DOI No: <http://dx.doi.org/10.29228/Joh.46870>

Authenticity process is conducted by

Makale Türü: Araştırma makalesi
Geliş Tarihi: 12-10-2020
Kabul Tarihi: 17-02-2021
On-line Yayın: 25-02-2021

Article Type: Research article
Submitted: 12-10-2020
Accepted: 17-02-2021
Published Online: 25-02-2021

Atıf Bilgisi / Reference Information

Alizadeh, N. (2021). Imagined Iran after the Arrival of Islam in Aryanist Orientalist, Nationalist and Islamist Historiography. *Journal of History School*, 50, 25-53.

IMAGINED IRAN AFTER THE ARRIVAL OF ISLAM IN ARYANIST ORIENTALIST, NATIONALIST AND ISLAMIST HISTORIOGRAPHY¹

Naseraddin ALIZADEH²

Abstract

This study investigates the orientalist, nationalist, and Islamist historiography of Iran during the late Qajar and Pahlavi eras. More specifically, using the Critical Discourse Analysis method the study examines texts produced by some of the main figures of these three groups to explore the ways they reconstructed the image of 'Iran' and 'Iranians' during the first four centuries of the Islamic era. The results show that the race-based approaches to history developed by the forefathers of the Aryan race theory - like Ernest Renan and Arthur de Gobineau - alongside orientalist Iranists – such as Edward G. Browne - shaped the worldview of many of the Iranian activist historians who later became ideologues of the Pahlavi monarchy. Accordingly, nationalist historians like Abdul-Hossein Zarrinkoob, who were under influence of the race-based approaches, pursued to present both the historical continuity and racial-civilizational superiority of Iran, Iranians, and the Iranian nation during the four centuries that have followed the collapse of the Sassanid empire. To this end, nationalist historians, as well as orientalist Aryanists, have argued that it was Iranians who inspired and/or achieved the main

¹ The author would like to thank two anonymous reviewers of this journal, Dr. Heydar Shadi and Ms. Katherine Blythe for their valuable comments.

² Dr. Lecturer, Karabuk University, Faculty of Economics and Administrative Sciences, Department of International Relations, alizadeh@karabuk.edu.tr, Orcid: 0000-0002-0724-7394

accomplishments in the first four centuries of the Islam era. Their anti-Arab racist approaches when translated into anti-Islam tendencies attracted critiques from Islamists elites such as Morteza Motahhari and Ali Shari'ati. On the eve of the 1979 Islamic revolution, these Islamic elites sought to deconstruct the orientalist and nationalist racial approach to history, by offering a new way of historiography partly in accordance with Internationalist Islamic doctrines.

Keywords: Historiography, Orientalism, Nationalism, Islamism, Iran.

Aryanist Oryantalist, Milliyetçi ve İslamcı Tarihyazımında İslam Sonrası Hayali İran

Öz

Bu çalışma oryantalistlerin, İranlı milliyetçilerin ve İslamcıların geç Kaçar döneminden başlayarak yeniden kurguladıkları İslam sonrası 'İran' ve 'İranlı' imajını incelemektedir. Elde edilen sonuçlara göre, Ernest Renan ve Arthur de Gobineau gibi Aryancılar ve Browne gibi oryantalist İranistlerce geliştirilen tarihe ırk-temelli yaklaşımlar, Pehlevi Krallığı'nın ideologları olan tarihçilerin bakış açısını etkilemiştir. Böylelikle, Abdul-Hossein Zarrinkoob gibi milliyetçi tarihçiler oryantalistlerin ırk-temelli yaklaşımları etkisinde 'İran', 'İranlı' ve 'İran milletinin' tarihsel sürekliliğini ve üstünlüğünü Sasani İmparatorluğu'nun çöküşünü izleyen dört yüz yıllık bir dönemde göstermeye çalışmışlardır. Bu doğrultuda, İran milliyetçi tarihçileri İslami dönemde gerçekleşen bütün başarılarla bir İranlının öncüllük ettiğini veya 'İran uygarlığından' esinlendiğini göstermeye kalkmışlardır. Oryanistlerin ve İran milliyetçilerinin Arap karşıtı ırkçı yaklaşımlarının İslam karşıtı eğilimlere dönüşmesi Murtaza Mutahhari ve Ali Şeriatî gibi İslamcılarının tepkilerine yol açmıştır. 1979 İran İslam devriminin arifesinde, bu İslamcı seçkinler söz konusu ırkçı yaklaşımları yapıbozuma uğratmaya çalışarak uluslararası İslami öğretilerle eşleşen yeni bir tarihyazımını geliştirmeye çalışmışlardır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Tarihyazımı, Oryantalizm, Milliyetçilik, İslamcılık, İran.

INTRODUCTION

In 1854, Maneckji Limji Hataria docked at Bushehr port. Recently appointed an emissary by the *Anjomane Akabere Parsian* - an organization founded by the Indian Zoroastrian Parsis to support their co-religionists in Iran - he was accompanied on this sea voyage by Hossein Khan Moshir od-Dowleh, the Qajar diplomat and future Prime Minister during 1871-73. With the patronage of Indian Zoroastrians, Hataria succeeded in developing a network between the Zoroastrian community and the court, bazaar, politicians, writers, Shia clerics, and minority religious communities such as the Bahais, Babis, and Zoroastrians. His links and correspondence with Fatali Akhundov, Aqa Khan Kermani, and

Qajar Prince Jalal al-Din Mirza were of great importance to the progress of nationalism in Iran (Stausberg, 2011; Zia-Ebrahimi, 2010; Ringer, 2012). As a result of such intellectual networks and under the first influences of the Aryanist orientalist ideas these three figures evolved into pioneers of race-based nationalism, historiography, and archaism in the second half of the nineteenth century Qajar era. Their works bear striking similarities, combining traditional methods of history writing with the racial narratives of orientalists, expressing racial antipathy toward Arabs, and glorifying the 'pre-Islamic history of Iran' above the Islamic era (Zia-Ebrahimi, 2014; Marashi, 2011).

Apart from Hataria and his circle, the Qajar era elites were active in Europe. For instance, Malkam Khan, the publisher of the *Qanun* periodical in London, maintained strong connections with activists and politicians in Istanbul, Tiflis, Bombay, Calcutta, Cairo, and Iran (Algar, 1973). Activists in Europe and colonial India were among the first Iranians introduced to orientalists like Edward Browne, or familiar with the works of the Aryanist orientalists (Ansari, 2012; Marashi, 2013; Matin-Asgari, 2018). Hence, Qajar Iran entered the twentieth century marked by the advent of a new generation of elites within Qajar Iranian borders and abroad and by changes in its social and political forces. While some activists were sympathetic to race-based nationalist narratives, on the eve of the 1906 constitutional revolution, they existed within a more pluralist intellectual environment (Alizadeh, 2010a). After the second dissolution of the majlis in 1911, those intellectuals disappointed with democratic state reforms were exiled or voluntarily left Qajar Iran for Europe. Many were invited by Germany's intelligence service to ferment propaganda against Russia and Britain in Iran. Named the Berliners, these intellectuals established a committee in 1915, publishing the *Kaveh* (1916-22), *Iranshahr* (1922-26), and *Nameye Farangestan* (1925) periodicals in Berlin. Alongside *Ayandeh*, the articles and news published in these periodicals reveal an Aryanist race-based approach to history (Behnam, 2010; Matin-Asgari, 2014). Consequently, at the point of the establishment of the Pahlavi regime, racist narratives were not limited to a small number of nationalist activists; owing to Aryanist orientalist ideas, racist-modernist discourse dominated the era to later become official Pahlavi ideology (Alizadeh, 2020a: 3-8). With due consideration to history's crucial role in the nation-building process, nationalists under Pahlavis patronage began rewriting Iranian history to follow their ideological racial concerns, legitimizing the Pahlavis as the inheritors of the Iranian tradition of monarchy, and forging a new national identity (Zia-Ebrahimi, 2016; Marashi, 2011). This nationalist historiography was to show Iran as an immortal nation and Iranians as a superior ancient race (Vejdani, 2015; Ram, 2000). Although they adopted an Aryanist orientalist approach to defining Iran -

