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## **Trauma Hypothesis:**

# **The enduring legacy of the Mongol Catastrophe on the Political, Social and Scientific History of Iran<sup>1</sup>**

### *Abstract*

We study the traumatic impact of the Mongol invasions, Ilkhanid rule and Timur's conquests on Iran on the basis of our modern psychological understanding of trauma, and examine the long-term consequences and reenactments of this historic catastrophe on the political, social and scientific history of this country in later periods. By identifying new patterns of political and social violence in post-Mongol Iranian history, we provide evidence to support the Trauma Hypothesis and demonstrate how a transgenerational transfer of the Mongol trauma has taken place across both political and social spheres insofar as residues of certain traits of post-traumatic stress disorder have survived in large sections of the population. Finally, we postulate how these residual traits are preventing co-operation at a local and national level.

### *Introduction*

This article provides the introductory synopsis to a study which seeks to analyze the psychological and emotional impact of the Mongol invasions, the Ilkhanid rule and the Timurid conquests on the political, social and scientific history of Iran. Its findings have been based on new advances in psychology and anthropology and have resulted in what we have termed "Trauma Hypothesis". According to this hypothesis, during a period spanning approximately 200 years, Iran and, indeed, other Islamic societies in the Middle East and central Asia, suffered the kind of profound and sustained psychological trauma which has had lasting and ruinous consequences and traumatic reenactments, i.e., the tendency to re-experience the trauma, on the political, social, behavioral, ideological and cultural aspects of these societies and which, from a historical perspective, can be regarded as the root cause of the demise of the Golden Iranian-Islamic civilization.

Although Iran was successful in achieving national and religious unity during the Safavid era and ultimately managed to gain independence during the neo-colonial period, meaningful co-operation and agreement on common interests amongst its people continues to be a major challenge. This inability to co-operate is the result of the lingering effects of the Mongol trauma and its reenactments in the post Mongol era on psychological and behavioral patterns in Iranian society and remains a serious obstacle to progress in this country. An analysis of this trauma and

<sup>1</sup> The original version of this article appeared in Persian in *Bukhara*, Vol. 13, No. 77-78 September-December 2010, Tehran, Iran.

its historical reenactments is not only vital for the purpose of confronting its ongoing and pernicious influence on Iranian society, but is also essential for establishing the right conditions for enabling radical historical progress, stimulating significant expansion in economic, scientific and cultural creativity, and building a more advanced social civilization in this country.

It should be stated at the outset that Trauma Hypothesis does not necessarily seek to oppose conventional theses on the historical reasons for Iran's developmental problems. Many of these diverse views focus their attention on any number of important climatic, historical, social, political and cultural conditions, or else emphasize the role of neo-colonialism in the region. All such opinions are undoubtedly worthy of analysis and discussion and each has the capacity to shed light on important aspects of the truth about Iranian history. Indeed, over the past few decades, Iranian researchers have produced a number of major studies which have investigated the fundamental causes of Iran's underdevelopment and led to widespread debate amongst the country's academic community. Since the 1970s, Dr Homa Katouzian in a number of his influential writings has emphasized the role played by "arbitrary rule" (*estebdad*) and the absence of an established and inviolable legal framework to explain the underlying problems hindering development in Iran.<sup>2</sup> In his view, the three main obstacles to economic and social development in Iran's history have been the arbitrary nature of legitimacy and succession of Iran's rulers; the uncertainty attached to life and possessions; and the great difficulty of long-term capital accumulation. Other writers have since followed up on this investigation: Dr. Sadeq Ziba Kalam in *Mā chegooneh mā shodim*, "How Did We Become What We Are", Dr. Seyyed Javad Tabataba'i in *Dibācheh'i bar nazariyyeh-ye enhetāt-e Iran*, "An Introduction to Understanding Iran's Decline", and Dr. Kazem Alamdari in *Cherā Iran aqab mānd va gharb pish raft*, "Why Iran Lagged Behind and the West Moved Forward", have each concentrated in turn on Iran's scientific atrophy in the aftermath of the Mongol invasions, the degeneration of political thought in the region, and the Asian mode of production respectively.<sup>3</sup> Trauma Hypothesis, however, aims to analyze the principal impediments to historical progress in Iran from an entirely different perspective. It seeks to highlight fundamental problems in the psychological and behavioral makeup of the peoples of this country through a description of the ingrained and widespread trauma ensuing from the Mongol invasions and its reenactments, which have severely hindered attempts at co-operation and social cohesion. Such psychological and behavioral dysfunctions could in fact in themselves be considered the very source of those social, political and cultural problems which certain mainstream theories have presented as the primary causes of underdevelopment. In fact,, in his book on Iran William S. Hass, the German-

<sup>2</sup> Homa Katouzian, *The Political Economy of Modern Iran: Despotism and Pseudo-Modernism, 1926-1979*, (New York University Press, 1981); *Iranian History and Politics: The Dialectic of State and Society* (Routledge/BIPS Persian Studies Series, 2003); *The Persians: Ancient, Mediaeval and Modern Iran*, (Yale University Press, 2009)

<sup>3</sup> Sadeq Ziba Kalam, *Mā chegooneh mā shodim: risheh yābi-ye elaleh aqab māndegi dar Iran*, (Tehran, 1378/1999); Javad Tabataba'i, *Dibācheh'i bar nazariyyeh-ye enhetāt-e Iran* (Tehran, 1380/2001); Kazem Alamdari, *Cherā Iran aqab mānd va gharb pish raft?* (Tehran, 1379/2000) [translated to English as *Why the Middle East Lagged Behind: The Case of Iran* (Lanham, MD, 2005)]

born Columbia University expert on the Middle East who had fled Nazi Germany, characterizes the devastation caused following the demise of the Saljuq empire by the Mongol and Timurid invasions as a cataclysm, which may have brought about a transformation that has changed the psychology of the Persian people infinitely more than the adoption of Islam. He argues that the inhuman despotism of the Safavids, bent on absolute subjugation of the people, was the result of centuries of Mongol invasion and domination with its subsequent anarchy and absence of order and authority.<sup>4</sup>

During the contemporary period, various Iranian writers, intellectuals, religious leaders and political figures, including Seyyed Mohammad Ali Jamalzadeh, Jalal Al-e-Ahmad, Mehdi Bazargan and Ehsan Naraghi have chosen to highlight the particular temperament and behavior of the Iranian people as the root cause or at least one of the root causes of the country's underdevelopment. In the late 1960's, the American sociologist Marvin Zonis conducted a study among the political elite of Iran and concluded that the longer the core members of this group participated in the Shah's political system, the more likely they were to exhibit attributes of mistrust, insecurity, exploitative tendency and cynicism.<sup>5</sup> In his critical assessment of the literature in the West on "Iranian national character", Prof Ali Banuazizi reviews the works of a number of western travellers, diplomats and academics in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, including those of Hass and Zonis, and in varying degrees questions the methodology and conclusions of these authors<sup>6</sup>.

In more recent years, two detailed studies have been carried out in this field. In the first study, Dr. Ali Mohammad Izadi has used the theories of the famous American psychiatrist, Erick Berne to trace the underlying reasons for the difficulties faced by Iranians back to the period during childhood where a "mature" adult figure is often absent or only a "weak" version is present. Izadi maintains this to be the case in almost every family and across every generation, chiefly as a result of a predilection on the part of parents for lying, as well as a manifest contradiction between their words and actions<sup>7</sup>. In the second study, Dr. Farrokh Sa'idi has identified the principal issue as the lack of a scientific approach by the masses to various matters, as well as the historical belief of Iranians in fate and destiny as the determinant of events.<sup>8</sup>

This article has been organized as follows: we will start with a brief look at the early centuries of Islam, the Golden Age of Iranian-Islamic Civilization and the flourishing of science and philosophy at that time. We will then examine the factors which brought about the decline of that civilization and paved the way for the Mongol catastrophe. This will be followed with a description of the massive and unprecedented scale of trauma caused by the Mongol invasions and the Il'khanid rule. Next, using the latest findings in the field of personal and social trauma,

<sup>4</sup> William S. Hass, *Iran*, (Oxford University Press, 1946), 117-119

<sup>5</sup> Marvin Zonis, *THE Political Elite of Iran*, (Princeton University Press, 1971)

<sup>6</sup> Ali Banuazizi, "Iranian 'National Character': A Critique of Some Western Perspectives." Chapter in *Psychological Dimensions of Near Eastern Studies*. Edited by L. Carl Brown and Norman Itzkowitz. Princeton, N.

<sup>7</sup> Ali Mohammad Izadi, *Cherā aqab māndeh 'im? Jāme'eh shenāsi-ye mardomeh Iran* (Tehran, 1382/2003)

<sup>8</sup> Farrokh Sa'idi, *Rāheh chāhārom* (Tehran, 1386/2007)

we will attempt to identify those types of mental and personality disorders which, according to our hypothesis, could have developed amongst vast sections of Iran's population, traces of which have passed from one generation to the next through dysfunctional behavior in the family and across all social and political spheres. We will then assess the role played by the bloody and violent Timurid conquests in replaying the Mongol catastrophe and reinforcing the Mongol *yasa* tradition of Genghis Khan (d. 624/1227) in Iran<sup>9</sup>. In comparison to this, we will also evaluate the growth of Islamic mysticism (*'erfan*) and the unprecedented rise of Sufi orders and Shi'a Islam as defense mechanisms and saviours of a traumatized population in the wake of the Mongol catastrophe. This will be followed by an examination of the enduring consequences and repeated reenactments of this catastrophe on Iran's social and political development. We will do this by presenting various pieces of evidence to illustrate the abiding and harmful effects of the Mongol trauma and its replays on the social personality of the Iranian people and show how, from a historical standpoint, this phenomenon can be viewed as the principal cause of the decline in scientific rationalism as well as a corresponding rise in intellectual ossification and extremism in this country. In conclusion, we will reference the role played by neo-colonialism in reviving the memory of the Mongol catastrophe and turn our attention to the challenge of counteracting the effects of the resulting historical trauma. For, even though the Iranian people have successfully achieved national independence, there is still a vital and overriding need for removing obstacles which are preventing co-operation and unity in relation to matters of national interest and public welfare. This is essential if Iranian society is to make significant progress and undergo a renewed flowering of creativity across all spheres.

#### *Golden Age of Iranian-Islamic Civilization*

In the period between the third to fifth century/ninth to eleventh century, Islamic societies in the Middle East, central Asia, North Africa and Andalusia (Spain) witnessed one of the most dazzling periods of cultural, philosophical and scientific expansion in the history of mankind, which in turn gave rise to a movement that continued until the ninth century/fifteenth century and paved the way for the Renaissance in Europe and ultimately for today's modern Western Civilization.

Intellectual luminaries such as Jaber Ibn Hayyan (d. ca. 199/815), al-Khwarazmi (d. ca. 235/850), Razi (d. 312/925), al-Farabi (d. ca. 338/950), Ibn Haytham (d. 430/1038), Ibn Sina (d. 428/1037), al-Biruni (d. ca. 1052), Ibn Rushd (d. 594/1198), Sohrevardi (d. 586/1191), Ibn Arabi (d. 637/1240) and Rumi (d. 671/1273) were each responsible for laying the foundations of sciences such as algebra, trigonometry, astronomy and computational mathematics, scientific methods in physics, chemistry and medicine not to mention Islamic mysticism and philosophical rationalism. The overwhelming part of this scientific and philosophic efflorescence which started during the translation movement at the court of the Abbasid caliph al-M'amun (r. 198-218/813-33), first came to fruition in Iran during the reign of the Samanids followed by the Buyids, and was concurrent with the rise of Iranian culture, language and literature and the

<sup>9</sup> *Yasa* is the Mongolian for a series of principles and regulations put in place by Genghis Khan and enshrined as "supreme law". Although it was written, there are no complete copies and only fragments have survived.

emergence of Mu'tazilite rationalism, most notably among the Shi'a community. Whilst many Arab and other scholars and scientists from the Islamic commonwealth were represented in this cultural and scientific renaissance, nevertheless, as stated by Ibn Khaldun (d. 808/1406) in his *Muqaddimah*, the vast majority of the scientists and philosophers of the Golden Age of Islam were in fact of Iranian origin ('*ajam*').<sup>10</sup> Two centuries after the Arab invasions not only did the Iranians establish a government independent of Baghdad inside their own territory, but they also played a pivotal role in the development of the Golden civilization.

Citing new historical documents, Richard Bulliet claims that from 750 to 1000 AD, Iran experienced massive economic growth through an extraordinary expansion in the cultivation of cotton crops and the rapid rise in the manufacture of textiles, weaving and related industries brought about by the emerging Arab and Iranian bourgeoisie.<sup>11</sup> This enormous growth led on the one hand to the creation of large cities and a vast job market in Iran which drew rural workers to those cities, and on the other, it became the source of a substantial tax revenue for the Abbasid caliphs in Baghdad - to such an extent that even the value of the silver dirham paid by Iranians as tax was greater than the value of all the gold dinars paid by the remaining Islamic dominions to the west of Baghdad combined.<sup>12</sup>

Assuming Bulliet's thesis regarding Iran's burgeoning economy during the first 250 years of the Abbasid caliphate is generally sound, we may conclude that the enormous tax gains generated by this economic boom also provided the financial underpinning for the tremendous scientific, philosophical and cultural resurgence which characterized the Golden age of Iranian-Islamic civilization. It was arguably this very economic boom which, directly or indirectly, necessitated and became the financial driving force behind the scientific advances during this period.

