

Identification with Islam in Iran during the First Few Centuries after the Arab Invasion

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Iran, identification, Kenneth Burke, rhetoric, Shi'ism.
イラン、同化、ケネス・バーク、レトリック、シーア派

Abstract

Identification, meaning creating common ground with your audience for the purpose of persuasion, is one of the most important terms Kenneth Burke, famous philosopher and literary theorist, introduced to the realm of rhetorical studies. This process is among the strategies that are often used to effectively convey a message in human communication. Communicators stress on the common ground they share with their audience through identification to establish communication. In the long history of religious propagation, missionaries and promoters have often used this method to create common ground with their target audiences to propagate and spread their views on existence itself. This paper not only tries to briefly shed light on the history of identification in religious propagation and its background in Iran before the Arab invasion but also highlights the process through which Iranians used identification after Islam to relate to the new religion. The latter has been studied under two main titles: 1. Identification with Islam in general and, 2. Identification with Shi'ism as one of the main branches of Islam. This study aims to at least show how and from what perspective the process of identification took place in the first few centuries after the Arab invasion in Iran and what views belonging to Islam became popular in Iran as a result.

1. Introduction

Emory Griffin, in his book *A First Look at Communication Theory*, writes: "Kenneth Burke was perhaps the foremost rhetorician of the twentieth century. Burke wrote about rhetoric; other rhetoricians write about Burke" (Griffin, 2012: p.305). Burke's theories were a huge revolution in rhetorical studies in the twentieth century, and challenged the traditional views of rhetoric extensively. His lengthy perceptions of rhetoric, which have been gathered in books such as *A Grammar of Motives*, *A Rhetoric of Motives*, and *Language as Symbolic Action*, along with his numerous essays, are unique in terms of diversity, originality, and ingenuity. One of the most fundamental terms which Burke introduced in his theory of communication was identification, which derived from his definition of rhetoric. Rhetoric, in his opinion, is "the use of words by human agents to form attitudes or to induce actions in other human agents" (Burke, 1969a: p.41). To form attitudes or to induce actions, rhetors inevitably use inclusive identification and persuasion, and thus rhetoric is connected with the two concepts of identification and persuasion (See Foss, Foss & Trapp, 2014: p.189). What Burke means by identification is the process through which a rhetor identifies with the mentality and the mindset of the audience by approaching them, and tries to see, define, and describe a matter or a topic from their perspective of the world, so that they do not feel distant from the subject of discussion and understand and accept it naturally through their own familiar mentality and frame of mind. In Burke's opinion, if the process of identification is successfully carried out, persuasion, which is the ultimate goal of rhetoric, will also be obtained and the rhetor generates and achieves effective communication with the audience. In other words, identification creates a common ground (substance) between the rhetor and the audience, and the wider the ground, the greater the chance of intersection and successful and effective communication will be (See Burke, 1969b: p.55).

Burke uses the term consubstantial to describe the aforementioned association; as two entities are united in substance, they are consubstantial (See Foss, 2009: p.63). This means that the audience are also active and as dynamic as the rhetor in the process of communication, and that the identification process depends on them also. Therefore, Burke calls the process of communication "the general body of identification" (Burke, 1969b: p.72). In his belief, human beings were always afraid of being alienated or dissociated, and rhetoric, which is connected with identification and persuasion, helps to overcome this problem. Therefore, the ultimate goal of rhetoric is to create agreement, reconciliation, and unity among human beings, and if there were no division and separation between individuals, there would be no motives governing effective communication and deployment of rhetoric. If individuals were "not apart from one

another, there would be no need for the rhetorician to proclaim their unity" (Burke, 1969a: p.41). "Only because of their separation or division do individuals communicate with one another and try to resolve their differences. Paradoxically then, identification is rooted in division" (Foss, 2009: p.64).

Throughout history, one of the examples of deep and profound agreement and unity among large masses and communities was accepting a particular religion. To achieve this goal of ubiquitous harmony in belief and way of life, the believers, missionaries, and promoters of one religion would use rhetoric, in different degrees. In fact, there is overwhelming evidence that throughout the history of human life the process of identification was commonly used by missionaries and promoters for the promotion and advocacy of one religion by transforming the old beliefs of a nation into a new faith. Whenever there is a widespread acceptance of a religion in the history of religions, the definite trace of the process of identification in different degrees and scales can be extrapolated. In this paper not only the history of identification in religious propagation and its background in Iran before the Arab invasion have been studied but also the process through which Iranians employed identification after Islam to relate to the new religion is specifically analyzed.

2. A Brief History of Identification in Religious Propagation

There are residuals of one or more ancient religions in every religion, and almost all religion scholars agree that no religion throughout history has emerged in a vacuum (See Wunn, 2003: pp.387-390). According to these scholars, every religion proportional to the social and cultural situation of the sociocultural status quo, undergoes changes and evolutions. In other words, every religion communicates with people proportional to the intellectual and cultural atmosphere of the sociocultural status quo they make manifest, and therefore one religion with the same foundations and principles can have different manifestations in various intellectual and cultural environments. One of the main contributors to this transformation is that religions tend to borrow elements of the culture, beliefs, and symbols of a people and convert it into parts of the messages that are being communicated. In other words, to convince the targeted audience that the message being conveyed is not entirely different from their beliefs and way of thinking, and to ease the process of communication, religions use key elements belonging to the culture of a certain group of people. This process, which in this paper is called "identification in religious propagation", is one of the most important ways of communication, which is based on the idea that substance (common ground between the different parties) is necessary for accepting and believing a message.