and India - as the land and cradle of the superior 'Aryan civilization', they would first need to overcome significant obstacles in fashioning such a racial history for Iran. Firstly, they were required to argue some form of continuity across the large ruptures in its history. They claimed that the so-called 'Aryan race' and 'Iranian monarchies' stretches far back to the seventh century B.C.E., whereas for over two-thirds of this period, the territory within the ambivalent borders they defined as Iran had been ruled by the Greeks, Macedonians, 'non-Aryan' Arabs, Turks, and Mongols. Secondly, in the face of perceived historical defeats by 'non-Iranian aliens' (*aniranian*), nationalist historiography aimed to induce a sense of honor rather than shame in the Iranian citizen (Cole, 1996). Thirdly, nationalist ideology was to use history to present Iranians as descendants of a homogenous Aryan race (Tavakoli-Targhi, 1994; Vaziri, 1993; Alizadeh, 2020b; Saleh, 2013).

This article studies the ways orientalist, nationalist historians, and Islamists presented the continuity of 'Iran', 'Iranian identity', and the 'Iranian nation' during a perceived rupture happened following the collapse of the Sassanid Empire in the first half of the seventh century, and before the dominance of the Turkic dynasties in the second half of the tenth century. This perceived rupture period lasted for more than three and half centuries, followed by nearly eight centuries of Turkic dynasties' rule, and more than a century of Mongol rule in the lands that the nationalists considered the immortal territory of 'Iran'. Accordingly, I will discuss the different tactics adopted by Aryanists, orientalist Iranists, and Iranian nationalist historians for proving that not only was the Iranian nation alive but that it retained its pre-Islamic Aryan 'national identity', ultimately defeating its Arab aliens thanks to its 'superior civilization, culture, wisdom, ethic, and courage'. More specifically, I will critically analyze the ways these groups reconstructed different uprisings during the Umayyad and Abbasid eras and the assumed role the 'Iranian' factor played in these empires. Furthermore, I examine nationalist Iranian and Aryanist orientalist historians' thoughts representing the emergence of regional governments during 'Iranian intermezzo', determining them a comprehensive political effort to revive the 'independence of Iran' and its 'national identity'. Finally, I will discuss the reactions of Morteza Motahhari (1919-1979) and Ali Shari'ati (1933-1977), the prominent ideologues of the Islamic movement leading to the 1979 revolution, to the anti-Arab and anti-Islamic ideas of orientalists and nationalist historians.

METHODOLOGICAL ASPECTS

This study aims to examine the reconstructed image of historical events that occurred between the seventh and tenth centuries within the vague

geographical boundaries called 'Iran' by Iranian nationalists and 'Persia' by orientalists. These events are reproduced in the works of distinct groups, three of which are discussed in this research. The first group includes orientalists like Renan, Gobineau, and Browne whose works later inspired Iranian nationalist historians. The second group consists of nationalist historians from the Pahlavi era, like Zarrinkoob, Kasrawi, Homai, Safa, and Momtazeh. The third group is formed of Islamist scholars, among whom I will discuss the ideas of Motahhari and Shari'ati, the theorists and ideologues of the Islamic Revolution and future Iranian regime. Evaluating the texts produced by these three groups, I utilize a Critical Discourse Analysis³ for two main reasons. Firstly, the surveyed texts were produced within different socio-political contexts shaped by different forces and discourses, like Aryanism, nationalism, Islamism, and modernism. Secondly, the examined texts produced by these three groups analyze other textual materials written by Muslim and non-Muslim authors under different socio-political conditions between the seventh and the tenth centuries. In other words, this study explores texts produced within different socio-political contexts by contemporary scholars who investigate textual materials produced mostly during the Umayyad and Abbasid eras.

Any study analyzing historical texts would face various difficulties and restrictions, two of which are significant to this article. Firstly, the three aforementioned groups refer to texts - here termed the 'second reconstruction' - that are reconstructed images of historical events - the 'first reconstruction' - that took place during the first four centuries of Islamic history. As with contemporary texts, historical texts are not merely unbiased evidence of historical events. For instance, a historical text written by a Muslim or Zoroastrian may exaggerate the negative or positive aspects of the pre-Islamic era or Arabs for ideological or political reasons. On the other hand, an Alid or Shia writer may attribute unfair qualities to the Umayyad rulers, whereas a Zoroastrian Sho'ubi writer might do the same when writing of Arabs, Turks, or Muslims. As a result, it is important to treat all texts as reconstructed images as it is impossible to completely grasp naked reality.

Secondly, another difficulty arises when a researcher deals with terms across different texts like 'Iran', 'Iranian', 'Persia', 'Persian', 'Arab', 'Fars', 'Turk', and 'Ajam'. There is a consensus that in nineteenth century 'Mamaleke Mahruseye Iran' was the primary title of a changing political geography/territory

³ Critical Discourse Analysis method assumes that social and linguistic practices are intertwined phenomena that constitute one another. Accordingly, scholars who developed or apply this method underline the interactions between texts, discourses, historical contexts and power relations in a society (For a review of this method see: (Tenorio, 2011)).

that after the 1906 Constitutional Revolution unofficially was called ‘Iran’ (Sadrinia, 1995). Accordingly, in the first decades of the twentieth century, Iran became defined as the geography within specific, defined borders, with its citizens termed Iranians. The issue becomes much more complicated when studying pre-Safavid Islamic era texts and diplomatic documents where names such as Isfahan, Khorasan, Fars, and Azerbaijan are prevalent but lack a political-geographical entity called Iran (Gnoli, 1989; Vaziri, 1993; Alizadeh, 2020b). For instance, Ferdowsi used Iran and ‘Iranzamin’ in *Shahnameh*, but some parts of today’s Iran - like Sistan, Mazandaran, and Rey - were depicted as non-Iranian lands. As Davis argues, Ferdowsi does not attempt to determine the borders or even the capital of Iran in the legendary part of *Shahnameh*, whereas he mentions the capital of its enemy the Turanians. Mostly devoted to the history of the Sassanid empire, the second part of *Shahnameh* determines Iraq – outside the borders of today’s Iran – to be at the heart of the vaguely defined boundaries of ‘Iranzamin’ (Davis, 2012). The situation becomes even more complicated when Iranians translate historical names. For instance, in *Al-Āthār al-Bāqīyah*, Al-Biruni (973-1051 C.E.) discusses ‘Fors’ (the plural of Fars), but Iranian translator Dana-Seresht chooses to instead use the word ‘Iraniyan/Iranian’ (Al-Biruni, 2007). Contrary to Iranian scholars and most of the orientalists, Al-Biruni describes the ‘Fors’, Sogdians, and Khwarazmians as distinct groups of people in his work. We face the same problem with the translation of the Arabic word ‘ajam’ (non-Arab people) into Farsi. For instance, although the ‘ajam’ loanword exists in Farsi, in translating *Al-Fihrist* a prominent work of a tenth-century Arab scholar, Tajaddod instead uses the word ‘Irani’ (Ibni al-Nadim, 2002). The word ‘Persia’ as used by orientalists is even more confusing. Despite Reza Shah Pahlavi’s request in 1935 for all countries to use ‘Iran’ instead of ‘Persia’ in official correspondence, some westerners and orientalists insisted on using the word ‘Persia’ either to continue the Hellenic and Roman tradition or for political-racial considerations. It is impossible to spot the exact location of the westerners’ Persia or who should be considered Persian throughout the different periods of history. Aryanist orientalists and nationalist Iranians take advantage of this ambivalence. For example, as I will show in the following pages, this ambiguity as to the meaning of ‘Persia’ and ‘Persian’ allowed orientalists like Browne to claim Iranian origin for any scholar, ruler, movement, idea, or community, building an enduring and majestic ‘Persian history’. In contrast, Iranian scholars replace the words ‘Persia’ and ‘Persian’ with ‘Iran’ and ‘Iraniyan’, using them in their reconstructed images of Iranian history. As I will discuss, Browne and Iranian nationalist scholars assume that Iran consists of the lands that the Sassanids, Arsacids, and Achaemenids conquered during the peak of their power. They also subsume all the subjects of these empires under the title of ‘Iranians’

