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# From Reception to Aversion:

The Dissemination of Iranian  
Intellectual Thought in the Malay-  
Indonesian World

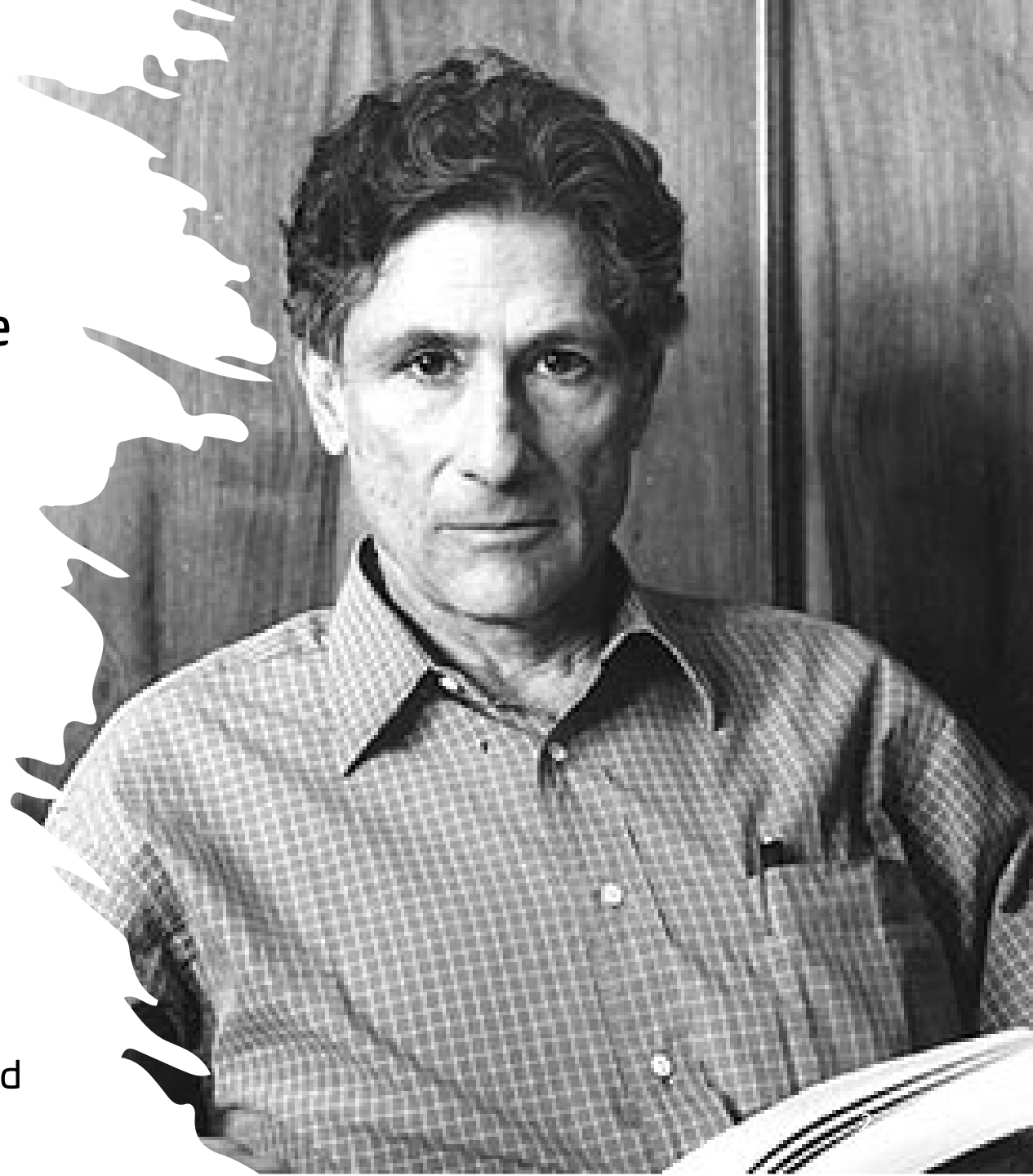
Dr Azhar Ibrahim  
Department of Malay Studies  
National University of Singapore



**NUS**  
National University  
of Singapore

“Like peoples and schools of criticism, ideas and theories travel, from person to person, from situation to situation, and from one period to another. Cultural and intellectual life are usually nourished and often sustained by this circulation of ideas, and whether it takes the form of acknowledged or unconscious influence, creative borrowing, or wholesome appropriation, the movement of ideas and theories from one place to another is both a fact of life and a usefully enabling condition of intellectual activity.”

Edward Said



- In the bibliographic and translation register of contemporary Muslim discourse in the region it is not uncommon to encounter the variants of Iranian thinkers ranging from Ayatollah Khomeini, Ali Syariati, Murthada Muthahari, Syed Hossein Nasr, Ali Tabata'i, and in later decades includes Mohammad Khatami, Abdol Karim, Mohsen Kadivar, Mir Ziba Hosseini and few others.
- The Iranian discourses enter the local scene via translation, conferences, and academic research.
- The types of Iranian thinkers' ideas which gained prominence .
- It inform us on the development of Malay-Indonesian intellectual and religious thought. While in the past many of the above-mentioned Iranian thinkers were seen as part of the global Muslim intellectuals and religious icons
- Today the reception is rather less robust especially with the rise of anti-Shiite rhetoric. An even aversion to Iranian intellectual works.
- The need to account for this shifting trend is imperative to assess the flow of ideas inasmuch as the dynamics of religious and intellectual thought in the region.