Throughout the history of religions there are numerous examples of using identification for religious propagation: ancient Egyptians 2900 years before Christ worshiped animals and gods with animal faces, and to promote this, the cult leaned towards the totemistic beliefs of the local inhabitants of the Nile and by transforming those beliefs forced their ancient pagan rituals in the region and soon this orientation became popular in the entire kingdom of Egyptian pharaohs (See Noss, 1975: p.39). Other than Egypt, in Greece the invasion of the northern tribes, who were ethnically Aryans and spoke an Indo-European language, changed the religion and the rituals of the locals, but the same cult beliefs were presented to the people in a new form and texture:

Each local group worshiped souls, nature, and fertile forces differently and had their own ceremonies and rituals. When the invasion took place not only a new language was imposed but also a unity in the names of gods emerged. The same ceremonies, services, and myths that the locals had for their gods with some new features and properties transferred to the new gods (ibid: p.54).

Accordingly, the religious beliefs of the Greeks evolved, and later when Greek philosophy reached its first attested peak of prominence, historically speaking, with Thales of Miletus, Anaximenes of Miletus, Heraclitus of Ephesus, Xenophon of Athens, Socrates, Aristotle, and other thinkers of the time, consequently religion also underwent some reforms and refinements in Greece, and the first Christian missionaries –who had almost all their writings in Greek– borrowed a lot from Greek philosophy for religious propagation and for ordering their own discipline. Some scholars believe today that the Christian teachings before the prevalence of Paul's doctrine were to a very large extent (especially in the Gospel of John and the Gospel of James) under the influence of the concept of "logos" in Greek philosophy (See Armstrong & Markus, 1964: pp.10-76; Karamanolis, 2014: pp.7-8; Hillar, 2012: pp.6-249). Furthermore, some other scholars assume that Christianity in the beginning was influenced by "mystery religions" and Gnosticism in Greece and Rome (which was influenced by Hellenistic culture), and in many beliefs and rituals (such as beliefs related to the soul, baptism and banquets, vigils and early-morning ceremonies, pilgrimages and new names for the initiates, as well as other rites) is similar to and owed a debt to those religions (See Jonas. 2001: pp.3-23; Merkelbach, 2010; Ferguson, 2003: pp.297-300). Although there are and there have always been doubts and uncertainties when it comes to such claims and discussions, it can at least be said that Christian missionaries might have borrowed some elements of the beliefs of the mystery religions in order to transfer their message easily and effectively to their target audience; thus the similarities can have arguably stemmed from the way Christian apostles and missionaries

attempted propagation: borrowing the thoughts, beliefs, and accepted cultural elements of a certain group of people to effectively communicate the message.

Other than Greece, in Canaan people followed especial customs and Nature worship due to their farming and agricultural life and had particular ceremonies, rites, and rituals of sacrifice. When Israelites settled in this area and their lifestyle changed from nomadism to sedentary craftsmanship and agriculture, for the purpose of naturalizing and acclimating to the new location, they accepted and adopted some of the beliefs and rituals of the natives and attributed some of the traits of Ēl and Ba'al/Hadad¹⁾ to Yahweh; and by transforming religious sites, laws, local myths, and rites such as sacrificial rites, ceremonies, and holy days aimed for the propagation of Judaism (See Paton, 1914: pp.205-224; Goldenberg, 2007: pp.26-41; Habel, 1964: pp.93-118; Weber, 1967: pp.140-168). And finally in the Arabian Peninsula, with the advent of Islam, some of the rituals of the Jahiliyyah (pre-Islamic period) and beliefs of the Jews and the Christians were transformed and again were presented in a new shape and format to the people and brought unity to the peninsula. Inexplicit faith in Allah, belief in angels and the Jinn, rites of Hajj, belief in the holy land of the Kaaba, kissing and worshiping the Black Stone, sacrificial rites, sanctification of the Zamzam Well, traveling back and forth between Safa and Marwa, sacred months, Qisas or retributive justice are just a few rituals and beliefs that existed before Islam among Arabs and have continued their existence in a new shape and form after Islam (see Aslan, 2011: pp.3-18; Peters, 1994: pp.105-132; Taqqush, 2009: pp.219-282).

The above are just some examples among many in the history of religions where identification was used for the purpose of propagation and resulted in the unity and integrity of a particular group of people and the prevalence of a specific religion in a particular region. Although some scholars believe that identifying common elements among religions of the world or beliefs of people is the result of the evolution of thoughts and ideas, this matter remains one of the most challenging and ambiguous aspects of the history of religions. Proving the transformation and evolution of a religion, if not impossible, is very tricky and problematic, therefore identification, as a principle process through which such transformations begin to take place when it comes to religious propagation in such studies, should not be neglected or rejected completely.