who preserved their main ‘authentic’ Iranian essences or spirit even after the Greek, Arab, Turk, and Mongol rulers conquered these lands. This is an awkward assumption because while talking about the ‘Abbasids of Umayyads’ or the ‘Ottomans of Seljuqs’ is strange, orientalist simultaneously refer to the ‘Mongols of Persia’ or the ‘Seljuqs of Persia’. To solve this problem, I use the terms ‘Iran’ and ‘Iranian’ only when discussing the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, or when writers specifically used these terms in their texts. Therefore, I do not change ethnic, religious, tribal, or geographical names like Fars, Persian, Persia, Zoroastrian, Islam, Ajam, Arab, or Turk when quoting from any research or historical text.

IMAGINING ‘IRAN’ AFTER ARRIVAL OF ISLAM

Reconstructing the history of Iran and Iranians from the arrival of Islam up until the establishment of the Pahlavi monarchy has been one of the main concerns of orientalist Iranists, Iranian nationalist and Islamist scholars. Arabic sources as early as the eighth century narrate numerous events during the early Islamic era. These have been treated as resources for historians of many different ideological backgrounds. Below I will discuss images of Iran in the first four centuries after arrival of Islam provided by orientalist Aryanists, Iranian nationalists and Iranian Islamists.

Orientalists’ Narratives

Beginning from the eighteenth century, European scholars used these materials to study the East through utilizing new systematic methods that Said argues gave birth to orientalism (Said, 1979). Furthermore, Duperron’s translation of the *Avesta* (published in 1771) and his attempts to decipher the texts attributed to the Sassanid era provided a second source for the philological, anthropological, and theological study of the East (Browne, 1959). In 1786, Jones presented his theory - later to be known as the Indo-European language family – asserting an affinity among the Greek, Latin, Sanskrit, Persian, Gothic, and Celtic languages (Cannon, 1990). Developed by orientalist like Gobineau, Müller, and Renan, among others, Aryanism emerged in the nineteenth century; this assumed superior biological and ethical qualifications for the so-called Aryan race through adopting a deterministic approach and providing a philosophical basis to philological debates. Renan also maintained that he was ‘the first to recognize that the Semitic race, compared to the Indo-European race, truly represents an inferior combination of human nature’. Consequently, his racist ideas became interwoven with the structure of the ‘civilization theories’ of his contemporaries.

Renan called the Semitic people ‘an incomplete race’ possessing an inherent dogmatism and lacking a cosmopolitan conception of civilization (Arvidsson, 2007).

Like Renan, Gobineau sought scientific reasons for the supremacy of the Aryan race and introduced miscegenation and amalgamation with ‘inferior races’ like the Semitic and African people as the underlying reason of racial and civilizational decay (Zia-Ebrahimi, 2014). He claimed that Persians had been great Aryans who had ‘unfortunately’ degenerated due to racially interbreeding with non-Aryans, especially Semitic Arabs (Irwin, 2016). Gobineau accompanied several diplomatic missions to Qajar Iran during which he penned several books. In these, he mourned the long-gone age of the Achaemenid ‘Aryan civilization’ that even the historians of the Qajar era had not heard of until the second half of the nineteenth century. Gobineau believed that Cyrus - ‘the greatest of the great men in all human history’ - led Aryans to emigrate to Europe (Biddiss, 1970). His ideas reflect a dichotomy prevalent among Aryanists who would elaborate on any social or historical topic through a racial lens. For instance, he claimed that cuneiform script was an Iranian invention (Calmard, 2001). Gobineau glorifies what he considers the age of the ancient pure ‘Aryan Persians’, however, he scorns that which he sees in Qajar Iran. Subsequently, he claims that there is no trace of the ‘Persian race’ remaining in Qajar Iran because its people were ‘a breed mixed from God knows what’ (Biddiss, 1970: 183). His observations suggest that racial antipathy towards other communities was not prevalent among the Qajar elites or its subjects, causing Gobineau to blame them for being ‘too democratic’ (Irwin, 2016: 323). Gobineau’s remarks about Islam and its Shiism echo the ideas advanced by some of the orientalist, and especially the Aryanists. Firstly, he discloses adverse sentiments towards Islam as a Semitic Arab religion but considers Shiism as a Persian Aryan revolt against the faith. This idea is at odds with strong historical evidence revealing that it was the Oghuz Turks (Qizilbashs) in the sixteenth century that designated Shiism the official religion of the Safavid state (Savory, 1980). Secondly, he claims that Aryan Persians did not convert to Islam but instead exploited it as a cover under which they could maintain their pre-Islamic Aryan faiths (Irwin, 2016: 325). These sorts of ideas enabled Aryanist orientalist to reconstruct a distorted image of events to claim the existence of cultural continuity in pre- and post-Islamic ‘Persia’.

Edward Browne, a British Iranist, was one of the prominent orientalist who attempted to show continuity in ‘Persian’ language and ‘civilization’ in ‘Persia’ after the arrival of Islam. The Farsi translation of his *The Literary History of Persia* includes the comments of prominent figures of nationalist historiography in Iran, like Taqizadeh and Yarshater. Browne’s racist tone is

somewhat milder than that of his Aryanist forefathers, but he was one of the important pioneers of the race-based historiography of Iran, whose racist attitudes were mostly centered on the ethnic Turks of Iran.⁴ Although, he reveals a sympathy toward Islam and Arabic literature in his *The Literary History of Persia* but his earlier remarks describing the ‘lizard-eater’ Arabs or the ‘sullen, moody, and dull-witted’ Azerbaijani Turks would later turn out to be stereotypes of vulgar racism (Browne, 1893). It is worth noting that Gobineau also uses approximately the same raciest rhetoric toward the Semetic and Tatars/Turks in his *Three Years in Asia* (Nash, O'Donoghue, 2008). Browne's historiography of the literary and ideas of ‘Persia’ begins with the Median and Achaemenid empires; like the Aryanists, he determines an Aryan origin for ‘culture and civilization’ in ‘Persia’. In doing so, Browne discards thousands of years of history related to ‘non-Aryan’ people like the Elamites. Notably, the authors of Farsi traditional histories were completely unfamiliar with the Medians and Achaemenids. Despite the differing starting points between Browne and traditional historians, they face similar problems in Iranianizing/Persianizing the fifth-century Arsacid Empire.⁵ Like late Qajar nationalist historians, Browne states that the Arsacids were probably Turanians⁶; consequently, he discusses the longest period in the ‘history of Persia’ over a limited number of pages (Browne, 1959, p.124). In his commentary, Yarshater rejects Browne's idea of a Turanian origin for the Arsacids, adding that the Turanians who were considered as Turks in *Shahnameh* were Iranian tribes (Ibid.).