# Endeared and Cited....

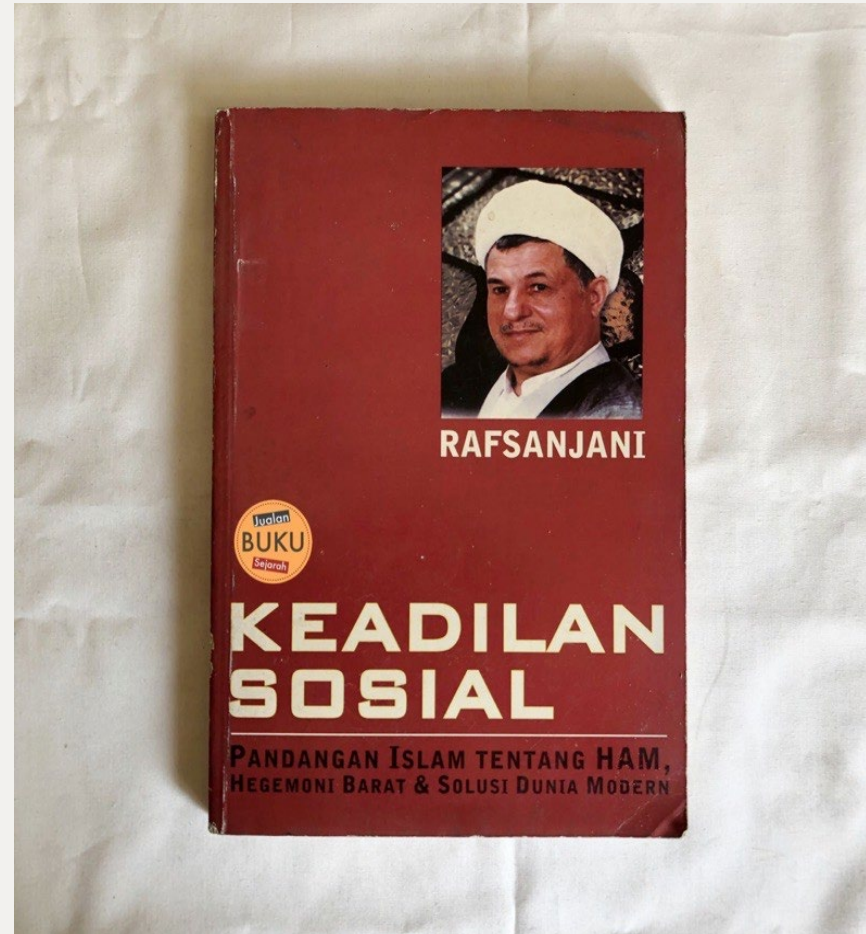


# Cited and commended

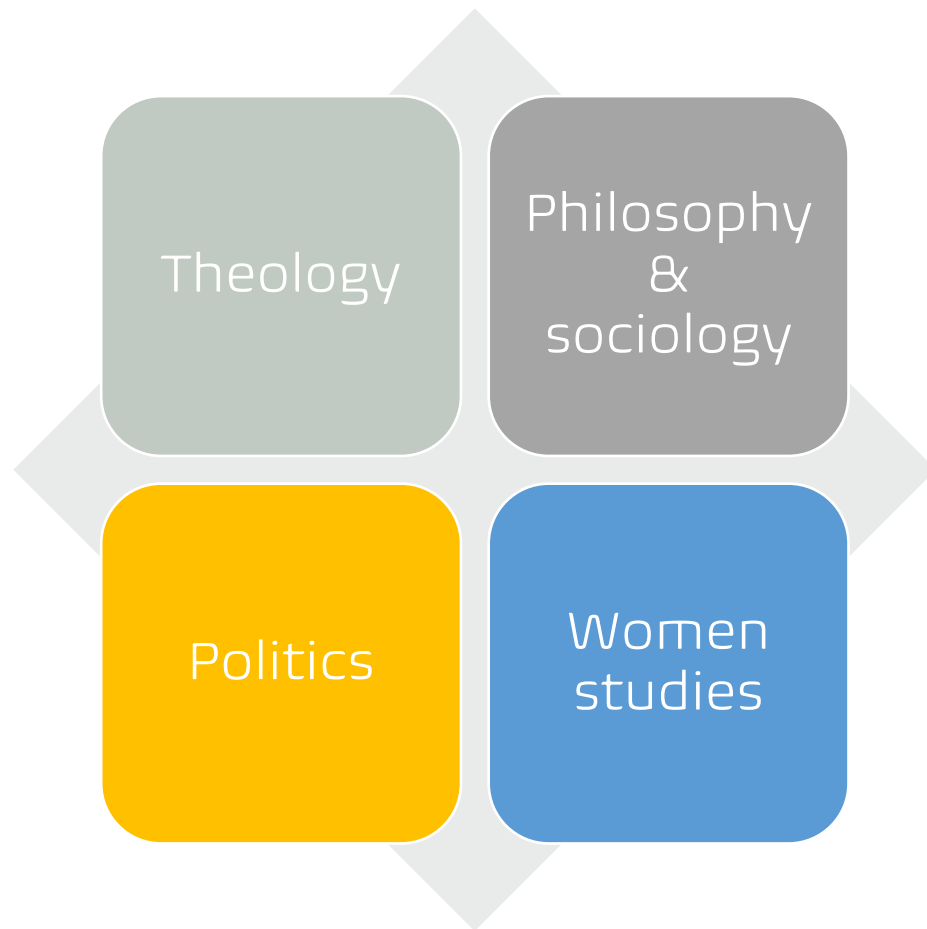




# Used to be popular.....



# Type of discourse enters Malay-Indonesian works



# Ideas come and go.....

- Over the decades, there have been a number of ideas and ideology that made its way to the Malay-Indonesian region.
- From the Muslim world, we saw the arrival of Ideas of Muslim Brotherhood from Egypt, Jamaati Islami and Tabligh from the Indian subcontinent, Wahabism from Hijaz, and later Turkish Islam ( Nursian, Gulen and Erdoganism ). From the Iranian world, which had a long historical and cultural influence in the archipelagic culture of Nusantara, the modern Iranian intellectual thought provides another boost to the local discursive corpus
- In many ways, the difference between these ideas with those coming from Iranian intellectual circles is the fact of its diverse intellectual affiliations and its continuity. While those above no longer had its appeal, this is not the case for the Iranian thought.
- Iranian intellectuals especially Shariati and Mutahhari have generated strong and consistent interest amongst Southeast Asian Muslim activists, academics and researchers.
- While interest on Ikhawnul Muslim and Maududian ideas dissipate over the years, Shariati and Mutahhari still gain some attraction. – although Iranian intellectual culture and figures gained less enthusiastic reception in recent years as compared to a few decades ago.