3. Identification in Iran before the Islamic Invasion

There is not much authentic and reliable information about the common beliefs and rituals of Iranians before Zarathustra, therefore detecting Iranian beliefs prior to the spread of Zoroastrianism and analyzing its effects on Zarathustra's teachings is not an easy task. Also, different tribes and ethnicities in the Persian Empire before Zarathustra and

even sometime after him did not have the same religion and rites, thus various beliefs and ideas existed all over Persia. Most probably tribes and ethnicities living in the cities had different beliefs from those that were nomads, and each group of people, based on their living conditions, practiced different religions and rituals, which all might have claims to the same origin (see Christensen, 1998: pp.56-57). This makes the study of the process of identification on the verge of Zarathustra's rise and spread of his teachings very difficult and challenging.

It is clear, however, that ancient Iranians before Zarathustra believed in some good and evil deities and attributed the elements of nature and natural forces to different spirits (see Noss, 1975: 305; Ghadyani, 2002: p.24). It seems these deities –whose worship was not limited to Persia– entered Zoroastrianism and became deputies and assistants of Ahura Mazda (the creator and highest deity of Zoroastrianism) (see Ghadyani, 2002: p.26). It is not known whether Zarathustra himself or his missionaries, for the sake of identification and propagation, consciously adopted these deities in their belief system or if these forces and spirits were part of the principles of Zoroastrianism from the beginning. Also, it is not unlikely that some of the elements of Mithraism which had many followers in different parts of Persia entered Zoroastrianism and were considered as a basis for identification. The importance of light and illumination in Zoroastrianism as opposed to darkness can be a sign that the process of identification might have been employed. Some scholars even argue that Zoroastrianism is the result of Mithraism and that it is actually a reform that happened in Mithraic obscurities (see *ibid*: p.94). However, there is no clear and tangible evidence to support this and whatever is said in this regard is based on assumption, speculation and hypotheses.

Other than the Mithraic origins of Zoroastrianism, it seems that the Xwedodah²⁾ doctrine in this religion was rooted in ancient Iranian beliefs and beholden to the aspects of goddesses and female deities in their minds, and that it was customary before Zarathustra, and when his teachings spread in Persia it was approved in and by Zoroastrianism (Razi, 2003: pp.53-54). In addition to Xwedodah, Barašnom³⁾, which is the most important Zoroastrian purification rite, might have originated from cow worship orientations in some parts of Iran and its surrounding areas. Based on academic studies there are traces of such orientation among Indo-European beliefs (including Hittites and Aryans who settled in Iran) (see *ibid*: pp.87, 106). It can be inferred from the Avesta that murdering cows is forbidden or at least believed to be an ominous and baleful act, since cows are considered highly respected animals in Zoroastrianism (see *also* Doustkhah, 1964: p.35; Razi, 2000: p.19; Afifi, 1995: p.599). Also, the divine plant Haoma, which is sacred and has been praised in the Avesta several times, has its origins in Indo-Iranian religion and is the cognate of the Vedic soma. Likewise, in the Vedic religion drinking the sap of

Soma (or Haoma) is considered physically strengthening, nourishing, and healing (see Razi, 2003: pp.127, 165). Nevertheless, it is not definite by any means that Zoroastrians used the process of identification to bind their teachings with the common Vedic and local beliefs.

Although there is not much known about the quality of the process of identification on the verge of Zarathustra's rise and the spread of his message, it is obvious, based on historical records, that Manichaeans⁴⁾ clearly relied on identification to communicate their message. In fact, it is not far off the point to say that identification was one of the main methods Manichaeans used for religious propagation. Ahmad Tafazoli writes:

One of the major ways Manichaeans employed for promoting their religion was that they used the names of gods, deities, and religious terms that were known and famous among their followers, so that they won't feel that they are being taught something completely unfamiliar and distant from their own beliefs, and rather assume that in fact what is being communicated is their own view of the world which has simply been explained better, clearer, and softer. For example, among Zoroastrians, they used the names of gods like Ohrmazd, Mitra, and Zurvan, and religious terms like Amesha Spenta, fire, Ab-Zohr, etc. Manichaeans hid their intentions behind those names and terms and communicated their message indirectly, and therefore borrowed various ancient beliefs, myths, and tales, and in this way, a lot of such content has survived in their teachings (Tafazoli, 1997: p.334).

Moreover, Manichaean missionaries adopted different ways of identification in different situations. They introduced themselves as Zoroastrians in Iran, Christians in the west, and Buddhists in the east and in such manner promoted and propagated their beliefs (see Ghadyani, 2002: p.175), and hence the impact of those three religions on Manichaeism is enormous, and there are not many principles in Mani's theology that are not similar to Zoroastrianism (specifically its Zurvanistic branch), Christianity, and Buddhism. Belief in reincarnation, the concept of prophecy, sin and reward, revelation and the angel of revelation, the eternal battle of good and evil and light and darkness, asceticism, invitation to suffering, withdrawal from various forms of pleasure, the afterlife, paradise and hell, avoiding contaminating water and fire, and prohibiting the killing of animals each in one way or another have been borrowed from these three religions and have entered Manichaeism and Mani's teachings.