To show cultural and racial continuity before and after the Islamic era, Browne - like other orientalist Aryanists - sought ‘Persian’ origins in movements, courts, and Arabic texts. To this end, he provided three arguments that are common among most of the orientalists in general, in particular the Aryanists. Firstly, he links many religious or political movements to Manichaeism, Mazdakism, and Zoroastrianism. Assuming that all subjects of the Sassanid Empire were Persians, Browne considers Mani and Mazdak to be Persians too. Ibn al-Muqaffa (721-756) - who was considered a converted Persian Zoroastrian

⁴ His anti-Russian sentiments pushed him to support Ottomans and study Turkish in 1870s. Following the early death of his Turcologist friend, Elias Gibb, Browne completed and published his *A History of Ottoman Poetry* (Wickens et al., 1989).

⁵ Before the Arsacids and after Alexander the Great, the Seleucids ruled the lands orientalists call ‘Persia’ and Iranian modern history calls ‘Iran’. Browne accepts this era as a rupture, yet assumes ‘Persia’ existed during the Seleucid reign. See (Browne, 1959).

⁶ Etemad al-Saltaneh (1992) also considers Arsacids to be alien Turkic Turanians, whereas in the fourth volume of his *Lost Millenia*, Rajabi (2004) tries to Iranianize them. He states that Iranians including Ferdowsi were fond of the history of the alien Alexander the Great spanning less than a decade but remained silent about the 476 years of the Arsacid Empire.

and a prominent translator of Pahlavi and Zoroastrian texts into Arabic - states that the private language of the Sassanian royalty was Khuzi, a non-Iranian language associated with the Elamite tongue (Frye, 1983), even casting doubts as to the 'racial roots' of the ruling Sassanian dynasty (Ibni Nadim, 2002). Ironically, despite his reservations about whether the Arsacids were racially Turanian or Persian, he states that Mani was a Persian because his father was 'probably' descended from a noble Arsacid family. Mani's mother was a Christian, whose believers - like the Arsacids - were considered outsiders by the Sassanians and Zoroastrians. Moreover, as Browne himself mentions, the historical evidence demonstrates that Mani and Sassanian king did not speak a common language and required an interpreter to communicate. Browne refers to historical texts describing how Sassanian kings and Zoroastrian mobads slaughtered Mazdakians and Manichaeans, stating that Khosrow I, a Sassanian king reigning between 531 and 579 C.E., received the titles *Anushirvan* ('the Immortal Soul') and *Dadgar* ('Dispenser of Justice') from Zoroastrian mobads following the brutal massacre of the Mazdakians and his repression of the Manicheans (Browne, 1959, p.255). Interestingly, in his *Siyasatnama*, Nizam-ul-Mulk (1018-1092), the Wazir of the Seljuqs, supported the repression of the Manicheans and Mazdakians (Nizam-ul-Mulk, 2018), whereas according to Ibn al-Nadim, in the tenth century, it was the Turkic Khagan who threatened the Abbasid rulers with retaliation if they subjugated the Manicheans (Ibni Nadim, 2002). Despite these controversial historical narratives, Browne attempts to link the Manichaean - and Mazdakian - repression during the Islamic era to their Persian identity, concluding that it proved their resistance to aliens and the continuity of a 'Persian' identity (Browne, 1959, p. 242-243).

Secondly, Browne attempts to find ethical, intellectual, and dynastic links between Shiism and 'Persians'. For instance, he claims that 'Persians' supported the Alids and the Shia sect of Islam because the wife of Husayn ibn Ali, the third Shia Imam, was a daughter of the last Sassanian king. Browne concurs with Gobineau's theory regarding the 'Persian' infatuation with Shi'ism, finding evidence in their love of monarchy as a God-given blessing granted to the Sassanids and later to the Shia Imams. Moreover, he claims that although Persian hatred towards the Sunnis and the second Rashidun Caliph, Omar, revealed itself in the form of Shiism, its root could be found in the abolition of the Sassanid Empire by Omar (Ibid., 194-5). The search for racial reasons behind any historical event or movement lead Browne to overlook the Sunni pre-Safavid history of the so-called 'Persians'. He claims a direct relationship between declines in Shia power and the surges in the political power of the 'Turks'. However, he neglects to mention that it was the Turk Qizilbashs that made Iran a Shia country, and that

most of the prominent literati and scholars whom he terms 'Persian' - like Khayyam, Al-Ghazali, Saadi, and Ferdowsi - were Sunni or Ash'ari Muslims, or that many of the political figures - like Nizam-ul-Mulk - fought the Ismaili Shias. Browne's biased method of historiography leads to his silence regarding the likely role of the Barmakids - whom he considers heroes of the Persian cultural and political revival - and holds no doubts about in respect of their 'Persianness' - in the death of Musa Al-Kadhim, the seventh Shia Imam (Haider, 2019).

Thirdly, Browne states that the political and bureaucratic structure of 'Muslim Arab' empires imitated the Sassanid empire or had been established by the 'Persian' elites. He tries to show that administrative arrangements in the Abbasid empire both began and peaked because of its wise Persians. This idea bears similarity to the perspective of Aryanists like Renan, Gobineau, and Müller, assuming that only the Aryans could create mould-breaking ideas or that there must be an Aryan agent or wisdom behind any 'progress' or 'civilization', and that non-Aryans could at the best only imitate the innovative contributions of their Aryan counterparts. For instance, Browne assumes that the Barmakids were the architects of 'the golden age of Abbasid Empire' (Browne, 1959, p.372-5). Despite the vagueness as to which characteristics a historical figure must possess to be included in Browne's and other orientalist's presumed list of Persians, it is a common method of orientalist and Iranian nationalist historiography to look for a 'Persian/Iranian' wazir, poet, or symbol when rulers were 'non-Persian'. In orientalist and nationalist histories, wazirs - if any - are mostly absent or at best secondary in the historiographies of the Achaemenids, Sassanids, Saffarids, Samanids, and Buyids, but in the historiographies of the Arab Abbasids, Turkic Seljuqs, and Mongol Ilkhanate, kings are secondary or puppets in the hand of wazirs assumed as Persian.

As with other orientalists, Browne tends to show the Diwan, the traditional high administrative ministry, and the office of wazir as originally Persian Sassanian institutions. This implies that because Arabs were unable to even imitate the Sassanians in establishing similar institutions, wise Persians were required to undertake these responsibilities. This world view disdains both inspiration and thought combination because in their mind Aryan would always produce authentically pure ideas; however, the development of institutions before and after the arrival of Islam depicts ideas as a kind of public good that no one could hinder from spreading. For instance, the Diwan as an administrative institute and the Dabir as a position at court exist as far back as the Elamites (*tep/tip*), the Akkadians (*tappu*), and the Sumerians (*dub*) (Tavernier, 2007). Historical texts demonstrate that the first Muslim rulers, including the second Caliph Omer, the Umayyad, and the Abbasid rulers were keen on these