In any event, irrespective of the validity of Bulliet's thesis, the immense wealth of the great Islamic empire, which at the time encompassed a third of the known world and vied with the Byzantine empire for supremacy, combined with a number of other favourable factors to create the optimal conditions in the Islamic community for innovations and historic advances in science and philosophy to take place.

Firstly, during the Abbasid caliphate, Arabic became the *lingua franca* of the entire Muslim world and, for the first time in human history, translations of major scientific and philosophical works from Greek, Syriac, Pahlavi and Sanskrit to Arabic facilitated the global spread of knowledge and scholarship. Secondly, as a result of the direct participation of Iranian scholars and administrators in this undertaking, Iran's outstanding pre-Islamic heritage in scientific and philosophical pursuits, notably in the fields of astronomy, mathematics and

<sup>10</sup> Ibn Khaldun, *The Muqaddimah: An Introduction to History*, trans. Franz Rosenthal, 3 vols. (London, 1958), 3: 311.

<sup>11</sup> Richard W. Bulliet, *Cotton, Climate, and Camels in Early Islamic Iran: A moment in world history* (New York, 2009), ch. 1.

<sup>12</sup> Richard W. Bulliet, "Economy and Society in Early Islamic Iran: A Moment in World History," *The Idea of Iran, The Rise of Islam*, ed. Vesta Sarkhosh Curtis and Sarah Stewart (London, 2009), 53.

medicine and also in the field of translation of scientific texts, became established as the standard model for research and investigation. Thirdly, scientific and philosophical activities were each compatible and reconcilable with Islamic teachings, including *hadith*, which encouraged Muslims to pursue scientific studies and examine the natural world. Indeed, many Islamic scholars and luminaries such as Farabi, Ibn Sina, Ibn Arabi and Rumi were inspired by these very teachings.

In the creative and scientific environment which had been established at the court of the Abbasids in Baghdad and the Samanid and Buyid courts in Iran, Muslim, Christian and Jewish scholars and even those who were not tied to any religion, engaged in scientific and philosophical debates and co-operation free of any religious zeal. This was in fact one of the most crucial factors behind the huge surge in scientific and philosophical advances in the Golden Age of Islam. We need only remind ourselves that not only was Razi, the greatest physician of the Golden age, not subjected to any kind of persecution, despite his philosophical objection to prophecy and religion, but was in fact rewarded for many years with appointment to high office. This type of tolerant and liberal attitude, already apparent during the Samanid and Buyid eras, was a hitherto unheard of phenomenon which only started to emerge gradually almost a millennium later in Europe.

The foundations of many of the sciences, including several branches of mathematics such as algebra, trigonometry and computational mathematics, as well as modern astronomy, natural sciences such as physics and chemistry, and medicine were laid in Islamic societies in which Greek philosophy, rationalism and Islamic mysticism also experienced major advances. There can be no doubt that the scientific and cultural renaissance which took place in Europe would not have been possible without the transfer of knowledge from the Iranian-Islamic heritage. This view has been confirmed by Toby Huff in his comparative study into the levels of scientific progress between the Muslim world, China and Europe during the Middle Age:

Our concern is with the fact that from the eighth century to the end of the fourteenth, Arabic science was probably the most advanced science in the world, greatly surpassing the West and China. In virtually every field of endeavor – in astronomy, alchemy, mathematics, medicine, optics and so forth – Arabic scientists (that is, Middle Eastern individuals primarily using the Arabic language but including Arabs, Iranians, Christians, Jews and others) were in the forefront of scientific advance. The facts, theories, and scientific speculations contained in their treatises were the most advanced to be had anywhere in the world, including China.<sup>13</sup>

#### *Process of Decline and Prelude to Catastrophe*

The aforementioned research by Richard Bulliet has managed to elucidate some new aspects of the root causes of the demise of the Golden civilization. According to Bulliet, in the

<sup>13</sup> Toby E. Huff, *The Rise of Early Modern Science, Islam, China and the West*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge, 2003), 48.

fifth/eleventh century, the entire region of central and western Asia was in the grip of a “significant cold spell” which lasted approximately 130 years, a period which he has named the “Big Chill”.<sup>14</sup> This cold spell destroyed Iran’s cotton crops as well as its textile manufacturing facilities and brought about a commensurate drop in its agricultural prosperity. One of the most significant repercussions of this economic disruption was the migration of many families of the bourgeoisie to India and warmer terrains west of the Muslim dominions, and the dispersal of the vast workforce that had built up during the 250-year long period of economic boom. It was because of this very dispersal that even after the end of the 130-year period of inclement weather, Iran’s economic fortunes could not be revived.<sup>15</sup>

Furthermore, according to Bulliet’s research, the climatic change and severe weather forced the Turkmen nomads to decamp from Ghaz to the warmer Iranian plateau. It was this same tribe that went on to establish the Seljuq Empire in Iran after overthrowing the Ghaznavid and Buyid dynasties.

The establishment of the great Seljuq Empire in the region had two consequences. Firstly, for the first time in Iran’s post-Islamic history, a large centralized government came into being which put an end to the rule of small provincial dynasties such as the Saffarids, Samanids and Buyids, extended the country’s borders to those of the Sassanian period, and maintained its power and authority by fielding a standing army. Whilst reliance on their military superiority might have initially guaranteed the Seljuqs a powerful and stable centralized government, it also carried with it the seeds of collapse and disintegration during times of crisis. Secondly, despite the continuation of certain notable scientific and cultural advancements, in particular during the first half of the Seljuq period, we start to witness the increasing influence of Turkic tribes in the gradual weakening and ultimate decline of the Golden Age of Iranian civilization.

Following the defeat of Iran and other Islamic dominions by the Turks, the political and social culture of a region, which up until that time had undergone at least two centuries of urbanization, now came under the influence of a tribal culture which managed to overwhelm it entirely. According to Thomas Barfield, whilst Arab tribal culture was organized along politically egalitarian lines inside each tribe, amongst the Turkic tribes, social structure and political organization was determined according to powerful patrilineal traditions of hierarchical leadership where obedience to a tribal leader or clan head (who was chosen on the basis of military strength and success in the battlefield), formed the principal structures of social groupings.<sup>16</sup>

Although the Turks, as a result of their association with the Iranians, converted to Islam, they continued their adherence to their own tribal culture, in particular the tradition of maintaining a standing army and their tribal “insider” versus “outsider” mentality which they

<sup>14</sup> Bulliet, *Cotton, Climate, and Camels*, 69.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 136.

<sup>16</sup> Thomas J. Barfield, “Tribe and State Relations,” *Tribes and State Formation in the Middle East: Conference Papers*, ed. Philip S. Khoury and Joseph Kostiner (Berkeley, CA, 1990), 153.

helped spread throughout the Muslim world. Consequently, authoritarian and despotic tendencies and binary thinking (seeing people and situations in simple black and white terms without considering nuances and grey shades in between) began to dominate social and political life in Iran to a much greater extent than before. With the accession to power of the Ghaznavids, and their successors, the Seljuqs, the liberal zeitgeist of the Abbasid era, which had reached its zenith in the courts of the Buyids and Samanids, gradually gave way to discrimination, religious sectarianism, and the subjugation of minority religions and schools of thoughts, including Shi'ism and Mu'tazilism. Hence black and white thinking in religious and political approaches began to displace rationalism at an ever increasing pace. Therefore, whilst the Isma'ilis continued their patronage of scientific and philosophical scholarship, following their open revolt against the religious dogmatism and political sectarianism of the Seljuqs, the latter adopted the very opposite policy. That is why, for example, under the Seljuqs, the Nizamiyya schools first established throughout Iran during the time of Nizam-al-Mulk, refrained from teaching mathematical and natural sciences, bringing about thereby a corresponding diminution in scientific learning in Iran.

One of the most important cultural outcomes of the success of the Turkic tribes was the striking and rapid rise of Sufism which, for a variety of reasons, became widespread both amongst the Turkic as well as amongst the indigenous Iranian population. Significantly, from a historical perspective, this was a movement that opposed scientific and philosophical activities. What is even more significant, culturally speaking, is that the Turks who were possessed of a primitive nomadic culture and lacked a scientific and cultural heritage, and who had only recently gained dominance over the Muslim community, were especially well-disposed towards Sufism. In fact, Sufism, at least in its early incarnation, displayed a particular affinity with certain primitive traditions such as belief in the occult and communion with the spiritual world. This is how Sufism managed to spread from what had become its most active center in Khurasan, and extend as far off as Transoxania, the original habitat of the Turkic tribes. Before long, Turkish Sufi sheikhs and dervishes came to replace the itinerant poets and traditional singers in the area and, through their vast network of proselytizers, invited the different Turkic tribes to join their Sufi and Hanafi orders, thus preventing the expansion of the Shi'a and Mu'tazilite movements.<sup>17</sup>

Furthermore, Roy Mottahedeh has described how the indigenous Iranian population which had experienced two centuries of independent self-rule under the Saffarids and Buyids, now came face to face with a huge surge of foreign Turks who had successfully established dominion over them. Overcome with a sense of fear and insecurity, they sought refuge in Sufism as a safe haven from their fearsome foreign overlords.<sup>18</sup>

<sup>17</sup> Mehmet Fuat Koprulu, *Early mystics in Turkish literature*, trans. Gary Leiser and Robert Dankoff (London, 2006), 7-8.

<sup>18</sup> Roy P. Mottahedeh, *The Mantle of the Prophet: Religion and Politics in Iran* (Oxford, 2000), 147.



Thus, Sufism played a crucial role in enticing the Turks towards Islam and absorbing them into the native population. However, this movement came at the expense of the waning of Mu'tazilite and other philosophical and religious activities. Finally, al-Ghazzali (d. 505/1111), who is commonly regarded as the most important religious scholar of that period, began his steadfast endorsement of Sufism as the only genuine means of experiencing religion and worshipping God, whilst at the same time launching a ferocious attack on the practice of rationalism, mathematics and the natural sciences by declaring such activities to be obstacles in the path of worship and proximity to God. This was one more example of the aforementioned black and white thinking emanating from the influence of the tribal traditions of the Turkic Seljuqs. As a result of the unrelenting influence of such beliefs on the world of Islam, philosophy and science became subject to ever increasing constraints. Islamic mysticism, which had on the whole existed harmoniously in its early development alongside philosophical and scientific scholarship, as evidenced by the works of the likes of Jabir Ibn Hayyan, Farabi and Ibn Sina, henceforth became increasingly removed from Aristotelian science and philosophy as practiced and advocated by Mu'tazilites and by Isma'ili Shi'as.

Thus, from the middle of the fifth/eleventh century onwards, patronage of scholarship and rationalist thinking began to ebb. Despite all this, it is worth pointing out that the effects of this downward trend in philosophical and scientific activities during the Seljuq era should be evaluated in strictly relative terms. At that time, Iranian-Muslim society was still home to numerous scholars in the fields of mathematics, natural sciences, medicine and philosophy and was still capable of fostering such figures as Omar Khayyam by virtue of its toleration of rationalist thought. There is a great deal of evidence to support this claim. For example, in the last decades before the start of the Mongol attacks on Iran, the preliminary principles of differential calculus were established for the very first time by Sharaf al-Din Tusi (d. 609/1213) who was alive six years prior to the Mongol invasions. Even during the Mongol invasions themselves, no less a personage than Nasir al-Din Tusi (d. 672/1274), who was one of the foremost mathematicians and astronomers of Islamic civilization, was able to prosper under the aegis of the Isma'ilis.

What ultimately played a fateful role in and made conditions ripe for the Mongol catastrophe was the social and political decay in Iran engendered by the escalating clashes between the followers of the Hanafite and Shafi'ite religious schools. These hostilities grew more intense with the death of Malik Shah (r. 464-484/1072-1092) and the breakdown of Seljuq rule and reached a climax following the death of Sultan Sanjar. The culture of black and white thinking and related attitudes of the Turkic Seljuqs, which had come to replace the more tolerant policies of the Samanid and Buyid eras, fanned the spread of these conflicts which in turn severely weakened solidarity amongst Muslims and brought about a high level of destruction and ruin in cities in their wake. According to Bulliet, the economic failure in Iran which had resulted from the "Big Chill" was the driving force behind the destructive Hanafite and Shafi'ite conflicts as they fought over control in Iran's larger cities of existing material resources.<sup>19</sup>

<sup>19</sup> Bulliet, *Cotton, Climate, and Camels*, 136.