4. Identification with Islam in Iran in the First Few Centuries after the Arab Invasion

4.1. Identification with Islam in General

When Arabs invaded other nations, beliefs and rituals of those nations that had been nurtured in their minds for a long time did not just fade away, but rather some of those beliefs and rituals entered and affected Islam and produced new beliefs about different issues. Although defeated nations accepted Islam and bowed down to its principles, they could not all of a sudden forget what they had learned from their ancestors throughout centuries; therefore, they compared their beliefs with those of Islam and sat in judgment of the ones that were not very close to their native beliefs. Iran was no exception in this process, and, upon the arrival of Islam, the comparison of Islamic beliefs with Zoroastrian principles began. From what is known from Zoroastrianism and Iranian beliefs before Islam it seems that when Arabs invaded Iran the masses of people did not see much of a difference with what Muslims were trying to promote: Islam, much like Zoroastrianism, was considered the best and the most complete religion; prophet Mohammad was sent to lead people by Allah and Zarathustra was sent to lead people by Ahura Mazda; Allah/Ahura Mazda was the creator of the world and the greatest in creation, enemy of evil and lies and the leader of truth and honesty; all the beings were created by Allah's/Ahura Mazda's will and providence and Allah/Ahura Mazda was transcendent in nature and unparalleled in existence to anyone or anything; Allah/Ahura Mazda fulfilled his will through angles/spirits, and divine deeds were accomplished through these angles/spirits; good and evil were in consistent battle and each were backed by good and evil forces (angles/spirits); in both religions, humans were autonomous beings that could choose between good and evil; and there would be savior/saviors in both religions who would lead humankind to the straight path and there would be a judgement day whereupon people would be judged for their deeds and would go to hell or heaven accordingly. All these similarities could have naturally provided enough common ground for the people to identify with Islam, and eased the process of transition from an ancient religion to a new religion brought by foreign forces. Bertold Spuler writes:

Certain parallels between Zoroastrianism and Islam may have eased the transition. The forces of Good and Evil could be found in Allāh and Iblīs, while the creation of the world over six periods (days), resurrection and hell, angels and demons, and the account of the originally good nature of the first humans are found in both religions. The custom of the five daily prayers may even have passed into Islam from

Zoroastrianism. Thus the change may not have been too difficult for some (Spuler, 2015: pp.130-131).

Sir Thomas W. Arnold, British orientalist and historian also believes that the process of converting to Islam was not a very big challenge for most Iranians, due to the many similarities between both religions and the similar teachings the people could find in the Qur'an (See Arnold, 1970: p.237). Richard N. Frye is also of the same opinion in his book, *The Golden age of Persia* and even adds that Iranians might have found Islam a more moderate religion than the orthopraxy-oriented and embellished Zoroastrianism (See Frye, 2000: p.101). He writes: "Many practices or customs of Zoroastrianism fitted in well with Islam, for example the institution of the *waqf*, which existed in pre-Islamic Iran. Suffice it to say that the points of similarity and of easy conversion from Zoroastrianism to Islam were many and the process by which Iran became a Muslim land is not wrapped in mystery" (ibid: p.141). Abd Al-Husain Zarrinkub in the book *The Cambridge History of Iran: The Period from the Arab Invasion to the Saljuqs*, writes on this topic:

It must be admitted also that, while Islam abolished the class society of Sāsānian in Iran, in some respects it conformed to what were also ancient Iranian ideas, such as the belief in one God, Allah, and the devil, Iblis, the angels, the Day of Judgement, the Bridge of Sirāt, Heaven and Hell; and even the five diurnal prayers were similar to ancient Iranian cult practices. Thus among the Iranian masses, who witnessed the self-confidence, the enthusiasm and the faith of the new-comers, and were aware of the corruption and weaknesses of the Sāsānian religious organization, gradually the hesitation in accepting Islam disappeared (Zarrinkub, 2007: Vol.4/p.30).

Although stating some of these similarities in this manner might not be without exaggeration, it is not unlikely that the fact that there were similarities that the people could readily notice helped Iranians to identify with the new religion, and eased the process of the transition of ideas, beliefs, and religious tenets.

Iran became an Islamic state after the Arab invasion, but it did not lose its core as a different region with a different history and culture. Religious and national resistance movements began soon after the Arabs crossed the borders, and the fact that these somewhat firm resistances altered some of the Islamic practices and customs due to their integration with Iranian/Zoroastrian beliefs and rituals should be considered significant. It is not known from the sources we have whether Muslim missionaries employed the process of identification for propagation based on the similarities between Zoroastrianism and Islam or not, what is apparent however from the historical facts is that it was not the

missionaries who used this method for communication with the conquered people of Iran, but rather Iranians themselves who gradually started this intellectual and ideological process of identification with Islam. It was evident that Iranians had little or no choice in accepting the new religion imposed on them by the Arabs and choosing the least arduous option which was identification (see Zarrinkub, 2010: pp.81-84). That's why identification is unique in the case of Iranians. Iranians found themselves in a situation where they either had to accept Islam or pay money (Jizya or jizyah) or be persecuted. Identification then became the only viable solution for the survival and provided the grounds for connecting the old beliefs to the new doctrines of Islam. Therefore, Iranians were both rhetors (communicators) and audiences simultaneously in the process of identification.