bureaucratic administrative traditions. Yet, the evolution of the Diwan in the Islamic era shows that it also possessed its own logic for responding to new and arising necessities. The Islamic era Diwan began with the recording and distribution of war booties and land tax revenues during the reign of the Caliph Omar and developed during the Umayyad era (Berkel et al., 2013). Muawiyah, the first Umayyad Caliph, and his successors founded the *Diwan al-Kharaj* for land taxes and the *Diwan al-Mustaghallat* for the administration of public properties, alongside three others, the *Diwan al-Rasail*, the *Diwan al-Khatam*, and the *Diwan al-Barid* for official correspondence, sealing, and postal services, respectively. Besides these, there were other Diwans with local branches like the *Diwan al-Jund* which oversaw military issues. Most importantly, Umayyad Caliphs founded the *Diwan al-Nafaqat* for public expenditure and charitable affairs and the *Diwan al-Sadaqa* for *zakat* and *ushr* revenues, indicating the effect of Islamic jurisprudence (Ibid.; Levy, 2000). Additionally, the Umayyads used the Arab-Islamic calendar and made Arabic the court language in an empire in which different court languages had previously been used (Hawting, 2002). Mainly founded in Damascus, some of these institutions bear similarities with or were inspired by the Byzantines (Legendre, 2016), but the agency and contribution of the Umayyad was remarkable. Orientalists like Browne consider the Diwan institute in Abbasid and all of those of the Islamic era to be copies of the Sassanid administrative institutes founded in the ancient civilizations of the region, whereas in actuality, the Islamic version had mainly evolved in Damascus during the Umayyad reign. Similarly, Browne, among other orientalist, believes that the post of wazir in the Abbasid Empire imitated the Sassanians. Browne looks for a 'Persian' etymology to the word wazir, however, he cannot produce any evidence of an office with such name during the Sassanid empire. Furthermore, we can find similar positions within different empires, like the *Tarkhan* in the Turkic Khaganate (Han-Woo, 2000), the *Dabir/Tippir* in ancient Mesopotamia (Tavernier, 2007), and later in the Umayyad Empire (Hawting, 2002). The biased historiography of Browne leads him to glorify the wazirs - whom he considers Persian - but he uses racist rhetoric when discussing the role of the Turk commander, wazirs, and scholars of the Abbasid empire. For example, he links the 'golden age of Abbasids' with the power of 'Persian' elites at court, and the empire's decline with the rising power of the Turk elites (e.g., Al-Fath ibn Khaqan, Ubayd Allah ibn Khaqan, and Bugha Al-Kabir). Browne describes the Turk elites as slaves with wild deeds and horrifying names, maintaining that the Caliph Al-Mutawakkil – possessing brutality reminiscent of the Ottoman Sultans - preferred the Turks to the Persians because of his bigotry (Browne, 1959, p.501-5). On the one hand, he praises the role of 'Persians' in the collapse of Caliph Emin (Ibid., 365-71) and justifies the Buyid intervention into

the Abbasid court, but on the other hand, scorns the role of ‘Turks’ in the collapse of caliphs, determining their interventions into court policy anarchic (Ibid., 368-77). Accordingly, his antipathy leads him to admire Caliph Al-Mohtadi who attempted to re-establish ‘Arab’ superiority by crushing the Turks, whom Browne dismisses as arrogant blood shedders (Ibid., 510-11). More interestingly, Browne states that the shift in the early Islamic era from the ‘democratic’ way of choosing a Caliph to a hereditary monarchy suggests a Persian influence (Ibid., 365-7). Therefore, to prove continuity throughout the history of ‘Persia’ he overlooks evident facts like the long-established history of monarchies across the globe. He neglects to mention that the first four Caliphs - all from the Quraysh tribe – were the father-in-law or son-in-law of the Prophet Muhammad who had died without a male successor. More strangely, he ignores that the Umayyads – also from the Quraysh tribe - founded a hereditary monarchy prior to the Abbasids. Furthermore, in the Sassanian empire founded upon Zoroastrian doctrines, incestuous marriages named *Xwedodah* were recommended for believers. Whether to maintain their noble blood purity or hold political and economic power within the dynasty, some of Sassanid empires married their daughters, sisters, and mothers (Skjærvø, 2013). Contrary to this kind of ‘good marriage’ in Zoroastrianism and Sasanian empire, most of the Abbasid Caliphs were born to concubines or non-Arab mothers. As a result, the formation and evolution of political and bureaucratic structures in the early Islamic era have specific motivations and logics for meeting the requirements of the age, coping with contingent difficulties, spreading the new religion, and legitimizing the empire. To this end, various rulers, elites, and communities within Islamic empires developed unique systems and processes, while also being inspired by the solutions developed by previous societies, with the Sassanians being only one of many.

Nationalists’ Narratives

The race-based historiography of the Aryanists and Indian Parsis echoed in the writings of the nationalist historiographers of the Qajar and Pahlavi eras. In contrast to the first generation of nationalist historians who had direct links with Aryanist orientalists and Indian Parsis, the second and third generations of the Pahlavi era found inspiration mostly through their published texts. A. Zarrinkoob was one of these nationalist scholars, penning *Two Centuries of Silence [Do Qarn Sokut]* to narrate the ‘history of Iran’ over the two centuries following the arrival of Islam. In the introduction to the second edition of his book, Zarrinkoob accepts that because of either his ‘immaturity or fanaticism’ he

could not 'acknowledge the faults, negligence, guilts and defeats of Iran.' He states that 'in those days, my soul was obsessed with such zeal and valor that I considered all pure, right, and celestial things to belong to Iran and anything not belonging to Iran to be ugly, inferior, and false' (Zarrinkoob, 1957). This confession did not lead him to revise his racist approach to history, instead choosing to add some paragraphs showing that the collapse of the Sassanian empire had in fact been brought about by internal problems rather than inferior Arabs. For him, these internal problems manifested as corruption among the Zoroastrian clerics and Sassanian court, alongside the betrayal of several regional governors who had cooperated with the Arab Muslim invaders (Ibid., 18). Browne, and more boldly, the Iranian nationalists, try to de-Arabize Islam, claiming that what defeated the 'glorious Sassanians' was Islam rather than the Arabs (Ibid, 18-9).

The second edition of *Two Centuries of Silence* intends to ask why the 'Iranians' with their superior qualities defeated the inferior 'hungry and naked' foreigners who had previously lived like 'demons' in the 'arid formidable deserts', and why 'Iranians' left their religions, converted to Islam, and accepted foreign political and cultural dominance? (Ibid., 23). Zarrinkoob blames the Arabs for their wild merciless behaviors but remains silent concerning the brutality of Khosrow Parviz, the Sassanid king, who crushed the skull of the Hira 'Arab' ruler because he opposed Khosrow marrying into his royal family. He dismisses the Muslim Arab conquerors as occupiers while admiring the political precision of Anushirvan who occupied Yamn, a part of the 'Arab' lands (Ibid., 31). Despite the name of the book implying over two centuries of rupture in the 'history of Iran', the writer attempts to present continuity. Seemingly furious about the corruption of the Sassanian and Zoroastrian oligarchy, Zarrinkoob states that the uprisings over the two centuries following the arrival of Islam never aimed to revive the Sassanian Empire but were instead resistance to the Arabs. He claims that after a tax quarrel in which the Caliph Omar was assassinated by Firuz Ebu-Lo'lo' (Ibid., 79), a slave who had probably been a Sassanian or Byzantian subject (Ashkavari, 1994), the Iranians took revenge on the Arabs.