An examination of the Hanafite and Shafi'ite struggles in Nishapur, which have been described at great length in another work by Bulliet, shows that although these conflicts did not at first prevent the Hanafites and Shafi'ites from putting up a united front against the Ghaznid attacks from the East of Iran on Nishapur, these sectarian conflicts nevertheless gradually escalated to such an extent that in response to fresh attacks by the Ghaznavids against Nishapur in the sixth/twelfth century, supporters of these two orders, instead of uniting against the onslaught of the common enemy, fell upon each other with such ferocity that all that remained at the end was widespread devastation. Nishapur was destroyed so completely that the following year, its citizens were forced to build a new town close to the ruins of the old city.<sup>20</sup>

It was under these circumstances that Ala al-Din Mohammad Khwarazm Shah (r. 596-617/1200-1221) came to power in Iran. Having already weakened the country's defence capability with his oppressive and divisive provincial policies, he went on, with a daring born of arrogance, to break his pact for the mutual expansion of trade with Genghis Khan. He followed this up with first ordering the execution of 450 members of Genghis's trade delegation and then issuing orders for the murder of the envoys that had been dispatched to seek justice for the first killings. The upshot was that the Mongols who, under the command of Genghis Khan had already by that time conquered northern China and large parts of central Asia and who were intent on world domination, now found sufficient grounds to plan their vengeful and barbarous epoch-making attacks on Iran.

### *The Mongol Catastrophe in Iran*

The Mongol catastrophe, which must rank as one of the most genocidal and brutal atrocities in human history, has left a permanent mark on the history of Iran and that of other Islamic societies. In 2003, an international group of geneticist announced that an identical Y-chromosome shows that about 8% of the population of a large part of Asia stretching, from the Pacific to the Caspian Sea, are descendents of Genghis Khan.<sup>21</sup> While this study confirms the huge impact that this fearsome warrior has had on the genetic makeup of the population in this vast area, the long term traumatic effect of the Mongol invasions on the psyche and the behavior of the people in the region has not been hitherto investigated.

What we have named the "Mongol Catastrophe" refers in particular to a very dark period in Iranian and Islamic history, lasting approximately 200 years. It is to this that we now turn our attention and attempt to describe. As stated earlier, the prelude to this period was the bloody internal conflicts between the followers of the Hanafite and Shafi'ite religious schools, which came to a head after the death of the Seljuq Sultan Sanjar in 552/1157. This was followed in 616/1219 by the unexpected and terrifying attacks on Iran by the Mongol hordes, who, led by

<sup>20</sup> Richard W. Bulliet, *The Patricians of Nishapur: A Study In Medieval Islamic Social History*, (Cambridge, Mass., 1972), 78-80.

<sup>21</sup> Tatiana Zerjal et al., *Am J Hum Genet.* 2003 March; 72(3): 717-721.

Genghis Khan, managed to strike a decisive blow against the Golden civilization of Iran and Islam.

Great Iranian and Islamic chroniclers of the period, such as Ibn al-Athir (d. 630/1233), Ata-Malik Juvaini (d. 681/1283), Seraj al-Din Jozjani (d. mid-seventh/thirteenth century) and Rashid al-Din Fazl-Allah Hamedani (d. 718/1318) have all described the Mongol invasions in their writings as a hitherto unseen historical catastrophe.

This is also the view expressed by the Iranian literary historian, Zabih Allah Safa:

Contemporary histories of this terrible onslaught are filled with accounts of the brutal atrocities committed by the Mongols and Tatars. There can be no doubt that this event was the most heinous of its kind to have occurred in the entire history of Iran up to that time, and one which has not been matched since.<sup>22</sup>

The same opinion was stated by a number of contemporary Iranian historians in papers presented at a conference held in Iran in 2000, at Shahid Beheshti University on “The Mongol Invasions and their Consequences”<sup>23</sup> and can also be found in the works of major Western historians of the Mongol period such as René Grosset, Ilya Petrushevsky, John Saunders and David Morgan whose works have all been translated into Farsi.

The lightning victories of the Mongols were based on a strategy of terror and mass murder. According to the dictates of *yasa*, the Mongolian code of social and political conduct, all non-Mongol tribes were expected to either surrender without resistance and pay taxes and tributes to their new masters or, in the event of the slightest show of resistance, face being massacred.

Ibn al-Athir, regarded by the Muslim world as the greatest contemporary historian of this period and who lived in Iraq not far removed from the cities under attack writes during the first wave of Mongol attacks:

If anyone were to say that since God (glory and power be His) created Adam until this present time mankind has not had a comparable affliction, he would be speaking the truth. History books do not contain anything similar or anything that comes close to it...Perhaps humanity will not see such a calamity, apart from Gog and Magog, until the world comes to an end and this life ceases to be.

As for the antichrist, he will spare those who follow him and destroy those who oppose him, but these did not spare anyone. On the contrary, they slew women,

<sup>22</sup> Zabih Allah Safa, *Tārikh-e adabiyyāt dar Iran*, 3 vols. (Tehran, 1380/2001), 3: 12.

<sup>23</sup> Entesharateh Daneshgah-e Shahid Beheshti, *Hojum-e Moghol beh Iran va payāmadhā-ye ān* (Tehran, 1379/2000)

men and children. They split open the bellies of pregnant women and killed the foetuses.<sup>24</sup>

The barbarous methods used by the Mongols included mass rape of virgin girls (in Bukhara as recounted by Ibn al-Athir,<sup>25</sup> and in also in Marv, as described by Juvaini<sup>26</sup>), the slaughter of all living things, from humans to animals such as cats and dogs, the holding of special celebrations after the mass killings and the removal of heads from the corpses of men, women and children (in Nishapur as stated by Juvaini<sup>27</sup>). These acts were all carried out in revenge but also in absolute cool blood.

The Russian scholar, Petrushevsky, using a population census of northern China before and after the Mongol attacks, has estimated that the population of this region fell to one ninth of its previous level following the Mongol invasions. On the basis of similarities which existed between the Mongol attacks in northern China and those in Khurasan inside Iran, we may conclude that the population of the latter was reduced by similar numbers.<sup>28</sup>

In fact, according to historians such as Saunders, from amongst all the Mongol conquests which at the time encompassed half of the known world, including China, Russia and Eastern Europe, the worst damage was inflicted on Iran and in particular, on Khurasan.<sup>29</sup>

We will conclude this section with a summary provided by Ira Lapidus in his comprehensive 2002 study of Islamic societies:

The Mongol regime in Iran was a conquest state. It was made up of a single large army composed of a tribal military aristocracy allied to the ruling dynasty. This aristocracy conceived of itself as a privileged people whose right to dominate and tax its subjects was enshrined in the supreme law, the *yasa*.<sup>30</sup>

In the early decades of 1250, Hulegu Khan, Genghis's grandson, launched a highly organized and successful military campaign against Iran, a country which for more than thirty years had been consumed with fear and terror of the Mongol onslaughts. After first overrunning Alamut, the headquarters of the Isma'ilis and roundly defeating them, Hulegu next laid siege to Baghdad, and after massacring its population and abolishing the Abbasid dynasty, he established Ilkhanid rule in Iran which lasted close to eighty years. It has been estimated that Hülegü, in addition to a 150,000 strong army, brought with him approximately 750,000 to 900,000 members

<sup>24</sup> Izz al-Din Ibn al-Athir, *al-Kāmil fi'l-Tā'rikh*, pt. 3, *The Years 589-629/1193-1231: The Ayyubids after Saladin and the Mongol Menace*, trans. D. S. Richards (Aldershot, 2008), 202.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 208-209

<sup>26</sup> Ata-Malik Juvaini, *Genghis Khan: the History of the World-Conqueror*, trans. J. A. Boyle (Manchester, 1997), 162.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 177-178.

<sup>28</sup> Ilya Pavlovich Petrushevsky, *Keshāvarzi va monāasebāteh arzi dar Iran dar ahdeh Moghol*, trans. Karim Keshavarz, 2 vols. (Tehran, 1357/1978), 1: 71.

<sup>29</sup> John Joseph Saunders, *The History of the Mongol Conquests* (Philadelphia, 2001), 177.

<sup>30</sup> Ira M. Lapidus, *History of Islamic Societies* (Cambridge, 2002), 228.

of Mongol tribes, accompanied by their Turkish families and their herds, to the Iranian plateau and established them as the ruling elite in the region.<sup>31</sup>

This is how Lapidus has characterized the Mongol invasions:

The first impact of the Mongol invasions in Iran was disastrous and amounted to a holocaust. The populations of many cities and towns were systemically exterminated. Whole regions were depopulated by invading armies and by the influx of Turkish and Mongol nomads who drove the peasants from the land. The conquerors plundered their subjects, made them serfs and taxed them ruinously. The result was a catastrophic falling population, income, and state revenue. For over a century fine pottery and metalwares ceased to be produced. A period of urban autonomy and cultural vitality was brought to an end.<sup>32</sup>

During the Ilkhanate period, the Mongols tied the peasantry to their lands and treated them as serfs. Farmers who were not able to pay the exorbitant taxes imposed on them by their Mongol governors were taken into slavery along with their families and sold in slave markets. The Iranian historian, Abd al-Hossein Zarrinkub, has described the consequences of this policy for farming:

To escape the burden of taxes and forced labour, peasants had to constantly abandon and flee their lands. Local lookouts on every side reported the approach of the official tax collectors (*bashghanan*) to the peasants who, afraid of being plundered, would pack everything they could and flee. For this reason, time and again, fertile land was turned into barren land.<sup>33</sup>

Zarrinkub also has this to say about the fate of cities under the Mongols:

In cities too the effects of the permanent feeling of hunger and want brought about by the destruction of villages became very pronounced in the lives of minor tradesmen and merchants. As these conditions continued, they periodically gave rise to prostitution and spread of brothels which in those days were known as *kharabat*.<sup>34</sup>

Financial corruption coupled with crises in trade, farming and society, in particular the desertion of villages by peasants, finally crippled social and economic life inside the country and for the first time put the Ilkhanid state in jeopardy. Indeed, this is regarded as the real reason

<sup>31</sup> John Masson Smith Jr., "Mongol Nomadism and Middle Eastern Geography: Qishlaq and Tumens," *The Mongol Empire and its Legacy*, ed. Reuven Amitai-Preiss and David O. Morgan (Boston, 2001), 40.

<sup>32</sup> Lapidus, *History of Islamic Societies*, 226-228.

<sup>33</sup> Abd al-Hossein Zarrinkub, *Ruzgārān: tārikh-e Iran az āghāz tā soqūṭ-e salṭanat-e Pahlavi* (Tehran, 1378/1999), 544, 546.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

behind Ghazan Khan's conversion to Islam and his decision towards the end of the seventh/thirteenth century to enact certain reforms.

But Ghazanid reforms which had been designed with a view to creating a degree of equality, by reducing taxes and cutting down on the outright plunder of the population by local governors were met with strong opposition from princes and Mongol rulers who were absolutely obedient to Genghis's *yasa* traditions. In reality, these reforms enjoyed very limited success. The noted Iran specialist, Ann Lambton, for example, has made the following observation on this subject:

Ghazan Khan (694-703/1295-1304) is the only Ilkhan who can be said to have had an agricultural policy. Shortly before his death he sought to bring about an agricultural revival, but his reforms were short-lived and the revival ephemeral.<sup>35</sup>

Lambton goes on to explain the Ghazanid reforms on the basis of accounts provided by Abd Allah Vassaf in his eighth/fourteenth century history of the Mongol empire, *Tārikh-e Vassāf*. She is however careful to point out that Vassaf's description of the conditions in Fars province shows that none of these reforms were ever actually carried through.<sup>36</sup>

Even the tying of peasants to the land and their prohibition from ever leaving it, which was tantamount to slavery and thus contrary to Islamic legal principles, was officially sanctioned and incorporated by the Ghazanid reforms.<sup>37</sup>

#### *Blow to Civilization and Morals*

The Mongol policy of destroying canals, on which the country's economy relied, harmed Iran much more than other conquered territories. Indeed, the Mongol invasions devastated Iran's irrigation networks and resulted in the collapse of farming in the region. The severe economic repercussions of the Mongol invasions also had grievous social consequences. In vast parts of Khurasan and the Caspian, from Balkh to Damghan, for the first time after several thousand years of civilization, primitive societies appeared. In one such case recorded by the eighth/fourteenth century historian Seyfi Haravi, the destruction of farming wrought by the catastrophe in Herat, forced 140 of its survivors to feed for years afterwards on human flesh, dog and cat meat and reduced them to vagabondage.<sup>38</sup>

Contemporary accounts by historians and poets testify to a very dark period in Iran's history in the wake of Mongol invasions and speak of the total collapse of moral values in family life and the rest of society. In the private sphere, there was a terrible increase in mendacity, hypocrisy, treachery, and bloody family feuds, whilst in the social sphere, there was a

<sup>35</sup> Ann Lambton, preface to *Landlord and Peasant in Persia* (London: 1991, first published 1953), xl and xlvii.

<sup>36</sup> *Tārikh-e Vassāf*, ed. M. M. Isfahani (Bombay, 1269/1852-53), 386, cited in Lambton, *Landlord and Peasant*, xlvii.

<sup>37</sup> David Morgan, *The Mongols* (Oxford, 1986), 169.

<sup>38</sup> Seyfi Haravi, *Tārikhnāmeḥ-ye Harāt*, ed. Mohammad Zobeyr al-Seddiqui (Tehran, 1352/1973), 81-82.

monumental rise in violence, crime, prostitution, womanizing, sexual abuse of slaves, alcoholism and drug addiction, all of which came about as a result of the disintegration of the very fabric of a society torn apart by the Mongol catastrophe.