Based on the available historical accounts it can be argued that Iranians, soon after the Arab invasion, for the sake of relief and remission from the humiliation that was imposed on them by the Arab invaders, and also to identify with Islam and bind the ties with the Islamic customs and practices (since the religious tenets seemed familiar to them and therefore conjured a sense of ideological kinship), began forging accounts and Hadīths concerning various issues. For instance, they claimed that Iran is the resting place of several men from the Bible who have been sanctified within Islam, attributed some of the Iranian myths to them and replaced them with some native mythical figures (Jamshid changed to Solomon); Persians also claimed that some Iranian memorial sites were originally owned by them (Persepolis belonged to Solomon), and in this way wanted to show that Iranians prior to Islam were Ḥanīf (meaning they believed in the religion of Abraham) and people of Book/Scripture⁵⁾ (from the family of Isaac the Prophet) (See Al-Maqdisi, 2006: Vol.2/p.464; Oshidri, 1992: p.235; Moin, 1976: Vol.1/p.115; Al-Muttaqi al-Hindi, 1989: Vol.1/p.39; Al-Albani, 2002: Vol.8/p.464). They also forged Hadīths from Prophet Mohammad about the superiority of the Iranian nation over others and their place and position in Heaven (See Bokhari, 1981: Vol.6/p.63; Termazi, 1983: Vol.5/p.60; Abu al-sheikh Ansari, 1992: Vol.1/p.39; Al-Muttaqi al-Hindi, 1989: Vol.4/p.314, Vol.12/pp.90-93). These Hadīths mostly spoke of the prophet's preference for the Persians and warned against disparaging them. In addition, the image of Salmān al-Fārsī⁶⁾ as a famous companion of the Prophet was constantly embellished with new legendary traits among Muslims in order to secure a share for the Iranians in the development of Islam (See Majlesi, 1983: Vol.17/p.170; Zahabi, 1994: Vol.1/p.543; Tabari, 1911, Vol.26/p.42; Bar-Asher, 2003: p.219; Stoddard, 1934: Vol.1/pp.163-164). Furthermore, reports were invented which established a direct connection between the Prophet and particular places in Iran and corresponding Hadīths from the mouth of the Prophet had to appear at the same time, praising the excellence of the local population (Al-Maqdisi, 2006: Vol.2/p.645). Also

according to Ali ibn al-Athir, the famous Islamic historian and biographer, Iranians in 935 celebrated the birth of the Prophet near Isfahan by burning bonfires in the Zoroastrian manner (See Ibn al-Athir, 1987: Vol.8/p.94-98). It is also evident that in several other parts of Iran people still adhered to Zoroastrian practices and Zoroastrian feast days were still celebrated in public while all these practices and celebrations were often deliberately coincided with some special occasions in Islamic tradition (See Al-Maqdisi, 2006: Vol.2/ p.439). These are some of the efforts of the Iranians to identify with Islam and express their proximity to Islamic teachings. Although, these efforts were sometimes reflected in the complete dismissal of everything Arabian, including the religion of Islam, and consequently in the reaffirmation of Zoroastrianism, it nevertheless managed to express itself within Islam through identification.

Moreover, some of the early religious and political movements (such as the movement of Behāfarīd which took place in the 8th-century Khorasan and tried to effect a rapprochement between the teachings of Zoroastrianism and those of Islam) represented other attempts by Iranians at religious identification (See Biruni, 2001: pp.257-258; Zarrinkub, 2007: Vol.4/p.35). These reform movements sought to achieve a far-reaching assimilation of Zoroastrianism with the beliefs of Islam by suppressing all that was most repulsive to the Muslims, such as marriage between close relatives, wine consumption and the eating of deceased animals, fire worship and the murmuring of the canonical books (at least during meals). On the other hand, Zoroaster's teachings that were similar to that of Islam (such as following the threefold path of Aša: good thoughts, good words, good acts) were being praised and admired (See Spuler, 2015: p.186). These religious and political movements clearly show the degree of religious fervour that had been stirred in the country and the way in which the old religious beliefs merged with the teachings of the Qur'an. Zoroastrian beliefs (such as engaging in prayer five times a day) were adopted by Islam in general and certain Iranian religious beliefs were adopted by Persian (and later also other) Shī'ite circles. By identification Iranians were able to spread parts of their ancient culture in a new guise far beyond the confines of the Persian language area; they could stamp a whole range of Iranian character traits onto Islam, and finally they could create their own special form of this religion. In other words, religious identification was one of the reasons which contributed to the fact that the message of Moḥammad's prophethood and of the Qur'an acquired a character of its own in the Iranian linguistic area. This process of identification became possible through the intellectual interpretation of Islam on the one hand, and the growth of Shī'ism and its various manifestations on the other.