# The Flowering Reception: Factors that account for the interest in Iranian thought

1. The era of Islamic revivalism since 1970s
2. The enthusiasm for reformism
3. The opening of Islamic institute of higher learning
4. The role of leading local intellectuals in reading and promoting works of Iranian
5. Translation and book productions
6. Globalising contemporary Islamic thought
7. The affinity to global south experience
8. The search of critical scholarship on Islam
9. The appeal of Iranian intellectual thought to locals—a tradition different that what they are familiar with

# The Rising Aversion Why?

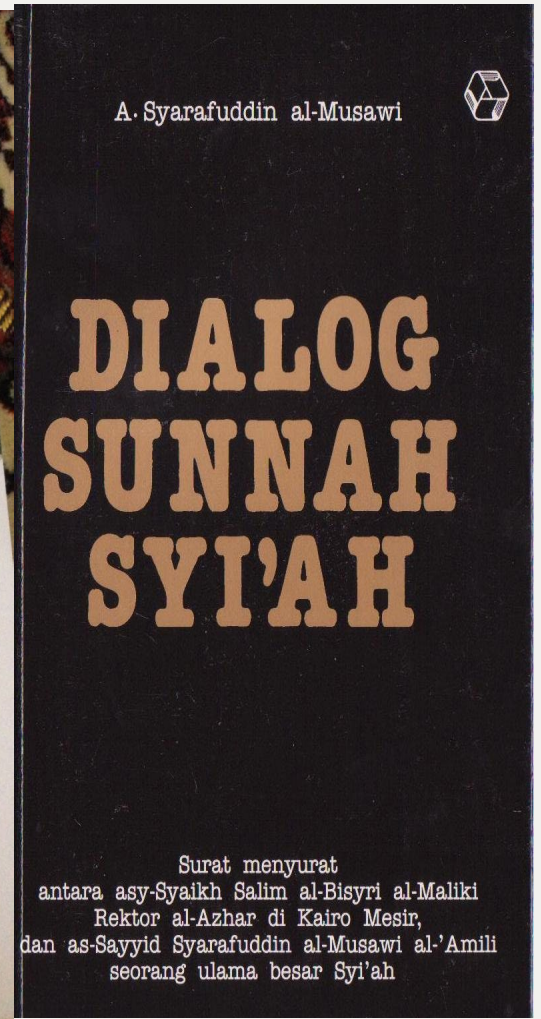
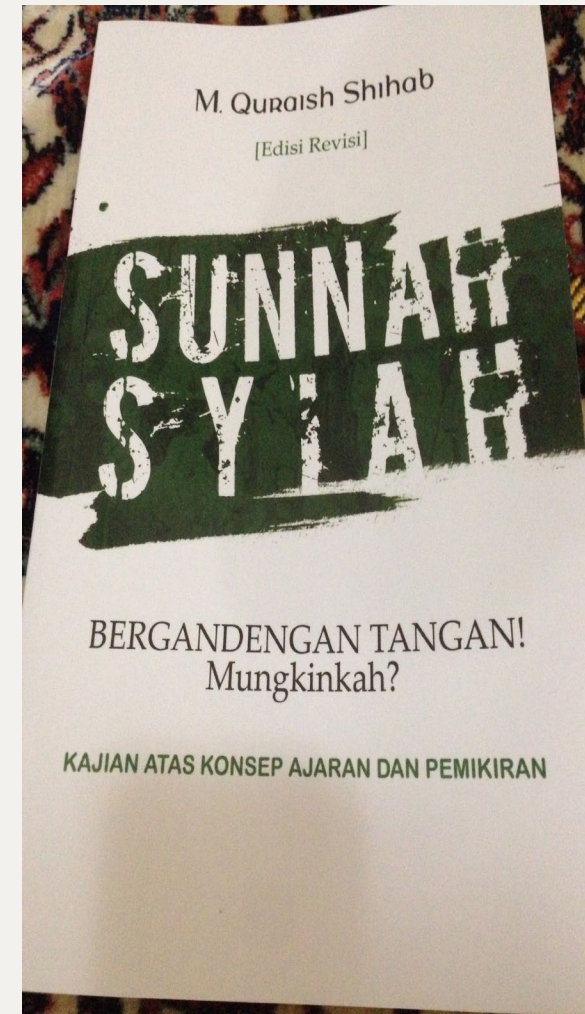
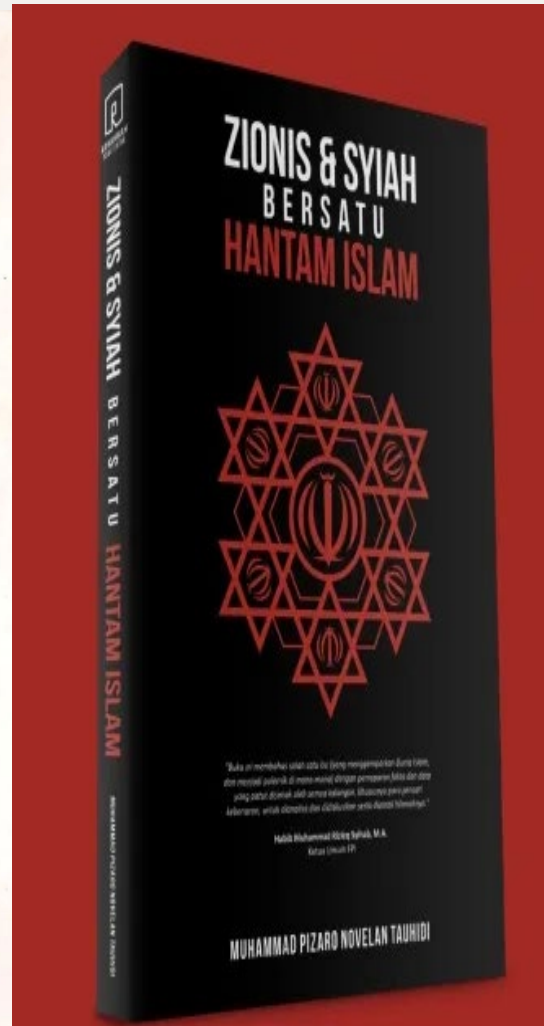
1. The increasing anti Shiite rhetorics and the curb of Shittes -- The gazing on the Shiites
2. The abated enthusiasm on the idea of an Islamic state
3. The competing traditions – several players in the market of ideas; Salafism, Sufis, and Turkish circles
4. Relative absence of leading Indonesian/Malaysian intellectuals in spearheading the discourse
5. The internal dynamics of academia ( less interest in emancipative endeavours )
6. The slow pace of translation and discursive interest generally