Ata-Malik Juvaini, the Iranian minister at the court of Hülegü, who was the first contemporary figure to write about these developments in his *Tārikh-e Jahāngoshā*, “The History of the World Conqueror”, has provided the following description of the extreme moral turpitude of the time:

They regard lying and deception as exhortation and admonishment and all profligacy and slander bravery and courage.

They consider the Uighur language and script to be the height of knowledge and learning. Every market lounge in the garb of iniquity has become an emir; every hireling has become a minister, every knave a vizier and every unfortunate a secretary; every *mustadfi*<sup>39</sup> a *mustaufi* and every spendthrift an inspector; every rogue a deputy treasurer and every boor a minister of state; every stableboy the lord of dignity and honor and every carpet-spreader a person of consequence; every cruel man a competent man, every nobody a somebody, every churl a chief, every traitor a mighty lord and every valet a learned scholar; every camel-driver elegant from much riches and every porter in easy circumstances by reason of Fortune’s aid.

They consider the breaking of wind and the boxing of ears to proceed from the kindness of their nature, for ‘*God hath sealed up their hearts*’, and they deem vituperation and sottishness to be the consequences of a scatheless mind. In such an age, which is the famine year of generosity and chivalry and the market day of error and ignorance, the good are sorely tried and the wicked and evil firmly established; in the performance of noble deeds the virtuous are twisted in the snare of tribulation, while the vicious and foolish attain the riches they desire; the free are beggars and the liberal outcasts; the noble are portionless, and the important of no account; the ingenious are exposed to danger, traditionists are the victims of calamities, the wise the prisoners of shackles and the perfect overtaken by disaster; the mighty are subservient to the base by compulsion and the discriminating are captive in the hands of the ignoble.

From this it may be known what labors the wise and the talented must perform to ascend the highest and explore the lowest scales.<sup>40</sup>

Juvaini’s assessment of the impact of the Mongols on Iranian people’s behavior has been echoed by the twentieth century Iranian poet, Malek al-Sho‘ara-ye Bahar (d. 1951):

<sup>39</sup> Juvaini, *The World-Conqueror*, 7, n. 11. In his note, Boyle suggests the most likely rendering for *mustadfi*, (literally “one who warms himself”) is “a shivering wretch”.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 7-8.

As soon as the effects of the twelfth century on the Ilkhanid era disappeared and we reached the second half of the thirteenth century, the influence of the Mongol form of rule and traditions that is to say – coarseness, savagery, cruelty, injustice, ignorance, the imbecilic *yasa* culture of the barren desert and the savagery of the wasteland took hold of the manners and attitudes the devastated, desolate, depressed and withered people who had survived the enemy's sword.<sup>41</sup>

A telling account of the collapse of morality during this period can also be found in the writings of another renowned Iranian poet, Obayd Zakani (d. ca. 770/1370), who lived towards the end of the Ilkhanid period and up to thirty years after the fall of this dynasty. In his treatise *Akhlāq-e Ashraf*, “The Ethics of the Aristocracy”, Obaid has described the unmistakable difference that existed between the pre- and post-Mongol social conditions through a startling comparison between the old abandoned virtues such as wisdom, courage, chastity, justice, generosity, patience, loyalty, modesty, truth, mercy and compassion and the new licentious behavior which included debauchery, violence, avarice, thuggery, cowardice, vulgarity, depravity, hedonism, tyranny, meanness, dishonor, disloyalty, deception and cruelty.<sup>42</sup>

### *Trauma and modern psychology*

Today, new findings in the fields of personal and social trauma and the psychological effects of large-scale mass murder on societies can help us to analyze the Mongol catastrophe. In light of these findings, it is now incumbent on us to cast a fresh look at this catastrophe. In recent decades, psychologists have succeeded in gaining a scientific understanding of the disorder known as Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). This disorder surfaces in individuals who have been caught up in terrifying natural or man-made disasters such as earthquakes or wars where they feel their own lives are in danger, or are witnesses to scenes of death and destruction around them. One of the main behavioural symptoms of this disorder is “hyperarousal” which can cause a lowering of the tolerance threshold in the sufferer and an increase in levels of aggression in the face of difficult circumstances.

In the past decade, a related but more chronic disorder has been diagnosed which is caused by the effects of trauma resulting from prolonged and repeated encounters with traumatic experiences. Examples of this disorder, known as Complex Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder can be found amongst children who have been chronically abused or prisoners who have been locked up or tortured for long periods of time. Studies have shown that these types of trauma can lead to profound changes in the personality of the traumatized individual. The term “Complex Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder” was first used in 1997 by Judith Herman, Professor of clinical psychiatry at Harvard University Medical School. Previously, psychologists had used the phrase “Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder” to describe the effects and symptoms of repeated acute trauma as experienced by prisoners of war for example. Professor Herman however has questioned the adequacy of this term when describing such trauma:

<sup>41</sup> Mohammad Taqi Bahar, *Sabk shenāsi*, 3 vols. (Tehran, 1376/1997), 3: 1082.

<sup>42</sup> Obayd Zakani, *Akhlāq-e ashraf: kolliyāt-e Obayd Zākāni* ed. Parviz Atabaki (Tehran, 1384/2006), 317-343



The existing diagnostic criteria for this disorder are derived mainly from survivors of circumscribed traumatic events. They are based on the prototypes of combat, disaster, and rape. In survivors of prolonged, repeated trauma, the symptom picture is often far more complex. Survivors of prolonged abuse develop characteristic personality changes, including deformations of relatedness and identity. Survivors of abuse in childhood develop similar problems with relationships and identity; in addition, they are particularly vulnerable to repeated harm, both self-inflicted and at the hands of others. The current formulation of post-traumatic stress disorder fails to capture either the protean symptomatic manifestations of prolonged, repeated trauma or the profound deformations of personality that occur in captivity<sup>43</sup>

Complex post-traumatic stress disorder can produce the following symptoms in the traumatized individual: psychological breakdown, loss of confidence and self-esteem, loss of sense of security and, not least, acquiescence and submission to repeated exposure to trauma. More generally, complex post-traumatic stress disorder robs the individual of his inner security and ultimately brings about a change in his personality.<sup>44</sup>

We will now consider two personality disorders which according to available statistics often surface as a result of exposure to trauma during childhood. The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, fourth edition (DSM-IV), gives detailed description of a range of personality disorders currently recognized including those we examine here.<sup>45</sup> The first is Narcissistic Personality Disorder.<sup>46</sup>

A number of etiological studies carried out by researchers in the US and UK have highlighted the role played by certain factors in the sufferer's social environment in the development of this disorder. According to these findings, deprivation from sufficient attention, arrested emotional development during infancy and childhood, child abuse, neglect or being spoilt during childhood, can each contribute to the development of narcissistic personality disorder in adulthood.<sup>47</sup>

<sup>43</sup> Judith Herman, "From Trauma and Recovery: The Aftermath of Violence - From Domestic Abuse to Political Terror," *Violence in War and Peace*, ed. Nancy Scheper-Hughes and Philippe Bourgois (Oxford, 2004), 369.

<sup>44</sup> A. Cook et al., "Complex trauma in children and adolescents," *Psychiatric Annals* vol. 35, no. 5 (2005)

<sup>45</sup> Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorder, 4th ed. (Washington, DC, 2004).

<sup>46</sup> DSM-IV describes individuals suffering from Narcissistic Personality Disorder, as displaying at least five of the following diagnostic symptoms: (1) a "grandiose sense of self-importance," (2) preoccupation with "fantasies of unlimited success, power, brilliance, beauty, or ideal love," (3) a belief that they are "superior, special, or unique," (4) "generally require excessive admiration," (5) evince "a sense of entitlement" by their "unreasonable expectations of especially favorable treatment," (6) engage in "conscious or unwitting exploitation of others," (7) "have a lack of empathy," (8) are "often envious of others or believe that others are envious of them," (9) "often display snobbish, disdainful, or patronizing attitudes", *DSM IV*, 714-715

<sup>47</sup> Salman Akhtar and J. Anderson Thompson, "Overview: Narcissistic Personality Disorder," *The American Journal of Psychiatry* 139, no. 1 (1982); Alexander Lowen, *Narcissism: Denial of the True Self* (New York: Simon

The second of the aforementioned disorders, known as Borderline Personality Disorder is a more chronic psychological disorder which may be the result of prolonged trauma during childhood. This disorder produces unstable personal relationships, distorted self-image, intense and unstable emotions, and impulsiveness.<sup>48</sup>

More recent studies into borderline personality disorder have claimed the existence of a strong link between the development of this disorder and major childhood trauma. Examples of such trauma include physical abuse, sexual abuse, emotional abuse, or serious domestic violence.<sup>49</sup> Some researchers also believe that borderline personality disorder belongs to those groups of personality disorders which develop in people already suffering from complex post-traumatic stress disorder.<sup>50</sup>

### *Anger and paranoia and their transference from one generation the next*

Frequent displays of aggression can also be found in another disorder known as Antisocial Personality Disorder.<sup>51</sup>

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& Schuster, 2004); Joseph Fernando, "The Etiology of Narcissistic Personality Disorder," *The Psychoanalytic study of the child*. 53 (1998): 141-158. Fernando has described "spoiling" of children more specifically as "narcissistic over-gratification".

<sup>48</sup> According to DSM-IV's diagnostic criteria, people suffering from this disorder display at least five of the following symptoms: (1) "make frantic efforts to avoid real or imagined abandonment," (2) "a pattern of unstable and intense relationships and may switch quickly from idealizing other people to devaluing them," (3) "an identity disturbance characterized by markedly and persistently unstable self-image or sense of self," (4) "impulsivity in at least two areas that are potentially self-damaging. They may gamble, spend money irresponsibly, binge eat, abuse substances, engage in unsafe sex, or drive recklessly," (5) "recurrent suicidal behavior gestures or threats, or self-mutilating behavior," (6) "affective instability that is due to a marked reactivity of mood" (e.g., intense episodic dysphoria, irritability, or anxiety usually lasting a few hours and only rarely more than a few days)," (7) "chronic feelings of emptiness," (8) "frequently express inappropriate, intense anger or have difficulty controlling their anger," (9) "transient paranoia ideation or dissociative symptom (e.g., depersonalization)" during periods of extreme stress. *DSM-IV*, 706-708

<sup>49</sup> Judith Herman, J. C. Perry, and B. A. van der Kolk, "Childhood trauma in borderline personality disorder," *American Journal of Psychiatry* 146 (1989): 490-495.

<sup>50</sup> S. Taylor, G. J. Asmundson, and R. N. Carleton., "Simple versus complex PTSD: A cluster analytic investigation," *Journal of anxiety disorders* 20 (4) (2006): 459-472.

<sup>51</sup> According to DSM-IV's diagnostic criteria, individuals suffering from this disorder display at least three of the following signs: (1) failure "to conform to social norms with respect to lawful behavior. They may repeatedly perform acts that are ground for arrest," (2) are "frequently deceitful and manipulative in order to gain personal profit or pleasure," (3) "repeatedly lie, use an alias, con others, or malingering. A pattern of impulsivity may be manifested by a failure to plan ahead," (4) are "irritable and aggressive and may repeatedly get into physical fights or commit acts of physical assault," (5) have "a reckless disregard for the safety of themselves and others," (6) are "consistently and extremely irresponsible" as indicated by "significant periods of unemployment" leading to "financial irresponsibility," (7) "show little remorse for the consequences of their acts. They may be indifferent to, or provide a superficial rationalization for having hurt, mistreated or stolen from someone.", *DSM-IV*, 702.

People suffering from antisocial personality disorder may also reveal a tendency to sadism, that is to say, they will be amused by or take pleasure, knowingly or unknowingly, in the psychological or physical suffering of others. A statistical study conducted by clinical psychiatrists and psychotherapists in America involving patients suffering from this condition has shown that out of 200 different personality traits, sadistic behavior ranks tenth in the list of the valid identifying criteria of this disorder<sup>52</sup>

The World Health Organization (WHO) which publishes its own medical classification for defining diseases (including psychosocial disorders), the *International Statistical Classification of Diseases and Related Health Problems*, 10<sup>th</sup> revision, (*ICD-10*), describes a conceptually similar disorder to Antisocial Personality Disorder as defined in *DSM-IV*, called Dissocial Personality Disorder.<sup>53</sup> Various studies have similarly shown that trauma suffered by children through different kinds of child abuse and neglect plays a critical role in the development of antisocial personality disorder later as adults.<sup>54</sup>

The next disorder we will consider is Paranoid Personality Disorder.<sup>55</sup> In their comprehensive study of this disorder, Useda and Bernstein have drawn the following conclusion with regard to the etiology of this disorder:

There is a considerable body of literature suggesting that childhood abuse is associated with anger and aggression in children and adolescents (Kolko, 2002) --

<sup>52</sup> J. Shedler and D. Westen, "Refining Personality Disorder Diagnosis: Integrating Science and Practice," *The American journal of psychiatry* 161, no. 8 (2004): 356.