Zarrinkoob discusses different examples of 'betrayal' whereby 'Iranians' cooperated with Arabs to seize cities, including Tisiphone, the Sassanid capital. He also narrates stories that he himself believed to be false, depicting the behavior of the 'plain, stupid and savage' Arabs after the conquering of Sassanian territory (Zarrinkoob, 1957, p.78-82). Zarrinkoob concludes that the period he describes as 'two centuries of silence' was the history of 'rivalry between the Arab and Iranian races' during which the 'Arabs were defeated several times'. He then maintains that at the end of these two centuries with Baghdad in the hands of the

Iranians, the dominance of 'Iranian civilization and culture made the Arab Caliphs surrender', so that 'Iranian nobles and commanders' regained the power they had once possessed during the Sassanid empire. Acknowledging the decline in Abbasid power followed by centuries of 'Turkish dynastic dominance', Zarrinkoob ends his book with racist remarks against the Turks. While criticizing the 'Arabs' for describing 'Iranians' as slaves, he - like Browne and other nationalist historians - scorns Turks as 'slaves who were ready to sell themselves to whoever would like to buy' (Ibid., 287-9).

Homai (1934 & 1935), Momtahan (1991), and Safa (1947) are other nationalist historians using race-based approaches to narrate the early centuries after the arrival of Islam. They sketch a picture suggesting an 'Iranian' mega strategy implemented step-by-step to bring the 'Arabs' to their knees. In this supposed comprehensive plan, the first step was a literal Iranian revival using Arabic language, the second was a political mega plan for penetrating the court, the third was a series of connected uprisings, the fourth was the liberation of different lands, and the final step was attaining the complete independence of Iran (For instance, see (Homai, 1324c, 237)). Like Aryanist orientalists and Zarrinkoob, they resort to reconstructing the narrative to stress the role of the highly distinguished Iranian race in the achievements of Islamic Arab empires. Likewise, Kasrawi, a nationalist historian, maintains that regional governments founded by 'Iranian rulers' during the Abbasid era succeeded in bringing independence to all of 'Iran' before the eleventh century. Kasrawi overstates the achievements of minor regional governments, but at the same time avoids legitimizing regional autonomies for two reasons. Firstly, in his *Unknown Rulers [Shayryarane Gomnan]*, he lists more than 150 autonomous and independent governments that ruled 'Iran' from the collapse of the Sassanians to the collapse of the Qajars (1925), most important of which was founded by the Turks to whom Kasrawi shows severe antipathy (Kasrawi, 2006). Secondly, the early years of his political life coincided with the regional unrests of the late Qajar era, during which Kasrawi - along with a group of modernist nationalists - supported Reza Khan in founding an authoritarian centralized government. This government went on to oppress regional uprisings and assimilate non-Persians, particularly Turks and Arabs, into official Persian culture (Alizadeh, 2020a, p.15-8).

Uprisings that nationalists (and most of the orientalists) believe were designed and implemented by 'Iranian' elites and regional semi-autonomous governments inside the Abbasid empire are given significant importance in their historiography. Various pieces of evidence cast doubt on the claims of nationalist historians about the existence of a comprehensive plan to emancipate 'Iran' from

the ‘Arab yoke’. As can be seen in other empires, these uprisings were primarily the consequence of power rivalries among the ruling groups. The first confrontation and civil war, *Fitna*, occurred in response to Caliph Othman’s assassination in Medina. This event divided the ruling Quraysh tribe into two factions, creating the Hashemites and the Umayyads. Thereafter, civil war continued with the Jamal, Siffin, and Nahrawan battles between differing factions of the first Arab Muslims, dividing Muslim society into three main camps: the Alids of mainly Iraq, the supporters of Muawiyah in Syria, and the Kharijites opposed to both of the former groups who were scattered across different parts of the empire (El-Hibri, 2010).

The Second *Fitna* broke out after the death of Caliph Muawiyah, during which his successor Yazid killed Husayn, Caliph Ali’s son, in Karbala, and sent troops to Hejaz to oppress Abdullah, Caliph Abu Bakr’s grandson. These rivalries lead the Hashemites - including the Alids, but not limited to them - and the Kharijites to extend their propaganda efforts against the dominant Umayyads to mobilize larger masses. The tragedy of Karbala enflamed a series of revolts, most important of which were the Tawwabin, Mukhtar, and Zayd ibn Ali upheavals (Hawting, 2002). After Karbala incidence, the Hashemites and Kharijites focused on tribal, religious, regional, and traditional class fault-lines, spreading the power battle from Iraq and Hijaz out towards the borders. As a result, Mukhtar’s supporters consisted of different non-Arab groups, while Yahya, the son of Zayd ibn Ali, moved to Khurasan to start a revolt directly from the periphery (Bakhtiyari, 2007). During these revolts, the successors of Abbas, the Prophet’s uncle, adopted a subtle plan preferring to remain in the shadows refusing to waste their resources on unsuccessful revolts, while gathering and organizing more supporters to wait for a proper opportunity to seize power (Ibid., 4-15). Therefore, the Hashemites divided into two groups: the rebellious Alids and the silent watchful Abbasids.

The opportunity the Abbasids had been waiting for came soon after uprisings in Iraq and at the borders, accompanied by the Third *Fitna*, the Umayyad dynasty’s internal conflicts over the throne. Despite the Umayyads finally resorting to oppressing them, the surviving Abbasids broadened their efforts by sending different missionaries to the periphery, one of whom was Abu Muslim (Browne, 1959, p.346-50). Iranian historians and orientalist take his Iranian roots for granted, but as Ibni Athir (1160-1233) and Dinwari (815-896) mention, Abu Muslim considered himself an Arab (Ibni Athir, 1987, p.256;

Dinwari, 1989, p.381).⁷ Many large groups of Arabs were in Khorasan at that time, including pro-Umayyad governors, troops for war against the non-Muslim central Asians, groups fleeing Umayyad oppression, and the exiled opposition. Yamani and Bani Tamim tribes were one of the most important Arab groups in the region. Abbasi missionaries tried to organize these Arab groups alongside local non-Arabs against the Umayyads, whereas the Kharijites were primarily active in the Sistan region (Browne, 1959). These groups were united around one single goal which was the toppling of the Umayyad Empire, however, the following course of events would show the Abbasids to own the best plan for seizing power in the aftermath of the empire's collapse. Critically analyzing historical accounts on the Abbasid revolt in Khorasan Daniel argues that 'it is hard to see how race /ethnicity was much of an issue in the movement' in which different Arab and non-Arab groups participated (Daniel, 1996). Nationalist scholars like Browne tend to show this uprising as an Iranian plan under Abu Muslim's leadership to exact revenge against the Arabs and Umayyads (Ibid., 360). Interestingly, they even present Abu Muslim as an Iranian nationalist in heart and spirit, taking advantage of the Abbasids and playing the Arab card to reach his nationalist goals (For instance, see (Homai, 1934d, , p.349-50)). However, historical documents again favour an opposing argument, showing that Abu Muslim was most probably an Arab missionary of the Abbasids whose attendance at Khorasan was about mobilizing the borders against the Umayyads. For instance, Ebu Muslim killed Behafarid, the leader of a Zoroastrian group, as well as Eb-Salma, his own master who had a key role in the rise of Abbasids, by the command of the Abbasid Caliph (Browne, 1959, p.461). Contrary to claims of nationalist Iranian and some orientalist historians, it was the Abbasids who played the periphery card and took advantage of elites like Abu Muslim because the dynasty had seized power although none of its members had participated in an important military campaign. Despite all his services, Abbasid even killed Abu Muslim when he became surplus to requirements and perceived as a potential threat to the Caliph (Tabari, 2003). As a result, except for some regional uprisings, the main revolts were organized by the Hashemites, whereas apart from the Abbasids and later the Turks, other groups like the Alids found no benefit in them (Browne, 1959: 357-8). Similarly, although we can see some rare ethnic awareness, neither the Abbasids nor the Turks captured the power to establish an Arab state or revive Turan and the Khaganate; rather, their accomplishments, too,

⁷ Moreover, Homai, referring to Tabari states that Abu-Muslim insisted on his Arab roots (Homai, 1934: 351).

should be analyzed according to economic, religious, or tribal logics, instead of racial or national.