# More aversion.....





# Competing Narratives





**Orang yang masih  
mempertentangkan  
SUNNI - SYIAH  
adalah orang yang  
"LAHIR TERLAMBAT"**

**Prof Dr Quraisy Shihab  
Penulis Tafsir al Misbah**



# Admiration

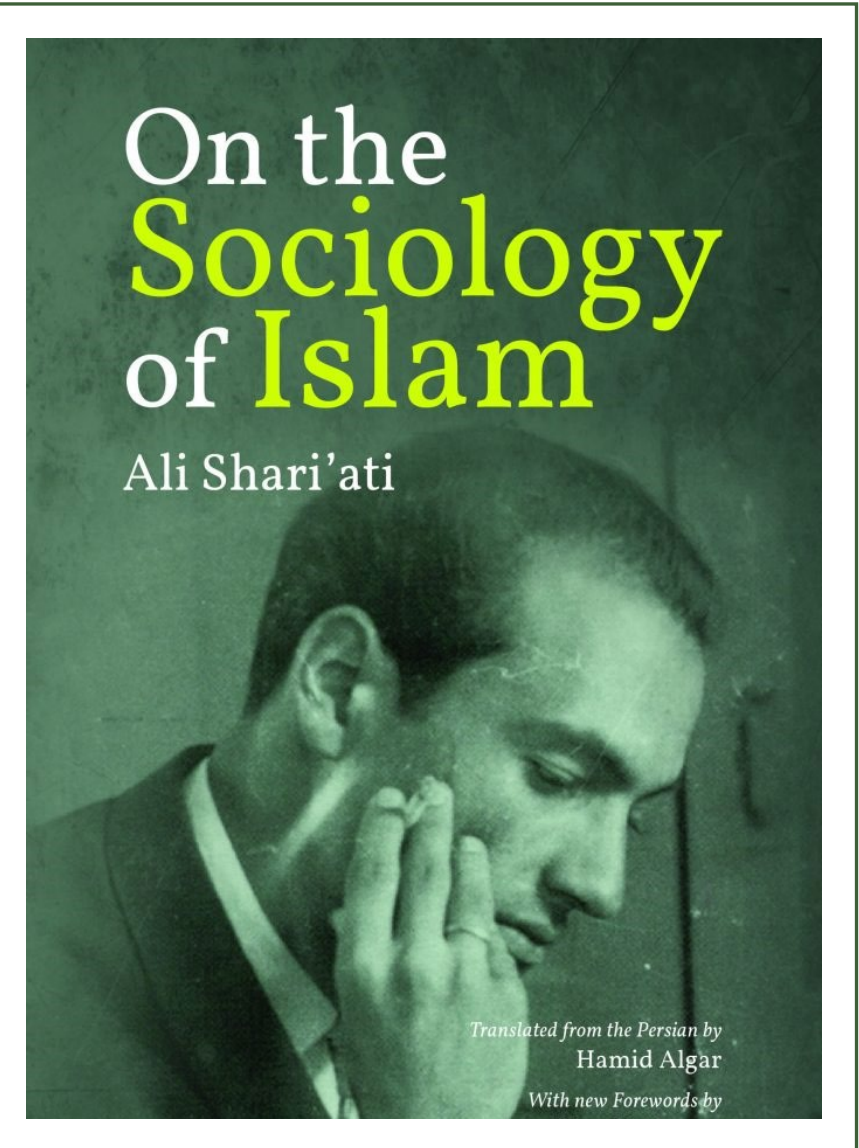
Iranian thinkers and scholars, apparently don't gain any recognition and interest in Malay intellectual scene, as compared to Indonesia. The observation by TM Shahrom is apt:

"Pemikiran. Monammed Arkoun, Muhammad Baqir Sadr, Murtadha Mutahhari dan 'Hassan Hanafi daripada tradisi intelektual Islam Peranchis dan Iran amat luas divacanakan di Indonesia. Kehadiran buku karangan pemikir-pemikir tersebut mendapat sambutan luar biasa dan menjadi best-seller. **Tradisi intelektual Iran atau Parsi memang mempunyai sejarah tradisi keilmuan yang cukup cermelang. Kedua tradisi itu, dari segi konteks sejarahnya, amat memberi penghargaan yang tinggi kepada pengajian ilmu falsafah sama ada yang "Islamik" atau sebaliknya.** Di Malaysia, pemikiran Ali Syariati dan Prof. Seyyed Hoessein Nasr agak dikenali kerana karya-karya mereka yang diterjemahkan tetapi pemikiran Murthada Mutahhari. Muhammad Baqir Sadr, Muhammad Taqi Misbah dan lain-lain lagi masih menjadi nama yang asing. Misalnya, karya Muhammad Baqir Sadr seperti Falsafatuna atau karya Muttahhari, iaitu Pengantar Logik, kita akan berasa sentuhan intelektual dengan kehebatan pembahasan-pembahasan yang segar dan bernas. Kita akan terpegun kerana pemikiran-pemikiran in lahir daripada tangan golongan "Ayatullah" yang dari segi tradisionalnya hanya seorang ulama. Mereka membincangkan ekonomi atau falsafah peringkat tinggi. Mungkin juga kita tidak menjangka bahawa sudah banyak buku falsafah dan dialog peradaban ditulis oleh Mohammad Khatami (mantan Presiden Iran). Hal ini belum lagi didedahkan kepada karya-karya ulama klasik mereka seperti Al-Amuli, Mulla Sadra dan Mir Damad yang menulis berjilid-jilid buku. Di Iran, tradisi keilmuan mash terpelihara dengan baik, kitab-kitab lama masih diajarkan dan dikaji, bahkan turut dikritik khususnya di institusi pengajian tradisional. Kritikan-kritikan itu lahir daripada pemikiran baharu dan pemikiran baharu itu pula bukan "dimport" dari luar bahkan bertolak dari tradisi itu juga"