<sup>53</sup> According to the WHO's ICD-10 criteria, the individual suffering from this disorder must show at least three of the following symptoms: (1) "disregard for social obligations, and callous unconcern for the feelings of others," (2) "gross disparity between behaviour and the prevailing social norms," (3) "behaviour is not readily modifiable by adverse experience, including punishment," (4) "a low tolerance to frustration and a low threshold for discharge of aggression, including violence," (5) "tendency to blame others, or to offer plausible rationalizations for the behaviour bringing the patient into conflict with society." See *International Statistical Classification of Diseases and Related Health Problems*, 10th revision, 2nd ed. (ICD-10) (Geneva, 2004), 338.

<sup>54</sup> B. K. Luntz and C. S. Widom, "Antisocial personality disorder in abused and neglected children grown up," *American Journal of Psychiatry*, 151 (1994): 670-674.

<sup>55</sup> According to DSM-IV's diagnostic criteria, individuals suffering from this disorder must exhibit at least four of the following symptoms: (1) "assume that other people will exploit, harm or deceive them, even if no evidence exists to support this expectation," (2) "are preoccupied with unjustified doubts about the loyalty or trustworthiness of their friends and associates," (3) "are reluctant to confide in or become close to others because they fear the information they share will be used against them," (4) "read hidden meanings that are demeaning and threatening into benign remarks or events," (5) "persistently bear grudges and are unwilling to forgive the insults, injuries or slights that they think they have received," (6) "are quick to counterattack and react with anger to perceived insults," (7) "may be pathologically jealous, after suspecting that their spouse or sexual partners is unfaithful without any adequate justification." *DSM-IV*, 690-691

features that are similar to those seen in PPD. Childhood physical abuse may therefore prove to play a specific etiologic role in the development of PPD.<sup>56</sup>

They then point out that both genetic and environmental factors play a significant role in the development of the traits that constitute paranoid personality disorder and go on to state that “for example, an analysis of twin study data revealed that the types of traits that appear to characterize PPD, such as suspiciousness, hostility, oppositionality and restricted expression of affect, have both strong heritable and environmental components.”<sup>57</sup>

Our main interest here, so far as the Mongol Catastrophe is concerned, is the role which environmental factors play in the development of personality disorders, namely traumatic events which can, through repeated experience, create the necessary conditions for the development of this disorder. Psychologists specializing in this disorder have carried out all-encompassing studies regarding the possibility of transfer of trauma from parent to child through acts of child abuse and domestic violence, and have discovered cases of repeated trauma running through several generations of families. Today’s victims of domestic violence may themselves become the perpetrators of this very kind of behavior in later years. Thus it becomes possible for aggressive behaviour to transfer vertically from one generation to the next at the family level, whilst simultaneously transferring horizontally at the socio-political level. This is especially true when there is no serious conflict between this type of behavior and society’s rules and values. In a collection of articles on the inter-generational transference of trauma, Danieli has presented the results of his research and findings on this question, the most noteworthy sections of which, for our purposes, are the preface, conclusion and chapters 13, 32 and 33 respectively.<sup>58</sup>

In the past decade, anthropologists have also studied the terrible consequences of large-scale trauma such as the Holocaust in Nazi Germany, the war crimes and massacres in Rwanda and Bosnia and the methods used by military dictatorships in such countries as Argentina and Brazil to instill fear and terror, and have shown how trauma precipitated by such situations can not only have long-term consequences for the individual victim, but also affect much wider inter-personal and social relationships right across the board.<sup>59</sup>

Furthermore, if, for whatever reason, society cannot deal adequately with interpreting such traumatic incidents, and fails to rehabilitate the victims involved through its various traditional and cultural responses to disaster, social bonds and relations will corrode, weaken

<sup>56</sup> D. P. Bernstein and J. D. Useda, “Paranoid Personality Disorder,” *Personality Disorders: Toward the DSM-V*, ed. William O’Donohue, Katherine A Fowler, and Scott O. Lilienfeld. (Thousand Oaks, Calif., 2007), 55.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid.

<sup>58</sup> Yael Danieli, ed., *International Handbook of Multigenerational Legacy of Trauma* (New York, 1998)

<sup>59</sup> Mahmood Mamdani, *When victims become killers: colonialism, nativism and the genocide in Rwanda* (Princeton, N.J., 2001); Antonius C. G. M. Robben and Marcelo M. Suarez-Orozco, eds., *Cultures under siege : collective violence and trauma* (Cambridge, 2000)

significantly and result in the appearance of narcissistic personality disorder amongst individuals and to increased narcissism generally across society as a whole.<sup>60</sup>

### *The Mongols Invasions and Trauma Hypothesis*

According to Trauma Hypothesis, the very deep and long-lasting period of trauma induced by the Mongol catastrophe, which we estimate to have affected up to ten consecutive generations of Iranians, has had a detrimental psychological impact on a number of important aspects of the social behavioural patterns of the people of this country. Indeed, if society can be viewed as a live organic entity, whose members make up its living parts, we can see how a psychological disorder such as Complex Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder can affect certain parts of that entity, including, major aspects of social behaviour.

According to this hypothesis, the successful invasions of Iran by the semi-barbaric Mongol tribes and their subsequent settlement in the region, in particular during the period of the Ilkhanid rule, served to entrench on a large scale certain aggressive and sadistic tendencies across familial, social and political spheres in this country. Indeed, the traumatic effect and influence of the savage attacks by the Mongol hordes resulted in the appearance of post-traumatic stress disorder across a significant section of the Iranian population, who also showed certain symptoms of narcissistic, borderline, antisocial and paranoid personality disorders. These developments came about through the presence of aggressive behavior in the family and across the social and political spheres which were then passed from one generation to the next. In this manner, a trio of interlocked closed spheres of trauma and aggression were created such that each sphere affected itself, and was in turn affected and was affected by the two others.

On the premise of the vertical and horizontal transference of trauma, we can show how these three spheres come to influence each other. For example, in a society where a relatively high level of aggressive behavior is regarded as normal and acceptable, one can expect to find parents who have previously suffered trauma themselves, and who in turn foster traumatized children through their own behaviour. In this way, aggressive behaviour found in the social sphere will directly impact aggressive behaviour existing in the family sphere. We may then surmise how it can be possible for the aggressive actions and behavior of conquering armies and despotic governments towards peoples in cities and villages to transfer to families. In the latter, this transfer occurs through various methods such as child abuse, abuse of women, and more generally through aggression towards those who happen to be the weakest members of the family unit in terms of having fewer rights or a lower status. Hence aggressive behaviour in the political sphere can continue uninterrupted through its enactment in the family sphere.

We may therefore postulate on the basis of Trauma Hypothesis, that the various types of damage inflicted on Iran during the Mongol period formed an interlocking chain across the political, social and family spheres which left a long term mark on a number of behavioural and

<sup>60</sup> Marten W. DeVries, "Trauma in cultural perspective," *Traumatic stress: The effects of overwhelming experience on mind, body, and society*, ed. Bessel A van der Kolk, Alexander C McFarlane, and Lars Weisaet. (New York, 1996), ch. 17.

cultural habits of Iranians. Very crucially for its trans-generational impact, the Mongol trauma has been repeatedly reenacted in Iran's political history, as we will see later, by mass atrocities, resembling those of the Mongols but unprecedented in the pre-Mongol history. These were committed in various periods of the post Mongol history of the country: in Timur's conquests, Shah Ismail's massacre of Sunni population, Safavid's brutal rule, the Afghan conquest of Iran, and in Nader Shah's and Aqa Mohammad Khan Qajar's barbaric acts against the population. Concurrently, as we will explain, the Haydari and Ni'mati conflict, a type of permanent ritualized civil war independent of the central or local governments emerged soon after the Timurid era in all urban centres in the country, which was unparalleled in pre-Mongol Iran. These regular and bloody infightings among two sections of the population seemed completely purposeless but continued until the 20<sup>th</sup> century and kept the traumatic symptoms of the Mongol and Timurid era alive to modern times in Iran's social history.

We thus hypothesize that even though the worst effects of the psychological damage caused by the Mongol invasions have been remedied during the long centuries following the invasions, as a result of the unusual length and depth of the original trauma and its regular reenactment both in the political and social history of the country certain effects of this catastrophe have survived in more attenuated forms in the shape of traces of the aforementioned personality disorders. We emphasize here that we do not claim any clinical diagnosis of the population during the past few centuries, which is hardly possible to make. Nor, do we assert that there is evidence for the existence of these personality disorders in a large section of the population today. We rather submit that, residual characteristics from each of Narcissistic, Borderline, Paranoid and Antisocial disorders, have survived in the social behaviour and attitudes of the Iranian people. Prominent examples of which include mistrust, inner insecurity, meekness, feelings of weakness and helplessness in the face of adversity, as well as intense sensitivity, black and white (binary) thinking, narcissism, impulsiveness, belligerence and a tendency to bear grudges. Over time, these psychological dysfunctions have become embedded across social, political and family confines where they have fermented turmoil and disorder and created noxious problems in not only the realms of interpersonal and social relationships but also those of social harmony and co-operation. Indeed, the roots of the various social, economic, political, scientific and cultural failures and disappointments in Iran can be traced to these very trauma-induced problems.

The accounts left to us by historians from the Mongol period, a small number of which we have already referred to above, also bear witness to our Trauma Hypothesis. In the following sections, we will present further evidence from various sources which lend additional support to this hypothesis.

#### *The Timurid conquests and the yasafication of Iran*

Soon after the defeat of Ghazan Khan, the Ilkhanid state began to crumble and, on the death of Abu Sa'id Khan (r. 715-735/1316 -1335), the last Ilkhan, who did not leave behind any successors, it fell apart completely, giving rise in the interim to violence and chaos. These

developments were in fact the product of the internecine warfare between the local Ilkhanid princes and rulers who each controlled separate provinces in Iran. During these battles, soldiers from the pillaging Mongol commands, *ghapchagh*, regularly carried out numerous attacks and massacres, particularly in the Eastern provinces of Iran, where they perpetrated fresh atrocities each time. This period also coincided with the spread of a contagious and deadly plague in Iran and the rest of Asia and Europe which led to the death of millions of people around the world, famously known as the “Black Death”.

By 781/1380, it had been more than 160 years since the people of Iran had been made to suffer almost endless and uninterrupted traumatic living conditions, starting first with the Mongol invasions and massacres in 616/1219, followed by life under the yoke of the barbarous Ilkhans from 655-735/1258-1335 and finally, after the dissolution of the Ilkhanate dynasty, under conditions of permanent chaos and turmoil, endless internal and foreign wars and general death and destruction.

With the chaos and confusion of the successive feudal wars, the situation in Iran deteriorated to such an extent that only the fear of a powerful, despotic and ruthless central government could quell the seditious local rebels and establish relative peace and security.

Finally, it was the turn of Timur, a man who belonged to the Turkic tribes of Samarqand who soon after arriving on the scene turned into one of the most murderous and merciless tyrants of the age. From 781/1380 he brought the whole of Iran and the rest of the Middle East under his ruthless control and carried out the kind of mass slaughter which in the course of Iran’s history had only been witnessed once before during the first wave of the Mongol invasions. Through countless successive wars over 25 years, finishing with his death in 807/1405, he revisited the painful experience of the catastrophic Mongol attacks on the peoples of this region.

References to the social fall out from these wars can also be found in the poems Hafiz (d. ca. 792/1389-90), a contemporary of Timur, where he laments the terrible increase in violence amongst family members and reflects on the general moral turpitude of the time:

What woes are these that besiege us today?  
Evil and sedition we see painted across the horizon  
Wild horses lie wounded beneath the saddle  
Golden chains we see across the necks of asses  
Daughters endlessly at war with mothers  
Sons wishing ill upon their fathers  
Neither brother shows mercy to brother  
Nor does father show pity to son<sup>61</sup>

<sup>61</sup> The original of this poem can be found in Mohammad Mo’in, *Hafiz-e shirin sokhan* (Tehran, 1369/1990), 76.

این چه شوری است که در دور قمر می بینم  
اسب تازی شده مجروح به زیر پالان  
همه آفاق پر از فتنه و شرّ می بینم  
طوق زرین همه بر گردن خر می بینم

The essence of the personalities of Genghis and Timur was based on three key characteristics shared by both men, namely, narcissism, sadism, and strong leanings towards death and destruction. These are the same characteristics which Erich Fromm, the eminent psychologist and social philosopher, has identified in certain other famous historical personalities in his study of human aggression, *The Anatomy of Human Destructiveness*.<sup>62</sup>

The most important common feature between the policies of Genghis and Timur was their use of terror and their enforcement of *yasa* principles to exact absolute obedience from their subjects. These were principles which did not exist in Iran prior to the Mongol invasions but were imported to this country and surrounding regions by the invaders, that is to say, from outside the Islamic community. Timur's historic significance lay in the fact that, being born a Muslim, he was not only at home with Islamic culture but was regarded as one of their own by the native population. He was therefore able to incorporate the political and military culture of the Mongols and their *yasa* traditions more successfully and easily into Iranian culture. This was a process which ultimately led to what we have termed the *yasafication* of Iran. Thus, Timur completed the movement first started by Genghis and, in the process, became the embodiment of Mongol culture. However, his more enduring legacy was his wider transmission of this culture to Islamic societies across central and western Asia. This was a culture which was to form the basis of all the Turkic dynasties which ruled Iran and the surrounding regions until the twentieth century.