4. 2. Identification with Shī'ism as one of the Main Branches of Islam

It is likely that the activities of Mu'tazila in Iran and the tendency of Iranians towards Shī'ism during the Samanid Empire and the Buyid Dynasty⁷⁾ were because of the demand for identification with Islam and adjusting ancient beliefs to the new teachings. After the death of the Prophet there were disagreements among Muslims about his successor, and this gave rise to Sunnism and Shī'ism. Iranians from the very beginning were more passionate about Shī'ism, and showed interest and attachment towards Ahl al-Bayt (family of the Prophet). Iranians, prior to the establishment of an independent Iranian dynasty, not only supported almost all the movements and revolts in favor of Ahl al-Bayt but also took part in many of them. Mukhtar al-Thaqafi's revolt, Zayd ibn 'Ali and his son's, Yahya ibn Zayd's rebellion, and the Movement of the Men of the Black Raiment in favor of the Abbasid Dynasty- who claimed that they are taking revenge for Ahl al-Bayt- were some of the most important examples. These movements were initiated, encouraged, and supported by Iranians to the advantage of Shī'ism, to the extent that this branch of Islam was about to become a common narrative in Iran during the Samanid Empire and the Buyid Dynasty⁸⁾. However, the dominance of the Ghaznavids and Seljuqs, who were of Turkic Mamluk origin, and the complete coincidence of their interests with those of the Abbasid Caliphate hindered and hampered the rise of Shī'ism in Iran. Despite this, however, Shī'ism continued its presence and existence in Iran and eventually became the national religion of the country five centuries later in the Safavid era. Zabihollah Safa writes:

None of the other branches and sects of Islam other than Imamiyyah did become popular in Iran more easily. There were many obstacles on the way of Imamiyyah for many centuries and against those obstacles it had no medium to prove its rightfulness and no effective political and social power to spread its ideology. What it did have, were efforts to prevent its spread and propagation. And even some of the tough powers such as the Ghaznavid Dynasty and especially the Seljuq Dynasty, did whatever they could to suppress Shī'ā followers, and some crafty men like Nizam al-Mulk Tusi and others like him strove hard to eradicate each and every sect of the Shī'ā Islam, but despite all these efforts Shī'ism did not kneel to any of the problems and slowly continued its progression in Iran, and ultimately after centuries reached a position where it became the public and official religion (Safa, 1971: p.II).

According to Spuler, "the fact that some Shī'ite centers could survive difficult times until

they could finally become the nucleus for the victorious assertion of this creed in Iran shows just how strongly the followers of Shī'ism were already attached to their faith. Apparently large parts of the Iranian population had found the form of Islam that suited them the best" (Spuler, 2015: p.173). Therefore, it can be said that Shī'ite took deep roots in Persia from an early period and soon integrated firmly into the Persian mind. From the first centuries onwards Shī'ism was the Persian form of Islam for a not insubstantial part of the population, although its almost complete predominance in Iran was achieved only by the Ṣafavids at the beginning of the sixteenth century.

This much interest and attachment to Shī'ism in Iran in the first few centuries after the Arab Invasion and in the key centers like Khorasan, Rey, Qazvin, Jibāl, Tabaristan, and Kashan stimulated some of the contemporary scholars (mostly orientalist) to analyze and scrutinize the similarities between Zoroastrianism and Shī'ism. Some of these scholars believe that there is a clear link between some of the Zoroastrian beliefs, especially the belief in "Khvarenah" (divine mystical force or power projected upon and aiding the appointed) and Shī'ism. Abd Al-Husain Zarrinkub writes:

At the bottom of the Shī'ī reverence for the imām- the Prophet's successor- and the conception that the leadership of the community was a divine and extraordinary office, lay the Iranians' belief that the farr-o īzadī, the Divine Power of Ahura, should be an essential attribute for the exercise of sovereignty. This is not to say that the bases of Shī'ī beliefs are in any way derived from Iranian religious tenets; but the attraction these beliefs held for Iranians was in large measure due to the manner in which they were in harmony with and, as it were, echoed older cult conceptions. Nor is it without significance that some of the more extreme forms of Shī'ism, such as Kaisāniyya, Khashabiyya, Khattābiyya and Rāvendiyya, received their greatest support among the Iranian mawālī (Zarrinkub, 2007: Vol.4/ p.34).

Richard N. Frye also writes:

It should be noted that the Shī'ite belief in a savior or Mahdi and the Zoroastrianism expectation of the return of a messiah called Vahram-i Varjavand from a mythical 'copper city', in the early Abbasid period, at times seemed to coincide. Such similarities in Iran between Islam and Zoroastrianism make it difficult to disentangle some of the religious movements in this period to decide what doctrines were professed. For example, both religions believed in the doctrine of the man (MP: patman, Arabic: wasat); both believed in angels and demons, and we know of many Zoroastrian shrines which later became Muslim places of pilgrimage, a not

uncommon feature in the history of religions (Frye, 2000: p.128).