Furthermore, contrary to the claims of nationalists and some orientalist historians (For example see (Homai, 1934a, p. 49)), no collaboration was formed between regional autonomous governments for realizing the ‘independence of Iran’. The first regional rulers, the Tahirids (821-873), were supporters of Arabic and Islamic culture (Browne, 1959, p.105). It is worth noting that different members of the dynasty were appointed the governors of Egypt and the Arabian Peninsula, and as military commanders in Baghdad (Bosworth, 2000, p.104-5). Contradicting the narratives of nationalist historians, the Tahirids not only posed no threat to the Abbasids but oppressed revolts in Tabaristan, after which they lost the region to their rival, the Zaydis. Moreover, it was the Saffarids rather than the Arabs that overthrew the Tahirid dynasty in 873 (Browne, 1959).

Over two periods (864-928), the Alid Zaydis ruled the lands in the south by the Caspian Sea. When intra-dynasty infighting had weakened the Zaydis, the Samanids attained the support of the founders of the Buyids and the Ziyarids to overthrow them. Mardavij, the founder of the Ziyarids (930-1090), disobeyed the King of the Gilites to take power in the south Caspian region. Throughout their rule, the Ziyarids had numerous wars with the Samanids and the Buyids, oppressed separate internal revolts, accepted Turkic Ghaznavid and the Seljuqs’ authority, to be finally overthrown by Nizari Ismailis (Bosworth, 1965, p.25-34).

The Buyids’ reign (934-1062) began with wars against the Ziyarids, with their dynasty collapsing at the hand of the Seljuqs. Iranian nationalist historians tend to show them as rulers wanting to revive Zoroastrianism and the Sassanid empire. At the peak of their power, the Buyids ruled Baghdad but did not or could not topple the Abbasid Caliphate, in fact, the Buyids defended Baghdad against the Ziyarids whose founder held Zoroastrian inclinations (Busse, 1975, p.256).

The Saffarids are another short-lived dynasty that Iranian nationalists present as fanatics for an independent Iran. Ya’qub Leys, the founder of the dynasty, headed a group of bandits in Sistan. In 681, his band invaded the Buddhist regions of today’s Afghanistan and Pakistan in the name of Islam, acquiring themselves a great amount of booty and slaves. Next, he toppled the Tahirids, proceeding to march through Baghdad probably because of the provocation of the Caliph’s brother (Browne, 1959, p.525-8). When Ya’qub was unable to conquer Baghdad, the Saffarids accepted Abbasid authority in exchange for receiving governance of Sistan. They lost most of their lands to the Samanids in a war that took place in 900 C.E., and with the Samanids having captured the

members of the Saffarid dynasty they were surrendered to the Abbasid Caliph in Baghdad (Ibid., 527).

The Samanids were another dynasty rightly known for their role in the emergence of Farsi as a court and literary language. Even during the Samanids' reign, most poets and scholars preferred Arabic to Farsi (Negmatov, 1999, p.97-8; Browne, 1959, p.534); however, their support for Farsi was later continued by different Turkic dynasties, setting the foundation for the golden age of Farsi literature over the next five centuries. As already mentioned, the Samanids launched various wars against other regional dynasties that nationalist historians regard to be anti-Arab regional governments. Furthermore, Samanids are well known for their supports for Sunni Islam (Frye, 1975), their suppression of the Ismaili Shias (Madelung and Walker, 1998) and their contributions to the formation of 'Turko-Persian culture' (Canfield, 1991).

As a result, the regional autonomous dynasties of the ninth and tenth centuries were not pursuing the desires of nationalist historians in the twentieth century; rather, like the Arabs or the Turks, they mostly strived to seize power as often as possible for their own interests, generally fighting amongst themselves, and rarely posing a serious threat to the Arabs and Turks towards whom nationalist scholars and some orientalists show antipathy.

Islamists' Narratives

Finally, Motahhari and Shari'ati, two prominent Islamist ideologues of the late Pahlavi era, attempted to deconstruct the race-based nationalist historiography of the Pahlavi regime and the orientalists. Ali Shari'ati, one of the early advocates of the Islamic political and social ideology, urges Iranians to return to their 'true Shiite self' by abandoning Western and pre-Islamic traditions. He maintains that Iranians do not find their roots in the 'distant past' like Sasanians and Achaemenids, and even the earlier civilizations (Abdi, 2001, p.67). Shari'ati states that while in the first two decades after the arrival of Islam a bunch of brilliant elites emerged, we cannot find even one distinguished figure in a millennium prior to Islam:

We come across to the names of some physicians and sages during the reign of Anushirvan, but we get disappointed when we realize that they all were foreigners...Indeed, they were from Byzantine and fled Christianization plans of Justinianus...They were political refugees that established Gondeshapur. So, our first university in the golden age (of the pre-Islamic era) was founded by Greeks. So, why this infertile nation flourished after

the arrival of Islam and turned to be the founder of universities, schools, and libraries which were unique in the world? (Shari'ati, 1978, p.213-6).

Although Shari'ti criticizes nationalist historians who bold the Pre-Islamic empires and society, but he assumes the existence of the Iranian 'nation' prior to and after the arrival of Islam. He like the majority of Nationalist historians and orientalist talks about the scientific and political intelligence of Iranians after the arrival of Islam dominating wide geography from China to Africa and the heart of Europe. Shari'ati believes that Islam resulted in an intellectual and spiritual revolution that transformed spirit, race, and world view of the nation. Moreover, he maintains that they who reveal antipathy toward Islam overlook such majestic accomplishments achieved by the Iranian 'race'. Shari'ati attributes these accomplishments to the emergence of an Islamic ideology that flourished the 'inherited merits and ingenuity' of Iranians. He states that humiliation and denial of this universal Islamic civilization make Iranians look for documents that show the superiority of their race and pre-Islamic history. Shari'ati pints out to the scapegoating of Arabs and Greeks by nationalists who claim that Sasanians and Achaemenids had serious intellectual achievements that were destroyed by foreigners (Ibid, 1978, p.215-8).

Likewise, Motahhari attempts to underline achievements during the Islamic era and deconstruct race-based historiography. He believes that both the higher status of Arabic within Iran's autonomous regional governments and Farsi's distinguished position in the Turkic states suggest that we should seek alternative explanations to replace racial and national ones (Motahhari, 1979, p.117-121). However, despite much critical nonconformity, like the nationalist historians, Motahhari references a wise, cultured, civilized, and immortal 'Iranian nation'. Moreover, Motahhari claims that while Iranians belong to the Aryan race, their intellectual and cultural structures, institutions, and traditions originated from non-Aryan Islam. He argues that 'if we take race as the basis of Iranian nationality then the colonialist Western world would be our close relatives and our Arab neighbors would be outsiders; however, if we take Islam as the foundation of our nation the opposite phenomenon would happen'. Consequently, he concludes that the discussion surrounding nationality cannot merely be an objective academic issue (Ibid., 1979, p.18). Motahhari believes most writers discussing the common issues of Islam and Iran to be ill-informed or retaining intentions other than scholarly motivation. He states that some orientalist try to abuse historical events, claiming a resistance movement among Iranians towards Islam (Ibid., 15-8). He maintains that:

When intellectuals in a backward nation decide to deal with (issues related to) their nation, they realize that what belongs to their nation

is mixed with misery, desolation, ignorance, and backwardness. Therefore, they turn to the period in their nation's history in which they can find majesty, glory, splendor, and magnificence, or at least glamour. That is why they push their present society with all its enchantments aside to travel back over the centuries. These centuries, along with people who lived in these ages, have formed interwoven chains of reasons and consequences that birthed our present condition. If they cannot find such (a splendid) age in their actual national history, they turn to ancient legends (Ibid., 29).