# Significant contributions:

- Blending Theology and social sciences are possible
- Study of ideology and philosophy are imperative
- The language of empowerment, activism and struggle against injustices and hegemonic power
- Tradition and modernity can be blended, recreated, reinterpreted
- Enhancing the gender discourse
- Enlarge the bibliographic imagination and encounter – translated works added to the growing intellectual corpus





## 1. Malay Studies at NUS

Exposure to students on the thoughts of Ali Shariati, and readings by Murthada Mutahari and Sermons and letters of Ali (Najhul Balaghah)

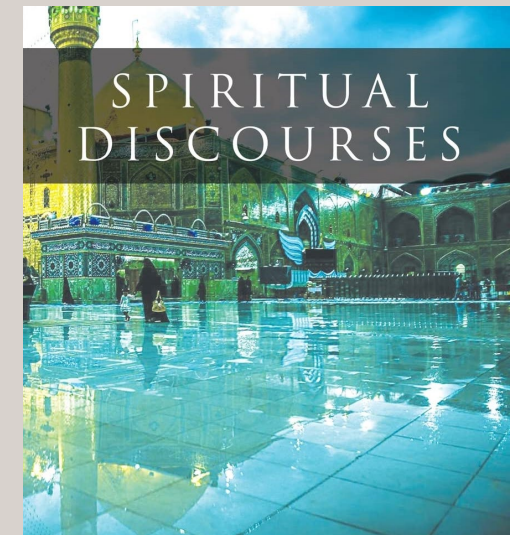
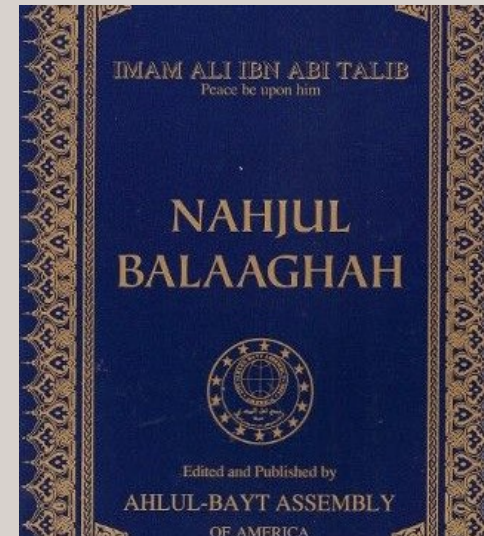
2. Public forums from progressive NGOs – Islamic Renaissance Front ( IRF) and Sisters in Islam Seminar on Ali Shariati by IRF

## 3. Translation of works

a. Shariati's *Fatimah: Kisah Perjuangan Puteri Rasullah*. Translated by Wan Abdul Manan Wan Muda. KL: Ikraq, 1993

b. Shariati's *Agama Lawan Agama*. Translated by Ahmad Nabil Amir, KL: IRF, 2017.

4. Religious Discoursing which made reference to the ideas of Shariati, Abdol Karim Soroush





# Books, and Book Chapters

- Mohd Nasir Hashim, *Memperkasakan Rakyat: Analisis dan Perjuangan*. KL: PSM Centre, 2016.
- Aina Wafi Ab Kadir, *Kisah-Kisah Melawan Dalam Al Quran*. KL: Thukul Cetak, 2017.

## Articles:

1. Abdul Muiz, Pandangan Falsafah Islam Ayatullah Murtadha Mutahhari, Jurnal UNISZA
2. Azhar Ibrahim, "Intelektualisme Profetik: Gagsan Ali Shariati untuk Pembaharuan dan Pembebasan," in Ahmad Farouk Musa (ed.) *Antologi Seminar Pemikiran Reformis*. KL: IRF, 2019
3. Maszlee Malik, "Memahami Dimensi Sosio-Spiritual Ibadah Haji Melalui Kacamata Dr Ali Shariati," in Ahmad Farouk Musa (ed.) *Antologi Seminar Pemikiran Reformis*. KL: IRF, 2019
4. Teo Lee Ken, "Ali Shariati and Ethical Humanism: Conceiving a Perspective of Liberative Social Ethics," *Ali Shariati and the Future of Social Theory* (ed. D J Byrd & Syed Javad Miri) Chicag: Haymarket Books, 2018
5. Teo Lee Ken, Justice in the Social Thought of Syed Hussein Alatas and Ali Shariati in Syed Farid Alatas & Abdolreza Alami (eds.) *The*
6. *Civilisational and Cultural Heritage of Iran and The Malay World:*
7. *A Cultural Discourse*, Petaling Jaya: Gerakbudaya, 2018
8. Chandra Muzaffar, "Understanding Ali Shariati's Political Thought" *Ali Shariati and the Future of Social Theory* (ed. D J Byrd & Syed Javad Miri) Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2018
9. Ahmad Nabil Amir, "Ali Shariati dan Idealisme Perjuangannya," *Wacana Pemikiran Refromis Jilid I*, KL: IRF, 2012



# Women Studies

- Advocates' Corner Series: Reflections on Ziba Mir-Hosseini's 'Journeys Toward Gender Equality in Islam'
- SIS and Musawah  
<https://www.musawah.org/blog/advocates-corner-series-reflections-on-ziba-mir-hosseinis-journeys-toward-gender-equality-in-islam/>



# Comparative Studies: On Alatas and Shariati

- Esmaeil Zeiny, "Spokesmen of Intellectual Decolonization: Shariati in Dialogue with Alatas," In Dustin J. Byrd & Seyed Javad Miri (eds.) *Shariati and the Future of Social Sciences: Religion, Revolution and the Role of the Intellectual* Brill: Leiden. 2017. pp.64-84.
- Afsaneh Tavassoli & Teo Lee Ken, "Islamic feminist political narratives, reformist Islamic thought, and its discursive challenges in contemporary Iran," *Inter-Asia Cultural Studies* Volume 22, 2021 - Issue 1

# Interviews

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- Pencerahan & Falsafah dalam Islam . "Temu bual Bersama Abdol Karim Soroush," in *Kerohanian & Pencerahan*. KL: Institut Kajian Dasar, 2007
- Farish A Noor, Interview with Abdul Karim Soroush, "Responsibilities of the Muslim Intellectual in the 21st Century" in *Crosscurrents Alternative Voices in our Changing Times*. KL: Marshall Cavendish, 2005