Timur's other legacy to Iran was the use he made of Muslim theology to legitimate his rule. Like Genghis, but unlike the pre-Mongol kings in Iran who derived their legitimacy from the caliph of the day, he claimed that all his victories owed to direct divine intervention. Furthermore, as stated by Manz, "[H]e claimed to have direct contact to the spiritual world through an angel which appeared to him and to have supernatural powers in the perception of other people's motives and plans".<sup>63</sup>

In this way, Genghis and Timur both left behind societies which became the mainspring for the spread of *yasa* culture in Iran and the rest of the region.

#### *Iranians' defence mechanisms against the Mongols*

The political response of Iranians to the Mongol conquests and the establishment of the Ilkhanid state took two identifiable forms which shared many similarities with their past reactions to the Arab conquests of Iran, the dominion of the Umayyads and the rule of the Turkic Seljuqs.

On the one hand, there was the continued rebellion, resistance and military opposition to the invading conquerors across various corners of the country. Historical examples of these include nationalist anti-Umayyad movements in the case of the Arabs, and the armed revolt of

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پسران را همه بد خواه پدر می بینم  
هیچ شفقت پدر را به پسر می بینم

دختران را همه جنگ است و جدل با مادر  
هیچ رحمی نه برادر به برادر دارد

<sup>62</sup> Erich Fromm, *The Anatomy of Human Destructiveness*, New ed. (London, 1997, first printed 1973)

<sup>63</sup> Beatrice Forbes Manz, *The Rise and Rule of Tamerlane* (Cambridge, 1999), 15.



the Isma'ilis in the case of the Turkic Seljuqs. The most successful of these rebellious movements however was that of the Shi'a Sarbedaran against the Mongol regime in parts of Khurasan and the Caspian region which succeeded in establishing an independent government that lasted almost 50 years before it was finally brought down by Timur.

On the other hand, just as Iranian families who provided ministers during the Sassanid era, such as the Barmakids, continued to work alongside their new Arab overlords following the Arab conquests, so political and cultural luminaries such as Nizam-al-Mulk were prepared to actively serve their Seljuq masters. Other examples include the Juvaini family who having previously served as ministers under Khwarazmshah went on to serve the Ilkhanid rulers. Another example was the scholar and philosopher Nasir al-Din Tusi who, before the military campaigns of Hulegu Khan was engaged in scientific work for the Isma'ilis in their fortress at Alamut but who, nevertheless, joined the service of the victorious Ilkhan on his defeat of the Isma'ilis. The Iranian historian, Shirin Bayani, in her study of the Mongol period, has stressed the important role played by eminent families of Iranians scholars in restoring Iranian culture and ensuring its survival. Indeed, Bayani has identified the co-operation of these bureaucratic families with the conquering rulers as absolutely crucial in the realization of this objective.<sup>64</sup>

The rise of Shi'ism during this period was another response to conquering invaders in the history of Iran. The breakdown of the Abbasid caliphate as nominal leaders of the Sunni population on the one hand and the historic role played by Shi'ism in the Iranian nationalist and liberation movements such as the Abu Muslim rebellion against the Arabs, the Isma'ili rebellion against the Turkic Seljuqs and the *Sarbedaran* rebellion against the Mongols on the other, were two of the principal political reasons behind this development during this period.<sup>65</sup> However, there were also other important social reasons at work which were pivotal in the growth of the Shi'a religion during the Mongol period, and the role played by them must also be taken into account.

The most important social response to the Mongol attacks was the appearance and widespread increase in the number of Sufi orders which, unlike the pre-Mongol period, occurred outside of any formal religious framework and was instead a direct response to the needs of a people whose lives had been touched by catastrophe. This response came at a time when society was in the grip of intense turmoil resulting from the near wholesale collapse of the state. During this period of chaos, Sufism and Islamic mysticism (*'erfan*) became surrogates for solace and support for the disaster-stricken people and thus turned into the most important form of defense mechanism against the Mongol attacks which at the time were viewed as "divine retribution". Various Sufi orders sprang up throughout Iran and the rest of the Middle East which sought to provide succor and spiritual welfare for the stricken people through special centers they set up around the country where they tried to draw people's attention to moral and spiritual matters by

<sup>64</sup> Shirin Bayani, *Din va dowlat dar Iran-e ahd-e Moghol*, 3 vols. (Tehran, 1381/2002), 2: 83.

<sup>65</sup> The *Sarbedārān* movement was made of religious and non-religious rulers that gained ascendancy over western parts of Khurasan in the middle of the fourteenth century just as the Mongol Ilkhanate was falling apart.

enjoining purification of the soul, renunciation of the material world and the promise of finding inner, "Divine Love". Thus they offered the most vital refuge imaginable for the spiritual and psychological protection of the disconsolate and distressed masses. In light of the complete moral collapse in social relations, the mystical experience of "Divine Love" through abstention and renunciation offered the only means to the traumatized masses for gaining stability, confidence, security, love and affection. It is worth noting that both Rumi and Hafiz, two of Iran's foremost exemplars in Islamic mysticism were the products of this age. Rumi grew up during the early part of this period, at the time of the first wave of Mongol invasions whilst Hafiz lived towards the latter part, during the Timurid period.

The lenient approach of many of the Mongol Ilkhans towards religious and doctrinal matters following the demise of the Abbasid caliphate gave license to the free expression of rivalries between different religions and creeds. It was under these conditions that the Shi'a religion experienced a remarkable rise amongst the Iranian people and played an ever increasing role as their savior in the face of catastrophe. There were at least four fundamental reasons behind this development.

Firstly, the followers of Shi'ism had always argued that the Umayyad caliphs, and their Abbasid successors, had unjustly usurped power from the Prophet's descendants and had set up oppressive governments which they believed were responsible for the calamities that had befallen the Muslim peoples. There is no doubt that in the eyes of vast sections of the Sunni population, the terrible Mongol catastrophe and the subsequent dominance of the infidel Ilkhans across the Middle East provided a historical vindication of the Shia' reasoning and made them potentially more accepting of Shi'a beliefs.

Secondly, the cataclysmic Mongol attacks had created a widespread spiritual and psychological need for public mourning and social expressions of grief. Significantly, this tradition of organized public mourning was only to be found amongst Shi'as who marked major religious occasions such as Ashura and the tragedy of Karbala with special ceremonies. These public events had been taking place on a limited scale from at least the time of the Buyids. Ceremonies held in honour of the various Shi'a Imams which now provided the victims of the Mongol trauma with opportunities of public mourning using this old tradition. Thirdly, social cohesion and unity from before the Mongol invasions had already weakened as a result of the bloody struggles between the Shafi'ites and Hanafites and the ongoing hostilities between the Sunnis and the Isma'ilis, largely broke down in the wake of the Mongol invasions. Under these circumstances, large-scale displays of public mourning by the Shi'as and their collective weeping and wailing proved highly effective in the rehabilitation of a traumatized society by encouraging a show of unity amongst its members thereby fortifying the social fabric.

Fourthly, the Mongol catastrophe so firmly embedded a sense of despair and helplessness in the psyche of the Iranian people that they turned in ever greater numbers to the Twelver Shi'a religion which, with its messianic message about a saviour in the shape of a Mahdi who was going to banish tyranny and establish in its stead justice throughout the world, provided a particularly attractive message of hope for the downtrodden and tormented peoples of that time. In fact, the eighth/fourteenth century was rife with leaders of various Sufi orders in the region

such as the Horufiyyeh, Naqtaviyyeh, Nourbakhsh and Mosha'sha'eh who each claimed the mantle of the Mahdi for themselves and gathered many followers to their ranks.

It was as a result of such factors that during the eight/fourteenth and ninth/fifteenth centuries, the phrase Sunni-Shi'a came to prominence in Iran since in this period many Sunnis also believed in the Shi'a Imams and were thus called Sunni-Shi'a. It was also at this time that some of the most important Sunni Sufi orders, including that of Sheikh Safi al-Din Ardebili (d. 734/1334) who later founded the Safavid dynasty, converted to Shi'ism.

Although Sufism, outside its political confines, was mostly characterized by a desire for escape from reality and occasionally led to retreat and flight from society and the rest of the world, it no doubt played a vital role in saving the traumatized Iranian psyche as well as restoring moral norms amongst certain sections of the population. More generally, through its expressions of love, search for meaning and knowledge and avoidance of psychological stresses, Sufism became a potent force in the protection and preservation of the psychological health of the population.

The growth in Sufism and Shi'ism from the seventh/thirteenth to the ninth/fifteenth centuries which constituted the main defense mechanism of the Iranian people in counteracting the Mongol catastrophe and restoring social systems also gave rise to a growth in Shi'a extremism (*ghuluvv*) amongst the *Qizilbash* of the order of Sheikh Safi al-Din Ardebili which laid the foundations for a new Iran and culminated in the Safavid dynasty in the early part of the sixteenth century which established national unity and recognized Twelver Shi'ism as the country's official religion.

Despite all this, the extent of the Mongol catastrophe was too great to allow protection from the worst effects of trauma for the large majority of the populace or to prevent its transference from one generation to the next. In addition, the Sufi movements whose initial mission had been to elevate society's morals and to counter the traumatizing effects of the catastrophe, themselves fell prey to the social degeneration of the time. This is how Safa describes the development of this movement:

Sufism was a rational movement intertwined with religious and moral guidance towards spiritual fulfillment and accomplishment which could not seriously grow or spread under the barbaric rule of the Turks, Tatars and Mongols. The only thing it could hope to achieve was to draw groups of destitute, desperate and forlorn peoples to its lodges (*khānaqāh*) who would then become a burden and nuisance to the Sufi sheikhs and leaders. It is almost certain that this very group in turn played their own part in the decline of Sufism and mysticism and revealed their harmful influence towards the end of the Mongol period and beyond.

Certainly, the spread of the "qalandariyyeh" order during this period and the tremendous increase in the numbers of "qalanadarian" in Iran and neighboring countries and the setting up of large numbers of their groups which were always

on the move between cities and important Sufi centers precipitated this decline and was a direct cause of many of society's ills.<sup>66</sup>

*The continuing effects of the catastrophe on Iran's political history*

Until the Safavid era, all governments in Iran, including the Timurid and the Aq Qoyunlu claimed descent from Genghis Khan. Even up until the Qajar period, Iran's most important rulers such as Nader Shah (r. 1148-1159/1736–1747) and Aqa Mohammad Khan Qajar (r. 1203-12/1789-97), openly claimed to take their inspiration from the leadership styles of Genghis or Timur, or as in the case of Shah Esma'il (r. 901-30/1501-24) and Shah Abbas (r. 996-1038/1588-1629), adopted Genghis's *yasa* model of governance wholesale, despite their hostility towards the latter's descendants

From the time of Timur onwards, the rulers of Iran's major dynasties claimed to be somehow God's chosen representative on Earth. Shah Esma'il, for example, the founder of the Safavid dynasty formally announced himself to be the "Shadow of God" on Earth and after the reign of Nader Shah, Qajar kings reclaimed this title for themselves.<sup>67</sup> Whilst it is true that this tradition dates back to pre-Islamic times in Iran, it was only after the reign of Timur that Iranian kings first attempted to justify their despotic actions in the name of Islam; actions which in reality were the outcome of Genghis Khan's legacy and which in their sheer bloodiness and ruthlessness were, until that time, unprecedented in the history of Iran.

The great majority of Iran's pre-Mongol Muslim rulers based their legitimacy on the authority of the Abbasid caliphs who were regarded as the nominal leaders of the Islamic community. This fact alone was enough to put severe constraints on the degree of tyranny of those rulers against their subjects. Hence, whilst Sultan Mahmoud, who ranks as one of Iran's most ruthless post-Arab and pre-Mongol kings, carried out widespread massacres in India in the name of "plundering infidel lands", he conducted far fewer killings of Shi'a and Mu'tazilite Muslims inside Iran, and even then, on a much smaller scale. By contrast, there were many occasions when, after having defeated his enemies, he would make at least an initial effort to reach a peaceful compromise with them or even offer them an amnesty.

However, after the Mongol and Timurid conquests, Iranian rulers in pursuance of the Mongol *yasa* model of governance, were not only willing to kill and mutilate large, ordinary groups of peoples who had perhaps dared to defy them, but also did not essentially consider themselves answerable to any higher authority for their atrocities. In the pre-Mongol Iran, the common approach to one's enemies, at least to begin with, was one of peaceful compromise and forgiveness. However, following the Mongols' invasions, this was replaced with extreme acts of vengeance which, as we have mentioned already, were based firmly on *yasa* cultural norms and models.

<sup>66</sup> Safa, *Tārikh-e adabiyāt*, 3: 166.

<sup>67</sup> Lapidus, *History of Islamic Societies*, 24.