Frye further discusses that the religious revolts of Bihafriid, Sunpad, Muqanna and Babak which took place early after the Arab invasion were attempts to join ancient Iranian beliefs to Islamic beliefs, and this intention coincided better with Shī'ism for the most part (See *ibid*: p.135). Other scholars like Lothrop Stoddard have gone beyond this and considered Shī'ā Islam to be a renewed version of Zoroastrianism (See Stoddard, 1934: Vol.1/p.186). Some others, on the motives of Iranian tendency towards Shī'ism, have placed an emphasis on the ancient beliefs about divine empowerment of kings and inheritance. Spuler in his book *Iran in the Early Islamic Period* writes on this topic: "The Shī'ite belief in a sequence of bearers, determined by their ancestry, of a special divine charisma within the family of the Prophet (ahl al-bayt) was bound to appeal to the Iranians, who were used to a similar concept from their rulers' order of succession, who had always been surrounded by an aura of divinity. The Iranians were conscious of having found in the Shī'ite faith a form of Islam which contradicted, if not all Arabs, at least the ruling dynasty and the official opinion of the majority of the Arabic-speaking community and later also the Turks." (Spuler, 2015: p.168). Also Ahmad Amin, in his book *Fajr al-Islam (The Dawn of Islam)*, insists on the effect of Zoroastrian beliefs in helping form an Iranian desire for Shī'ism and considers an important role for the concept of legitimacy and inheritable charisma in the rise of such orientation (See Amin, 2012: pp.111, 124). He discusses that Persians have given Shī'ism an Iranian color and adopted it well with their ancient beliefs. Their role in this process, he further argues, was far more than any other nation that has leaned towards this creed (See *ibid*: p.298). Other than Amin, Albir Nasri Nadir in the book *Aham al-Feragh al-Islamiyya al-Syasiyya va al-Kalamiyya (Important Political and Theological Sects of Islam)* paints a similar picture of the connection between Zoroastrianism and Shī'ism and believes that the thought of special divine charisma in the Imam was not derived from Arabic beliefs, but rather it stemmed from the way Iranians looked at their kings before Islam (Nadir, 1958: p.22). Also Muhammad Abu Zahra in his book *Tarikh al-Madhahib al-Islamiyya (History of the Islamic Schools)* writes: "In my opinion, Shī'ism was influenced by Iranian thinking about their kings and inheritable charisma. The similarities between Shī'ism and the hereditary monarchy is clear, and that is why Iranians now are mostly Shī'ite and why the first Shī'ites were Iranians" (Abu Zahra, 1996: pp.34-35).

Moreover, some orientalists like Reinhart Dozy think that Shī'ism is entirely an Iranian religion and the hereditary foundation for Imamah comes from Iranian beliefs about Khvarenah, and they have extended it to Ali and his descendants⁹ (See Wellhausen, 1958: p.240). Although there were many scholars who criticized and condemned such analogies

and presented arguments and evidence against them (See Ja'fariyan, 2009: pp.142-156; Puraḥmadi & Heydari, 2014: pp.27-44), the Iranian desire for Shī'ism remains a very controversial subject in contemporary research. While a lot has been mentioned (mostly from orientalists) about the Iranian origins of Shī'ism and the influence of Zoroastrianism in its development, it seems that this topic should have rather been addressed from the perspective of the process of identification and the effort of Iranians to form deep ties with the new teachings. According to historical facts, Shī'ism, at least in the first few centuries after the Arab invasion, was more compatible with the nature of Iranian beliefs, and therefore Iranians in many regions showed more interest in the Shī'ā Islam. Adam Mez, the famous German orientalist, believes that while Shī'ism was a pure Arabian movement inspired from Arabian thoughts and ideas, it soon spread all over the Islamic world after Mukhtar al-Thaqafi's revolt, and Iranians were among the first who joined this creed and contributed to it with their own set of beliefs and ideas (Mez, 1999: p.145). According to Julius Wellhausen: "There is no doubt that the Shī'ite beliefs are very similar to the Iranians, but mere similarity does not indicate that Shī'ism has originated from Iranian ideas" (Wellhausen, 1958: p.241). Based on these speculations it can be said that although it is difficult to arbitrate the Iranian origins of Shī'ism, it is possible to assume that the process of identification was employed by Iranians due to the similarity of the Shī'ite doctrine to their native beliefs and ideas.

5. Conclusion

Identification is one of the most important ways used for effective communication in human interactions. Kenneth Burke, contemporary philosopher, critic, and theorist was the first to talk about this concept in the realm of rhetorical studies. In his opinion, rhetoric is the use of words by human agents to form attitudes or to induce actions in other human agents. He believed that to form attitudes or to induce actions rhetors inevitably use identification and persuasion. Identification in Burke's glossary is the process which rhetors employ to create common ground with their audience. In other words, in this process a rhetor looks at the world from the perspective of his audience and tries to present his message based on their idea of existence, so that persuasion, which is the ultimate goal of rhetoric, is achieved. An Audience is not a mere recipient in this process, but is as active and dynamic as the rhetor in communication, and, in some special cases, an audience can become both rhetor and recipient simultaneously as in the case of Iranians during the first few centuries after the Arab Invasion.