**CROSSCURRENTS**  
ALTERNATIVE VOICES IN OUR CHANGING TIMES

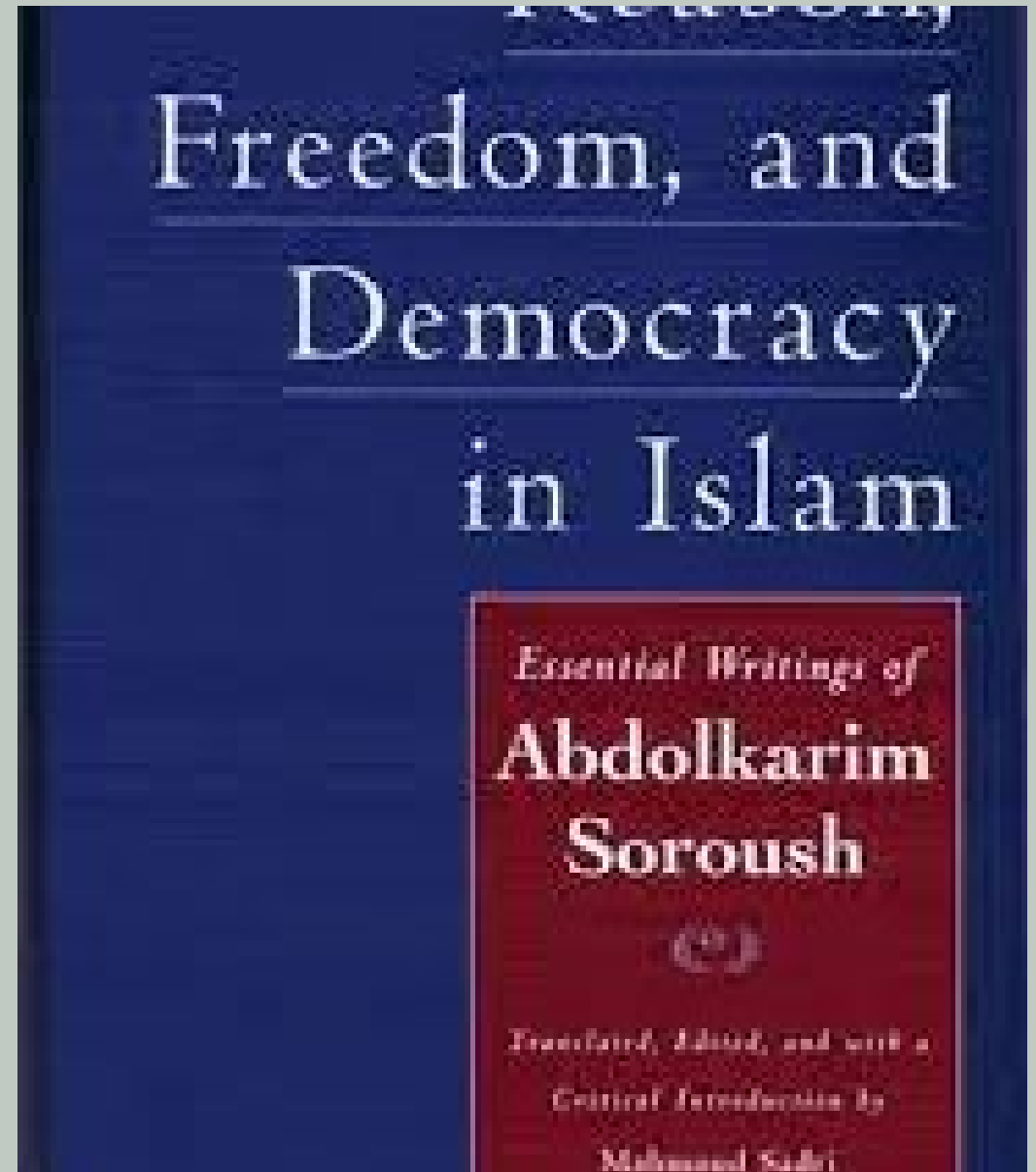
Farish A. Noor

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Farish Noor's interview with Soroush, noting his bleak assessment that Muslim world needs critical and creative mind to engage modern and traditional dogma