A look at Iran's political history shows how the sadistic behaviour of the Mongols continued uninterrupted following Timur's reign. This is something which is clearly reflected in the private and public lives of Shah Esmā'il, Shah Abbas, Nader Shah and Aqa Mohammad Khan Qajar, each of whom finds a place on the list of the most important kings of modern Iran in the past 500 years both in terms of the role they played in bringing about national unity and in establishing the great Safavid and Qajar dynasties and the creation of new institutions which provided them with greater internal stability than preceding dynasties. However, the key role played by these kings in creating modern Iran has often prevented an objective analysis of their barbaric personalities and politics, which in effect re-enacted the Mongol/Timurid trauma in Iran's political history over a few centuries.. Nearly all contemporary accounts of these great historical figures have been satisfied with a simple reference to "despotism" when describing the politics of these men, whereas contemporaneous accounts use phrases such as "bloodthirsty" in their descriptions, which are far more representative of their actual personality. Today, the science of personality disorders enables us to gain a much better understanding of the personality of these kings, by allowing us to identify signs of narcissistic, antisocial and paranoid personality disorders in their actions. Here, we will provide just a brief outline of the similarities between the Safavid style of government with that of Mongol and Timurid.

Similarities between the stories related about Genghis Khan, Timur and Shah Esmā'il provide evidence of the historical interconnectedness and continuation of the Mongol style barbarity during the Safavid era. For example, according to similar myths, Genghis as described in the *Tārikh-e serri*, Timur as described by Ibn Arabashha's (d. 853/1450) in his biography, *Aja'ib al-maqdur fi nawa'ib* and Shah Esmā'il as described Abu'l-Hasan Qazvini (d. ca. 972/1565) in his *Tārikh-e Ilchi-ye Nezām Shah* and *Favā'ed-e Safaviyyeh*, are each portrayed as holding a clot of blood in their hands at the time of birth.<sup>68</sup>

Referring to the early days of the Safavid dynasty, Safa states how "the founding of the Safavid dynasty from the very start was based on the kind of cruelty and bloodshed which occasionally bordered on the barbarous and bestial".<sup>69</sup>

Of course, there is no shortage of histories of cruel and sadistic kings in all- countries, including that of pre-Mongol Iran. However, our focus here is on the transformative effects of such behaviour, the unprecedented increase in the qualitative and quantitative levels of these cruelties, their systematic continuation and, ultimately, the decisive role they played in shaping Iran's history after the Mongol invasions.

One of the most savage atrocities committed after the Mongol invasions in Iran was the massacre of thousands of Sunnis by Shah Esmā'il in order to force the population to convert to Shia Islam. Supported by the *Qizilbash* in his belief that he was the promised Mahdi and the

<sup>68</sup> Manouchehr Pasadoust, *Shah Esmā'il-e Avval: pādshahi bā asarhā-ye dirpā dar Iran va Irani* (Tehran, 1381/2002), 762.

<sup>69</sup> Safa, *Tārikh-e adabiyāt*, 5: 96.

spiritual embodiment of prophets and imams on Earth, he carried out his murderous policies against Sunnis<sup>70</sup>

The most dramatic evidence for the increase in the more sadistic types of cruelty in Iran can be found in the widespread adoption of the Mongol tradition of cannibalism as a means of seeking revenge. From the advent of Islam until before the Mongol invasions, there is not even a single recorded case of cannibalism in Iran, which is strictly forbidden in Islam. However, many eyewitness accounts have survived of Mongols cooking and eating the flesh from the corpses of their enemies, especially those who had been accused of betrayal. This is something they did to generate and spread terror. According to the reports of the Dominican monk, Simon of St. Quentin, an envoy of Pope Innocent IV to the Mongol imperial court who had visited Armenia and north western regions of Iran during his travels in 644/1247, the Mongols engaged in cannibalism for any one of the following three reasons: “out of necessity, for sheer pleasure, and to instill terror in their enemies.”<sup>71</sup> There are also a number of references to cannibalism in the histories of the Ilkhanate.<sup>72</sup>

According to Parsadoust, Shah Esma’il was the first post-Mongol king and also the first of the Safavid rulers to introduce the Mongol tradition of cannibalism in Iran.<sup>73</sup> This form of punishment was also to continue in the court of Shah Abbas. An example of this can be found in the accounts of the Italian Carmelite monk, Paul Simon, a member of the diplomatic mission dispatched in 1604 by Pope Clement VIII to the court of Shah Abbas, in which he provides a detailed description of the kind of punishment meted out by the king to those found guilty before him: “The sentence which he gives is final and is immediately executed...to this end, when he gives audience, twelve dogs and twelve men, who devour men alive, are kept ready: he keeps them to use the greater severity.”<sup>74</sup> This barbaric punishment in his court has also been documented by Iranian sources.<sup>75</sup>

Shah Abbas is generally regarded as the greatest Iranian king of post-Islamic Iran by virtue of his accomplishments in creating a stable and united Iran, bringing about economic prosperity and a great flowering in the arts and architecture. But even his rule rested on *yasa* culture. He blinded and killed his own sons out of paranoid fears about their loyalty and thereby reinforced a tradition amongst his descendants which marked the start of the decline of the Safavid dynasty

<sup>70</sup> Eskandar Beg Monshi, *Tārikh-e ālamārā-ye Abbāsi*, ed. Iraj Afshar (Tehran, 1363/1984), 64-65.

<sup>71</sup> Peter Jackson, “Medieval Christendom’s encounter with the alien,” *Historical Research*, 74(186) (2001): 363.

<sup>72</sup> Reuven Amitai-Preiss, *Mongols and Mamluks* (Cambridge, 1995), 177.

<sup>73</sup> Parsadoust, *Shah Esmā’il*, 233, 239.

<sup>74</sup> *A Chronicle of the Carmelites in Persia, and the Papal Mission of the XVIIth and XVIIIth Centuries*, ed. H. Chick, 2 vols. (London, 1939), 1: 159. The original text reads “twelve dogs and twelve men [? sic], who devour men alive.” It is not clear if the “[? sic]” has been inserted by the translator or editor, but either way, it reveals a sense of incredulity at the cannibalism which it clearly refers to.

<sup>75</sup> Nasr Allah Falsafi, *Zendigi-ye Shah Abbās-e Avval*, 5 vols. (Tehran, 1371/1992), 1: 46-87.

Safa has provided more examples of the common types of punishments which were meted out in the court of Shah Abbas, including:

Boiling the condemned in hot oil or wrapping them in a cloak covered in gunpowder then setting fire to the poor wretches, or ripping open their bellies, skinning them alive, chopping off their hands and feet, piercing their eyes with nails, cutting off their nose and ears, pouring molten lead in their throats, cutting off their tongues, skewering their bodies, stuffing their skin with straw, hanging their bodies on a gibbet on the gates of the town...and similar types of gruesome acts.<sup>76</sup>

The Safavid rule which had been specially oppressive against the Afghans was finally overthrown by the traumatizing Afghan armies. This in turn heralded a new devastating period of anarchy, chaos and destruction throughout the 18th century in the country, which experienced the brutal conquests and rule of Nader Shah and Agha Mohammad Khan Qajar.

*The continuing effects of the Mongol catastrophe on Iran's social history*

The pernicious influence of some 200 years of invasions, conquests, wars, plunders and brutal rule of the Mongols, the Ilkhanids and Timur on the social history of Iran has been no less than that on its political history. The catastrophic Mongol invasions exposed Iranian society to a profound trauma which turned it into a hotbed of social and cultural unrest which was largely responsible for the emergence of future despotic rulers in Iran.

The Mongol victories, procured through adherence to *yasa* principles, and the repeat of those *yasa* inspired victories by Timur and Shah Esma'il, instilled certain significant cultural tribal characteristics such as black and white thinking and "insider" versus "outsider" mentality deep in the heart of the Iranian psyche, with inevitable consequences for every type of relationship in society. On the basis of the findings of modern psychology, we may postulate that these modes of thinking went hand in hand with an increase in the traces of narcissistic and borderline personality disorders as described earlier.

The most prominent expression of the ascendancy of the tribal mentality of the Mongols in Iranian society and the transformative effect of this mindset on the social history of Iran can be seen in the centuries-long Haydari and Ni'mati conflicts which first surfaced from at least the start of the Safavid era. Cities right across Iran became divided along enemy Haydari and Ni'mati lines. However, unlike the pre-Mongol Shafi'ite and Hanafite conflicts which were driven by doctrinal and religious differences and centered around rivalries over control of assets and resources, the Haydaris and Ni'matis, who had long been followers of the Shi'a school from Safavid times, fought each other not for any material, religious or tribal reasons, but solely on account of their differing identities. They repeatedly and systematically took part in fights with

<sup>76</sup> Safa, *Tārikh-e adabiyāt*, 5: 103.

whatever weapons they could lay their hands on, be it clubs and sticks, bows and arrows or swords and guns. During these battles, many were killed and many more still were injured. In recent years, an extensive and thorough investigation of these conflicts has been started by the Iranian historian Hossein Mirjafari.<sup>77</sup>

In 1571, Vincentio d'Alessandri, the Venetian ambassador to Iran who was visiting Tabriz at the time, reported:

The city [Tabriz] is divided into two factions, one called Nausitai and the other Himicaivartu, which comprehend the nine municipal districts, five in one and four in the other, and all the citizens about twelve thousand in number. These factions had always been in enmity, and slaughtered each other every day, nor could the king or any others put a stop to it, as the hatred between them had lasted more than thirty years.<sup>78</sup>

A century later, the situation in Tabriz is confirmed by Sir John Chardin, a French jeweler who traveled extensively throughout Iran and was at one point even appointed royal merchant at the court of Shah Abbas. In the account of his travels, Chardin observed that the “whole of Persia” was divided into these two factions, and that:

The City of Isfahan is divided into two quarters, one called Jubarah-yi Ni'matullahi, facing east, and the other called Dar-i dasht-i Haydariyyah, facing west....These two quarters...are really two factions, which comprise the suburbs and the territory of the city.<sup>79</sup>

According to Mirjafari, the Ni'mati and Haydari fights took place regularly during religious holidays, especially Muharram, and also on games and sporting occasions such as cock-fighting, which were conducted with special ceremony.<sup>80</sup> For example, there is an account first reported towards the end of the nineteenth century that from Safavid times in Isfahan on the annual Islamic holy day of Feast of Sacrifice (*'id-i-qurban*), large crowds of Ni'matis and Haydaris, each group numbering than a thousand, would set off in a procession from the outskirts of the city towards the main square, *Maidan-e Naqsheh Jahan*, engage in clashes at the intersections

<sup>77</sup> Hossein Mirjafari, “The Haydari-Ni'mati conflicts in Iran,” *Iranian Studies*, 12, no. 3-4 (1979): 135-62.

<sup>78</sup> “Narrative of the Most Noble Vicentio D'Alessandri,” in *A Narrative of Italian Travels in Persia*, trans. Charles Gray, (London, 1873), ser. 1, vol. 49, 224. D'Alessandri's transcriptions of Iranian names are not always immediately recognisable but can be easily guessed at: here, *Nausitai* and *Himicaivartu* clearly refer to the Ni'mati and Haydari factions. Elsewhere in his narratives, D'Alessandri has rendered Qazvin as *Carbin*, Khurasan as *Curassam*, and Tabriz as *Tauris*.

<sup>79</sup> John Chardin, *Voyages de monsieur le Chevalier Chardin en Perse et autre lieux de l'Orient*, 10 vols, vol. 2 (Amsterdam, 1711), 316, quoted in John Perry, “Toward a Theory of Iranian Urban Moieties: The Haydariyyah and Nimatiyyah Revisited,” *Iranian Studies*, 32, no. 1 (1999): 52.

<sup>80</sup> Mirjafari, “Conflicts in Iran,” 146.



and come to blows during the dividing of the sacrificial meat. As a result, up to forty or fifty people were injured and three or four were killed every year.<sup>81</sup>

In sheer magnitude and intensity, such conflicts are entirely without precedent in pre-Mongol accounts of Iran and are almost certainly the products of the post-Mongol and post-Timur eras. One may therefore surmise that such violent and apparently baseless confrontations between the Ni'matis and Haydaris was a means of casting out inner pain and anger reverberating in their psyche from the trauma of the Mongol attacks. This seems to indicate a deep and profound hurt and anger in the shape of a negative and destructive energy implanted in people's souls which had to find a regular means of escape. It was indeed through such battles that these feelings found an outlet as the participants were able to vent them on the opposing faction. The confrontations between the Ni'matis and Haydaris were the result of the aforementioned binary thinking which made these two groups view the world in simple black and white terms, or in "Ni'mati" and "Haydari" terms. Evidence of traits of borderline, narcissistic, antisocial and paranoid personality disorders can be detected in these attitudes, as well as in the particular style of confrontations they led to.

In fact, belonging to identifiable opposing groups such as the Ni'matis and Haydaris and engaging the enemy group in battle, holds a special attraction for individuals who, as a result of exposure to trauma and the resultant instability and inner insecurity, feel a need for the kind of patriarchal support from their own group which might give them a sense of security and a feeling of belonging. By venting their inner rage on the rival camp, these traumatized individuals can gain a sense of security, albeit a false one, amongst their like-minded members.