Throughout history there are numerous examples of using the process of identification for religious propagation that has led to widespread dissemination of a

message among a particular group of people. Moreover, using this process for the purpose of religious propagation can be traced in Iran both before and after the Arab invasion. Although evidence is lacking about the connection of Zoroastrian beliefs and native beliefs before Zarathustra, it is definite that Manichaean missionaries used identification to communicate with different people and races, and, by creating common ground, attempted persuasion. After the Arab invasion, although the traces of this process can be recognized, it was never the Arabs who provided grounds for accepting Islam, but rather it was Iranians themselves who strived through identification to bind ancient beliefs with the new teachings of Islam, since the ideological affinity they were led to believe in, by foreign forces as well as themselves (especially in the case of Shi'ism), was too significant for them to avoid. This effort, at least in the first few centuries after the Arab invasion, was made in two ways: 1. Identification with Islam in general and, 2. Identification with Shi'ism as one of the main branches of Islam.

It seems, in the first step towards achieving identification with Islam, Iranians, with the emphasis on the similarities between Zoroastrianism and Islam, tried to ease the process of accepting the new Islamic rules and teachings. Correspondingly, some began forging accounts and Hadiths in this regard about the racial origins of Iranians, their role in the triumph of Islam, their place in the eyes of the Prophet and their position in heaven, and in this way wanted to show their proximity to Islam and the Islamic teachings. On the other hand, it is highly likely that the activities of Mu'tazila in Iran and the immediate support of Iranians of the Shi'a or Shi'a-like movements in the first few centuries after the invasion were other attempts for identification with Islam by adjusting ancient beliefs to the new teachings. Most of the scholars who have done research in this area have always looked at the Iranians' inclination towards Shi'ism from the perspective of the Iranian origins of Shi'ism and the influence of Zoroastrian principles in its nourishment, without considering the possibility of the process of identification being employed by Iranians themselves. It seems that the Iranians' inclination towards Shi'ism, other than nationalist motives that stemmed from discriminatory policies of the Umayyad dynasty, was rooted in the process of identification and the common ground (both real and extensively fabricated) that Iranians felt with Shi'a Islam; therefore, Shi'ism was not only from an early date hallowed as a focus of national resistance, so that different lines led from here to the awakening of Iranian nationalism but also was strongly influenced by Iranian beliefs, such as the concept of legitimacy, of an inheritable charisma, and of the role of suffering. Thus, based on the historical documents that exist, the similarities between Islam and Zoroastrianism, the similarities between Zoroastrianism and Shi'ism, and the examples provided, it can be concluded that identification was one of the ways which the Iranian mind found to introduce idiosyncratic as well as traditional concepts into the new religion

brought by the Arabs. In this way it imparted to Iranian Islam the distinct and peculiar character that would continue to have an effect on different aspects of Iranian culture especially on later Iranian philosophy and mysticism.

Endnotes

- 1) Ēl was the general term for deity in Semitic languages as well as the name of the chief deity of the West Semites. Ba'al was the god worshipped in many ancient Middle Eastern communities, especially among the Canaanites, who apparently considered him a fertility deity and one of the most important gods in the pantheon. Hadad was also the storm and rain god in the Canaanite and was also called Ba'al, but this title was used for other gods as well.
- 2) Xwedodah is a consanguine marriage which was historically practiced in Zoroastrianism before the Muslim conquest of Persia.
- 3) Barašnom, the chief Zoroastrian purification rite, consisting of triple cleansing steps, with gōmēz (cow's urine), dust, and water, followed by nine nights' seclusion, during which three simpler cleansings take place.
- 4) Manichaeism was a dualistic religious movement founded in Persia in the 3rd century AD by the Persian prophet, Mani.
- 5) People of the Book/Scripture is an Islamic term which refers to Jews, Christians and Sabians.
- 6) Salmān al-Fārsī was a companion of the prophet and the first Persian who converted to Islam.
- 7) There is no doubt in the tendency of the Buyid Dynasty and its officials to Shī'ism, and although the Samanids had a dual behavior in this regard, they mostly did not oppose Shī'ism during their reign. Nasr ibn Ahmad and his minister joined Isma'illism and consequently a group of courtiers leaned towards the Fatimid Caliphate.
- 8) Since 945 it was possible to profess the Shī'ite creed publicly, and the expansion of Shī'ite beliefs was no longer prevented. This helped the rise of enormous Shīā shrines in Iran. The Imam Reza shrine was built in this period by the Buyid Dynasty. During this period respect and admiration for Ahl al-Bayt gained popularity in a way that according to Ibn Isfandiyar, 13th-century Iranian historian, the ruler of Tabaristan invited many Sayyids from distant areas in order to provide a feast for them (See Ibn Isfandiyar, 1987: p.243).
- 9) It must be noted that although the caliphate, after the Rashidun Caliphs, was based on heredity, none of the Caliphs of the Islamic world have ever had the divine and holy position of Shī'ite Imams. They were never considered as morally infallible or of incorruptible innocence (Ismah) as Shī'ite Imams. Therefore, Khvarenah and the divine empowerment of kings matches more with the Shī'ite beliefs, and Iranians could have identified their ancient beliefs more easily with Shī'ism than any other branches of Islam.

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