the 16<sup>th</sup> century AD under the leadership of Shah Ismail I of the Safavid Dynasty. Shah Ismail was not an orthodox Shiite follower, but a leader of extreme Shiism (*ghulât*). However, he was noted as a ruler who repressed Sunni followers to convert into Shiites. This phase is the heaviest historical burden and continues to be remembered. Moreover, the Safavids had laid a Persian political base for a long period of time as a Shiite nation, until then the Islamic Republic of Iran was established in 1979 AD. In addition, the Ashura commemorative tradition of self-injury or *talwar zani* became popular during the Safavid Dynasty, despite evidence that it was supported directly by the dynastic authorities yet to be discovered. Although Iran to date has been an influential Shiite Islamic political force in international politics, the statement that Iran intervenes in the Syrian and Yemeni conflicts in the interests of the Shiite school is weak, because the Houthis in Yemen and the Alawi regime in Syria adhere to different Shiite schools with Shiite schools in Iran.

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