Motahhari provides a list of such works that he considers 'legend', including Zarrinkoob's *Two Centuries of Silence*. He argues that racist approaches to history and society are a colonialist conspiracy to separate colonized people, adding that some people waged war on Islam under the cover of advocating for an Iranian nation and race or fighting the Arabs. He refers to widespread political propaganda efforts aiming to challenge Islam and promote Zoroastrianism in Iran (Ibid., 53), before advocating an idea at odds with his prior assumptions about the Iranians' Aryan race:

Now, there is no nation with a peculiar blood and race. For instance, we Iranians, with our long historical past have a specific situation in terms of governance and laws. Are we different from our neighbor nations in terms of blood and race? Do we and Arabs really have Aryan and Semetic races? ... Actually, claims about race and blood are superstition... Most of the Iranians who speak Farsi and are fanatics for the Iranian nation are Arab, Turk, or Mongol. Likewise, many of the Arabs who are fanatics of Arabism are of the Iranian, Turk, or Mongol race... if we equate Iranianness to the Aryan race we must consider most of our nation to be non-Iranian and abandon most of our heritage (Ibid., 60-1).

Refuting claims connecting the Iranian tendency towards Shiism to the marriage of the Third Shia Imam to the daughter of the last Sassanian king, Motahhari adds that this marriage was likely fictitious and abused by orientalist like Browne (Ibid., 120-142).

CONCLUSION

Beginning in eighteenth-century Europe, a new wave of racist approaches to history and society classified societies and civilizations into superior Aryan and inferior non-Aryan groups. These trends initially affected the worldview and lifestyle of elites in colonial Asia, before progressing into Muslim countries. Internalizing this approach, Parsi Zoroastrians incorporated this into their

traditional racial myths and propagated it among the Qajar Iran elites during the second half of the nineteenth century. Simultaneously, orientalist Aryanists contacted the Qajar elites, leading to the emergence of a new race-based historiography of Iran. This kind of historiography evolved into the official ideology of the Pahlavi regime and its nation-building project. Examining the ideas of three groups of historians, this study positions the race-based approaches within the conceptualized history of Iran. Accordingly, it discusses the ways Aryanists and orientalists like Browne attempted to portray the continuity and superiority of Iran and the Iranian nation during the four centuries after the arrival of Islam as a Semetic religion. Moreover, this study argues that an obsession with the Aryanist orientalists' race-based theories led Iranian nationalist historians to represent Iran and Iranian identity as superior immortal realities, which were alive and efficient throughout every stage of history. Finally, the study discusses how Motahhari and Shari'ati - two of the main ideologues of the Islamic movement on the eve of the 1979 Islamic Revolution- sought to deconstruct the secular racial approach to the early Islamic history of 'Iran'.

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EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Purpose: This article studies the ways orientalist, nationalist historians, and Islamists presented the continuity of ‘Iran’, ‘Iranian identity’, and the ‘Iranian nation’ during a perceived rupture that happened following the collapse of the Sassanid Empire in the first half of the seventh century, and before the dominance of the Turkic dynasties in the second half of the tenth century. Accordingly, the study discusses the different tactics adopted by Aryanists (such as Arthur de Gobineau and Ernest Renan), orientalist Iranists (such as Edward Browne), and Iranian nationalist historians (such as Azarrinkoob) to prove that not only was the Iranian nation alive but that it retained its pre-Islamic Aryan ‘national identity’, ultimately defeating its Arab enemies thanks to its ‘superior civilization, culture, wisdom, ethic, and courage’. More specifically, it critically analyzes the ways these groups reconstructed different uprisings during the Umayyad and Abbasid eras and the assumed role the ‘Iranian’ factor played in these empires. Furthermore, it examines nationalist Iranian and Aryanist orientalist historians’ thoughts representing the emergence of regional governments during ‘Iranian intermezzo’, determining them a comprehensive political effort to revive the ‘independence of Iran’ and its ‘national identity’. Finally, the study discusses the reactions of Morteza Motahhari (1919-1979) and Ali Shari’ati (1933-1977), the prominent ideologues of the Islamic movement leading to the 1979 revolution, to the anti-Arab and anti-Islamic ideas of orientalist and nationalist historians.

Methodology: To evaluate the texts produced by the aforementioned three groups, the study utilizes the Critical Discourse Analysis method for two main reasons. Firstly, the surveyed texts were produced within different socio-political contexts shaped by different forces and discourses, like Aryanism, nationalism, Islamism, and modernism. Secondly, the examined texts produced by these three groups analyze other textual materials written by Muslim and non-Muslim

authors under different socio-political conditions between the seventh and the tenth centuries.

Findings: To show cultural and racial continuity before and after the Islamic era, orientalist like Browne and Gobineau sought ‘Persian’ origins in movements, courts, and Arabic texts. To this end, they provide three arguments that are common among most of the orientalist in general, in particular the Aryanists. Firstly, they link many religious or political movements to Manichaeism, Mazdakism, and Zoroastrianism. Assuming that all subjects of the Sassanid Empire were Persians, Browne considers Mani and Mazdak to be Persians too. Secondly, they attempt to find ethical, intellectual, and dynastic links between Shiism and ‘Persians’. Thirdly, they claim that the political and bureaucratic structure of the ‘Muslim Arab’ empires imitated the Sassanid empire or had been established by the ‘Persian’ elites. On the other hand, an obsession with the Aryanist orientalist’s race-based theories led Iranian nationalist historians to represent Iran and Iranian identity as superior immortal realities. Iranian nationalist historians sketch a picture suggesting an ‘Iranian’ mega strategy implemented step-by-step to bring the ‘Arabs’ to their knees. In this supposed comprehensive plan, the first step was a literal Iranian revival using Arabic language, the second was a political mega plan for penetrating the court, the third was a series of connected uprisings, the fourth was the liberation of different lands, and the final step was attaining the complete independence of Iran. Finally, Motahhari and Shari’ati, two prominent Islamist ideologues of the late Pahlavi era, attempted to deconstruct the race-based nationalist historiography of the Pahlavi regime and the orientalist. These Islamic elites sought to deconstruct the orientalist and nationalist racial approach to history, by offering a new way of historiography partly in accordance with Internationalist Islamic doctrines.

Conclusion and Discussion: Contrary to the orientalist’s claims this study argues that there was not any pure authentic Iranian institution nor a mega plan to revive the Sasanian-Zoroastrian past in the first four centuries of the Islamic era. As a result, race-based arguments cannot explain the intertwined events took place and complex institution emerged in this period. Furthermore, the regional autonomous dynasties of the ninth and tenth centuries were not pursuing the desires of nationalist historians in the twentieth century; rather, like the Arabs or the Turks, they mostly strived to seize power as often as possible for their own interests, generally fighting amongst themselves, and rarely posing a serious threat to the Arabs and Turks towards whom nationalist scholars and some orientalist show antipathy. Finally, nationalist activist-historians’ attempts to reconstruct a new sense of Iranianness brought about adverse reactions from Islamists who sought to craft a new identity and political order. These

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developments led Motahhari and Shari'ati - two of the main ideologues of the Islamic movement on the eve of the 1979 Islamic Revolution- to deconstruct the secular racial approach to the early Islamic history of 'Iran'.