The Haydari-Ni'mati conflicts are perhaps the most singular feature of Iran's social history from the Timurid to the Pahlavi eras. These apparently senseless conflicts reflect a tendency amongst Iranians to fight each other over the most insignificant matters and nullities and, culturally speaking, represent one of the most significant historical consequences and reenactments of the Mongol catastrophe in Iran's social history. .

#### *Decline of science and philosophy and the rise of intellectual ossification and tribal thinking*

In the early periods of the Ilkhanate rule, the survival of the class of mathematicians, scholars, philosophers and learned men who had centuries-long antecedents in Iran was not in question. What is more, the study of certain scientific and intellectual subjects, by virtue of their own specializations, was actively encouraged by a number of the Ilkhanid rulers. Here, it is necessary to single out two important cases, namely historiography and astronomy (and certain mathematical disciplines supplemental to the latter).

In the first case, the Ilkhanids who, from the very start, wished to have their names recorded in the annals of history for posterity, encouraged their Iranian ministers to undertake the

<sup>81</sup> Mirza Hossein Khan Tahvildar, *Joghrafiyā-ye Isfahān*, ed. Manouchehr Sotudeh (Tehran, 1342/1963), 88-89, translation in Mehdi Keyvani, *Artisans and Guild Life in the Later Safavid Period: Contributions to the Social-Economic History of Persia* (Berlin, 1982), 259-62.

writing of history. It was in fact during this period that Iranian historians first began to write history in Farsi. Juvaini's *Tārikh-e Jahāngoshā*, "The History of the World Conqueror", written during the reign of Hulegu Khan, and, more importantly still, the *Jāme' al-tawārikh*, "Compendium of Histories" of Rashid al-Din Fazl Allah from the Ghazanid period, are generally regarded as some of the most important sources of world history from the Middle Ages. In the second case, the Ilkhanids, due to their superstitious shamanic beliefs in divination and foretelling the future using astrolabe (*ostorlāb*), from the very beginning lent their patronage to Iranian scientists in the fields of astronomy and computational mathematics.<sup>82</sup> As a result, these particular sciences continued to advance from this period until the end of the Timurid era. This is in particular evidenced by the establishment of the observatory in Maragheh, the major scientific discoveries of Nasir al-Din Tusi in developing models of the solar system which a few centuries later formed the basis of the revolutionary Copernican heliocentric cosmology, which replaced Earth with the sun as the center of the universe, and the major advances made by Iranian mathematicians during this period in the field of computational sciences, notably, Ghiyath al-Din Jamshid Kashi (d. ca. 832/1429) in the reign of Timur's grandson, Ulugh Beg (d. 852/1449).

But such examples are uncommon. The mortal blow delivered by the Mongol catastrophe to the totality of scientific studies, philosophy and rationalism in Iran was commensurate with its highly detrimental influence on Iran's socio-political history. In the end, a number of decisive factors following the Mongol invasions gradually cut off the lifeblood to the scientific environment of the Golden Age which had already been weakened by the ascendancy of the Turkic dynasties. Destruction of cities, libraries, schools and academies through repeated attacks by the Mongols, the disappearance of the surviving generation of scientists and thinkers through death or exodus to India and western regions of the Muslim world, caused a drastic and comprehensive decline in scientific and philosophic activities in Iran.

The complete conquest of Iran by Hulegu Khan, including his overthrow of the Isma'ilis, the patrons of scientists and philosophers, and the domination of the Ilkhanids with their highly primitive superstitious beliefs which can be traced back to the semi-barbaric Mongols, inflicted a death blow to the cultural foundations of scholarship and rationalism in Iran. Safa has made the following observation in this regard:

Mongol habits and traditions such as belief in evil spirits and the latter's sway over worldly affairs, fear of sorcery and sorcerers, belief in divination and omens such as thunder and lightning, reliance on incantations and spells for mastery of the material world and the like all gradually passed on from the conquerors to the conquered.<sup>83</sup>

From a long-term historical perspective, the Mongol attacks put an end to the presence of a nurturing environment for scientific progress. The widespread devastation of towns and

<sup>82</sup> *Astrolabe* was a medieval astronomical instrument used in measuring the altitude of the planets for use in astronomical problems, as well as making astrological predictions.

<sup>83</sup> Safa, *Tārikh-e adabiyyāt*, 3: 82.

villages, the sustained blows to agriculture, as well as widespread economic collapse, together produced a long-term decline in social production and income across Iran. Due to the dramatic decrease in social wealth, merely being able to survive in society was a challenge. This was a development which objectively bolstered conservatism and stymied efforts towards inquiry and innovation.

The most prominent victim in this development was scientific activity which came to a complete halt during this period as a result of the historical trends resulting from the Mongol attacks, namely a decrease in urbanization, predominance of tribal culture in social and economic life, psychological trauma prevalent in society, the preponderance of the primitive tribal mentality of the Mongol, Turkmen and Turkish dynasties which governed Iran until the twentieth century. This scientific collapse was in contrast to and differed substantially from the brilliant creative accomplishments in art, literature, mysticism and architecture of the Ilkhanid, Timurid and Safavid periods. This is a crucial difference which requires special consideration and which we will turn to next.

In recent decades, research carried out on the psychology of creativity in different professions, has shown how, in comparative terms, innovation in scientific disciplines such as astronomy, physics and chemistry demands a much higher level of internal and emotional stability than is needed for creativity in literature and the arts. Scientific work requires a very high degree of logical, objective and formal expression and scientists “tend to be more emotionally stable than those in professions that require more intuitive, subjective, and emotive forms.”<sup>84</sup> Early childhood trauma can provide motivation for creative work which also acts as a defense mechanism (hence the prevalence of various art-based therapies for certain victims of trauma).<sup>85</sup> t scientific and philosophic innovations seldom occur when unsettled family and social environments and emotional instability are all present at the same time. That is why a society like Iran’s which has amassed a brilliant cultural heritage from its past, is capable of producing outstanding original work in art, architecture and literature, in spite of exposure to the most severe types of trauma, whilst failing, at the same time, to produce similar results in the fields of science and philosophy.

The psychological trauma experienced by the people of Iran through the Mongol catastrophe and its subsequent reenactments has caused damage to the social fabric of Iran which has proved to be the main obstacle to nurturing science. The prevalence of mistrust and instability in people’s emotions and the primacy of black and white thinking in their responses to nearly all matters not only instigated religious conflicts and incited clashes between opposing social groups such as the Ni’matis and Haydaris, but also fundamentally hindered moves towards scientific creativity and innovation.

<sup>84</sup> Arnold M. Ludwig, “Method and madness in the arts and sciences,” *Creativity Research Journal* 11, no. 2 (1998): 93.

<sup>85</sup> Dean Keith Simonton, *Origins of Genius*, (Oxford University Press, 1999), chap. 4.

This view is echoed by Ibn Khaldun who first describes how, until the Mongol onslaught, the cultivation of the “intellectual sciences” had been the special preserve of Iranians in the “Persian countries, Iraq, Khurasan and Transoxania”:<sup>86</sup>

But when these cities fell into ruins, sedentary culture, which God has devised for the attainment of sciences and crafts, disappeared from them. Along with it, scholarship altogether disappeared from among the non-Arabs (Persians) who were (now) engulfed by the desert attitude. Scholarship was restricted to cities with an abundant sedentary culture. Today, no (city) has amore abundant sedentary culture than Cairo (Egypt). It is the mother of the world, the great centre (*îwân*) of Islam, and the mainspring of the sciences and the crafts.<sup>87</sup>

The absolute decline in scientific activity which took place in Iran and the rest of the Muslim world following the Mongol invasions can be linked directly to the rise in conservative, orthodox thinking, and the tribal and ossified Sufi and religious mentality referred to above. This trend is in fact similar to the Haydari-Ni'mati conflicts which we discussed in the previous section. As a result of their emotional instability and sense of inner insecurity, traumatized people often develop a strong desire for patriarchal or group support which might give them a sense of security and belonging. At the same time, beliefs in universal dogmas and prejudices which seem to provide answers to all questions and problems before any rational investigation, would act as panacea to these feelings. Membership in groups which compete and fight with rival groups can provide traumatized individuals with some feelings of security and belonging, whilst allowing them at the same to pour out their inner anger on rival groups. It is within this framework that we can provide an explanation for protracted battles between the Ni'matis and Haydaris in Iran's cities as well as the conservative and tribal mentality and absolute decline in innovation and scientific creativity in the world of Islam in general.

We must note that despite the fertile political, economic and artistic conditions during the reign of Shah Abbas - and a few decades beyond - which were not qualitatively dissimilar to the prevailing conditions in the Abbasid, Samanid and Buyid courts, Iran during this period did not experience the same kind of scientific and philosophical flowering as in the Golden Age. The essential difference between conditions during the Safavid and those of the Abbasid, Samanid and Buyid periods was the historic trauma engendered by the Mongol catastrophe, which had lodged firmly in the depths of Iran's socio-political spheres. The *yasa*-inspired black and white thinking and intellectual ossification which held sway across all levels of society and across the entire country, and was fundamentally opposed to the formation of a suitable environment for science and rationalism to thrive, simply did not permit that high level of freedom in expression of philosophical and religious beliefs which were such common features of the Golden Age. Even Molla Sadra (d. ca. 1045/1635-36), the greatest thinker of the Safavid era, whose mystical philosophy was the synthesis of the philosophical views of Avicenna, Sohrevardi and Islamic ethics, was subjected to oppressive pressure by the conservatism of the religious leaders at the

<sup>86</sup> Ibn Khaldun, *The Muqaddimah*, 3:314.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*, 315.

Safavid court. From the end of the Timurid period until the modern era, we have only a few examples of prominent figures such as Sheikh-e Baha'i (d. 1030/1621) and Molla Sadra who still cannot compare qualitatively or quantitatively with those from the Golden Age.

### *The New Imperialism and the Contemporary Era*

Unlike Islamic societies in central and western Asia and China, Western Europe and Japan remained out of reach of the Mongol hordes and thus immune from any direct or even indirect harm. These invasions carried out by semi-barbaric tribes are regarded as the most horrific of their kind in recorded human history and the most significant event of the second millennium. They are in fact, historically, the most important distinguishing feature between Western Europe and Islamic territories in Asia, whose influence on the disparate paths of progress followed by the two cannot be underestimated. In reality, unlike Asia, Western Europe, after the end of the first millennium did not come into contact with any semi-barbaric peoples and, was therefore able in time to exploit the scientific and cultural heritage of China, India, and in particular Islamic societies - which were also the conveyors of knowledge from ancient Greece - on their march to the Renaissance and thence to the modern world of science, technology, and culture which ultimately culminated in the Industrial Revolution.

During the neo-colonial period, given the harm it had already suffered, Iran, found itself in a very weak position *vis-à-vis* Western European countries. These countries, armed with scientific and technological advances on the one hand, and expansion in naval and foreign trade, discoveries of new continents and new sea routes on the other, had brought about a new balance of power in international relations. In addition to organizational underdevelopment in science, technology and culture, the psychological damage inflicted by the Mongol catastrophe and its repeated reenactments on the political, social and cultural life of Iran contributed to the country's infirmity in the face of interference, bullying and oppression by Imperialist powers and prevented it from adequately defending its national interest. The most significant example of this is the British invasion and occupation of Iran in the 1<sup>st</sup> World War, the brutal effects of which resulted in a devastating famine. According to some estimates up to half of the population were killed as a result, making Iran one of the greatest victims of the imperialist war.<sup>88</sup>

The influence, interference, politico and economic dominance of British and Russian imperialism in the nineteenth century and the all-encompassing American neocolonialism in the second half of the twentieth century, especially the role played by Britain and America in organizing the 1953 coup against the government of Dr Mosaddeq, and their support of Israel's illegal occupations and expansionist policies may have reawakened memories of the Mongol catastrophe in the collective psyche of this nation, encouraging the victim versus assailant mentality in the Iranian social persona. An obvious source of justification for the national sense of resignation and helplessness further entrenched such feelings. It follows that the pursuit of

<sup>88</sup> Mohammad Gholi Majd, *The Great Famine and Genocide in Persia, 1917-1919*, (University Press of America, 2003).

domination and influence by foreign powers poses a serious problem for the people of Iran as it prevents a suitable environment for reviewing their past history and inner trauma.

Ever since the Constitutional Revolution, the people of Iran have time and again displayed a searching and consistent resolve in their extensive efforts towards solving this country's historic problems. Yet, despite the tremendous advances made in the past one hundred years, especially in gaining national independence, the cultural vestiges of the Mongol catastrophe and its repeated reenactment in Iran's political and social history continue to remain at the heart of the intractable problems and serious divisions in this country. Ultimately, this is what has prevented meaningful and effective co-operation, social cohesion and unity of purpose on matters of public and national interest such as rule of law, greater people power, social, political, economic, cultural and scientific progress amongst Iranians. There are still persistent traces of mistrust, inner insecurity and instability, black and white thinking, idealization and vilification, low tolerance for difficulties, narcissistic tendencies, anger and extremism in the Iranian social persona which remain the greatest impediments to co-operation and collective action amongst its people. It is these features which lie at the heart of Iranian society's divisions and which prevent Iran from realizing its fullest potential.

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