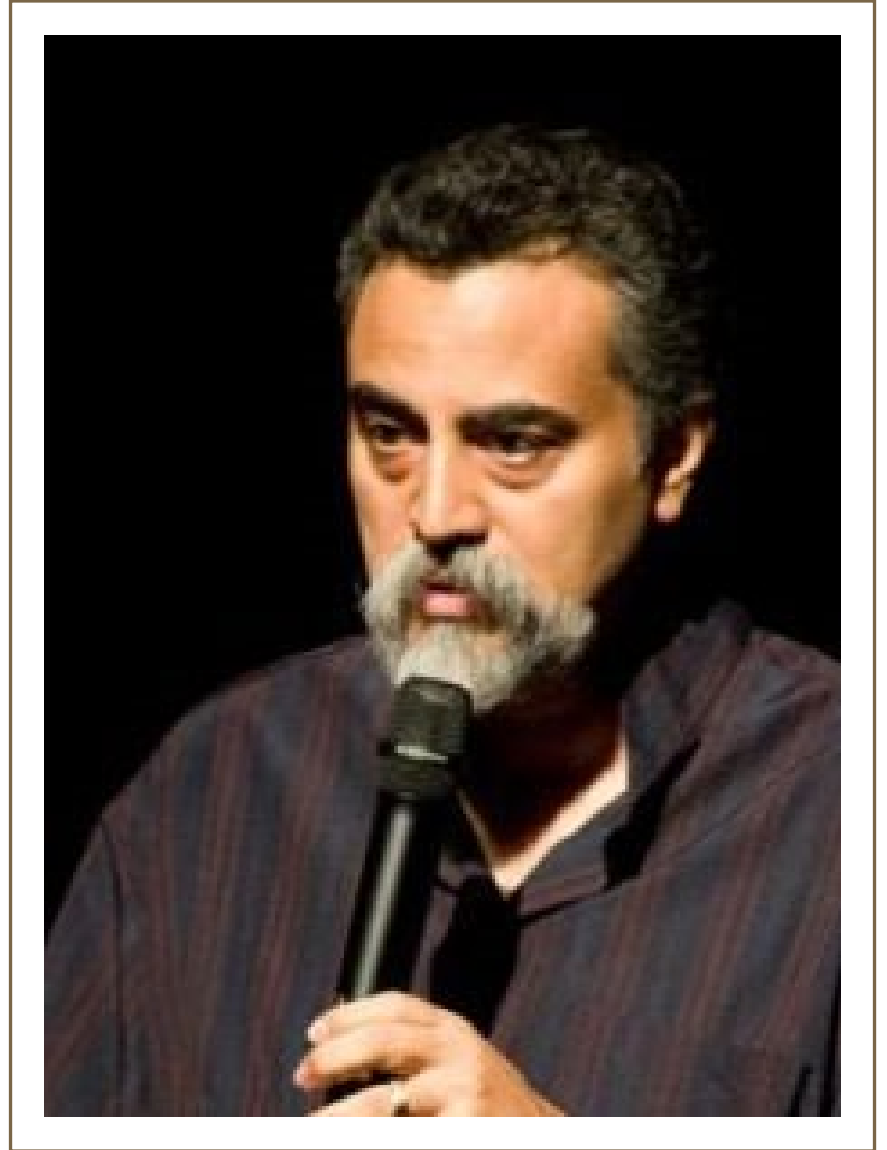
**Soroush's conclusion:**

"We don't have much choice at the moment. The Muslim world is caught between states and governments that are secular in their orientation and traditionalists who are conservative in theirs. The duty and task of reform falls on the shoulders of the modern Muslim intellectual, who must retain a critical distance in between."



## S Farid Alatas' Appraising Iranian thinkers:

- "Islamic Economics is also very problematic. To a large extent it has inherited the negative aspects of conventional economics in terms of abstract, hypothetical, deductive motives rather than the empirically oriented. And it has adapted the conservative bourgeois economics to some extent, using marxist terms. There is no strong critique of capitalism from their side. So the whole Islamic Economics is actually part of capitalist structure. But there are exception as such as theories by Baqir Sadr and Ayotollah Taleghani, from shia tradition, which is form the beginning of the anti-capitalist notions. Their approach is not islamizing the neo-classical economics but it is more an economical thought from the specific islamic tradition. So they are not to be included in that discipline of Islamic Economics that is really generated by Pakistani economists, sometimes funded by Saudi in seventies to eighties."





Interfaith Dialogue on

# RELIGION AND THE POOR


## An Opium or A Liberator?

Date : Sunday, 22 May 2016  
 Time : 11.00AM – 1.30 PM  
 Venue : Nottingham University, Level 2 Chulan Tower, Kuala Lumpur


Presenters:  
 Prof Syed Farid Alatas  
 Dr Patricia Anne Martinez  
 Eddin Khoo  
 Prematilaka KD Serisena

Moderator:  
 Imran Mohd Rasid

Jointly Organized by:



Register at : [www.irfront.org](http://www.irfront.org)





# Faith, Reason and Democracy in Islam

Date: Wednesday, 21 August 2013  
 Time: 10.00AM - 1.00PM  
 Venue: Senate Room, International Islamic University of Malaysia

Host:  
**Prof Waled Fekry Faris**  
 Director, International Institute for Muslim Unity

Special Guest:  
**Prof Mohsen Kadivar**  
 Iranian philosopher, University lecturer, cleric and activist

Co-Organizers


# A Religion Divided: Between Myth and Reality in the Muslim World

Friday, 23 August 2013  
 9.30 AM - 12.30 PM  
 Venue: Wawasan Open University, Georgetown, Penang

Host:  
**Zairil Khir Johari**  
 Chief Executive Officer, Penang Institute

Special Guest:  
**Prof Mohsen Kadivar**  
 Iranian philosopher, University lecturer, cleric and activist

Co-Organizer



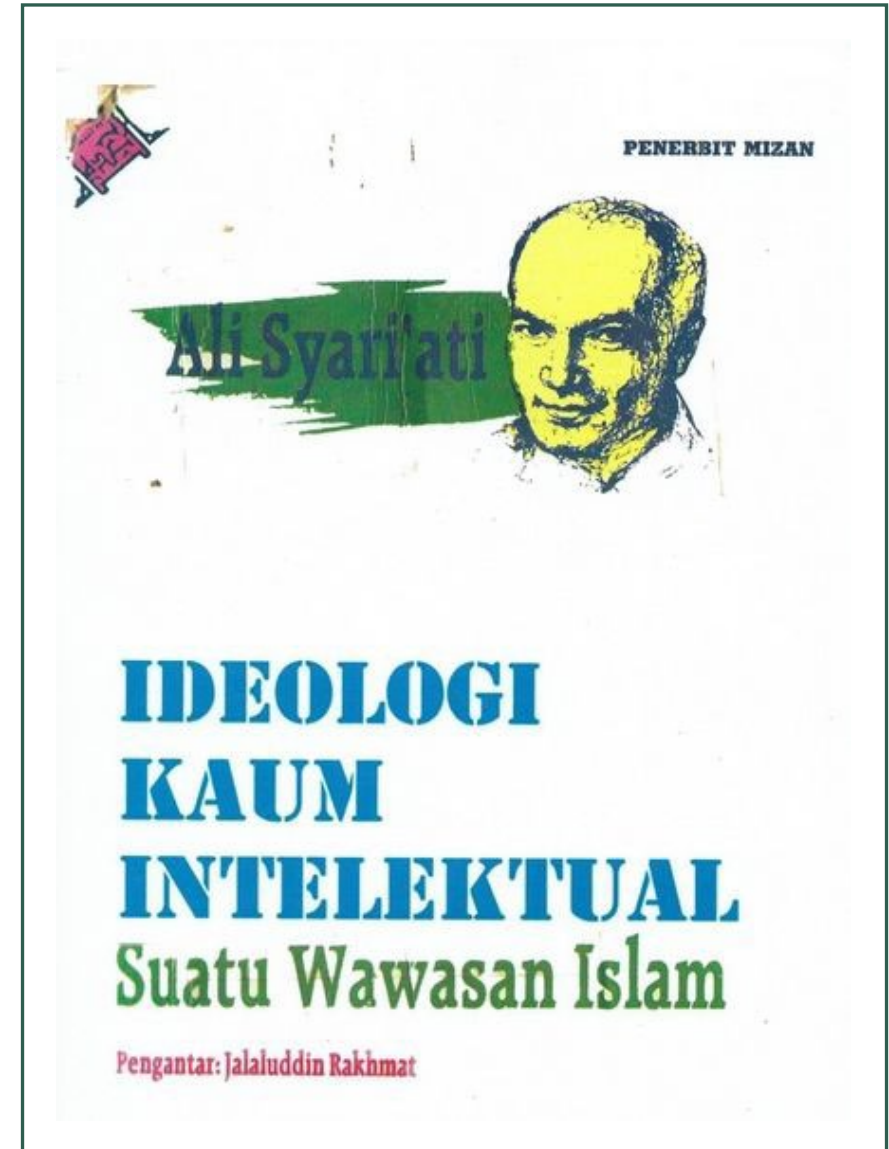
# Organised Forums

# Indonesian Reception on Iranian Intellectual Tradition

- Iranian thinkers of various theological and ideological bend and specialisation are easily available in Indonesia via translation, research and discursive engagement.
- Ali Shariati and Murthada Muthahari stand out in terms in terms of translated works and cited as references
- The interest in Iranian thinkers or intellectual world manifest via:
  1. Theological and philosophical translated works
  2. Gender studies from Iranian scholars
  3. Sunni-Shiite dialogues
  4. "Iran Corner" at UIN and Muhammadiyah campuses' libraries
  5. Indonesian students studying in Iranian universities
  6. Proactive discursive activities by Indonesian-based educational institutes eg STIF Mulla Sadra, and publishing houses eg Sadra, RausyanFikr Institute, Mizan
  7. Theses and research conducted by Indonesian students on Iranian thinkers

# The boost in Indonesia

1. The opening up Indonesian UINs and studies on contemporary thought
2. Leading intellectuals took strong interest in contemporary Islamic discourse in Iran and other parts of Muslim world
3. Socio-cultural and political environment relative open to diversity
4. Strong translation culture as part of Indonesian knowledge production

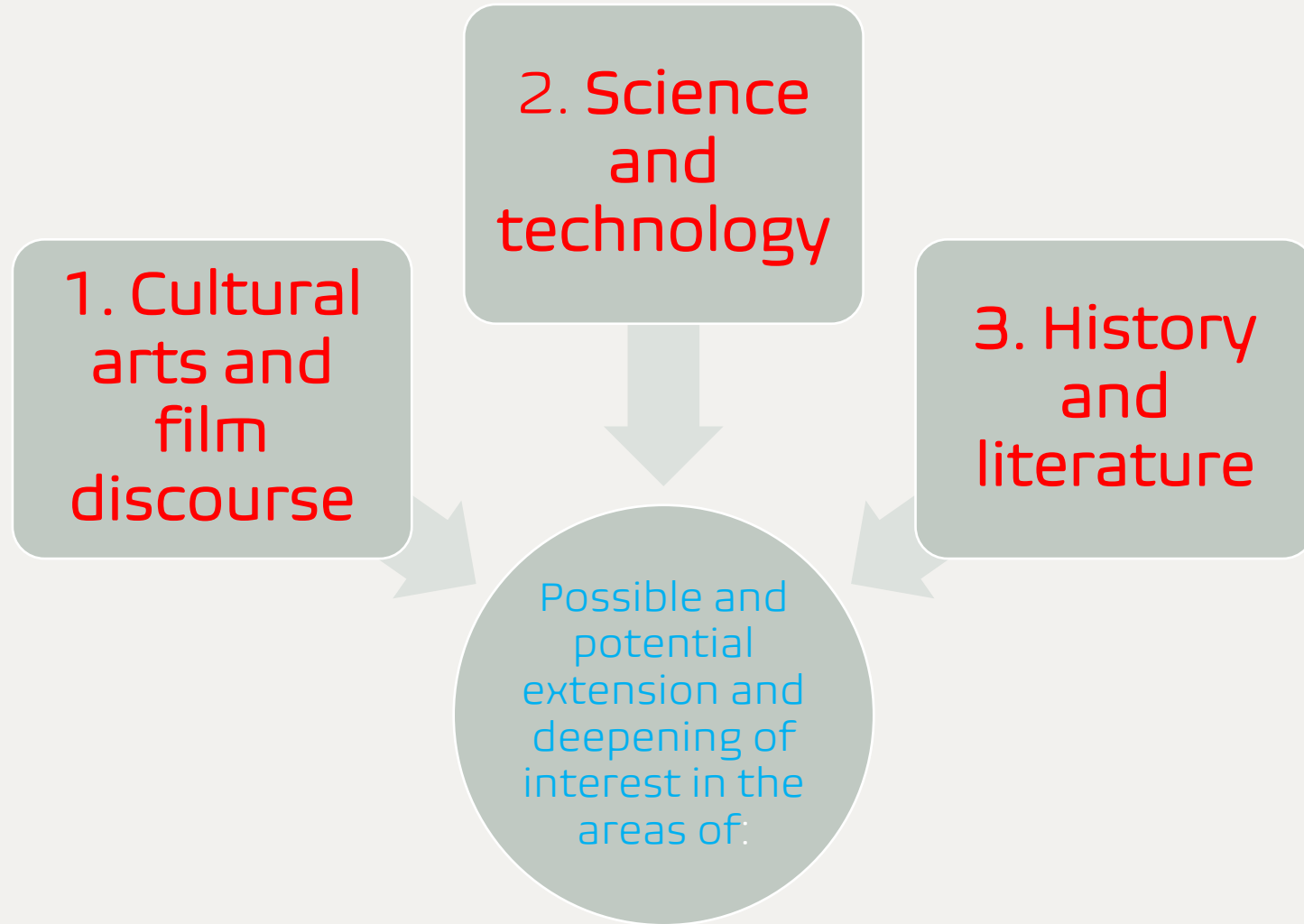




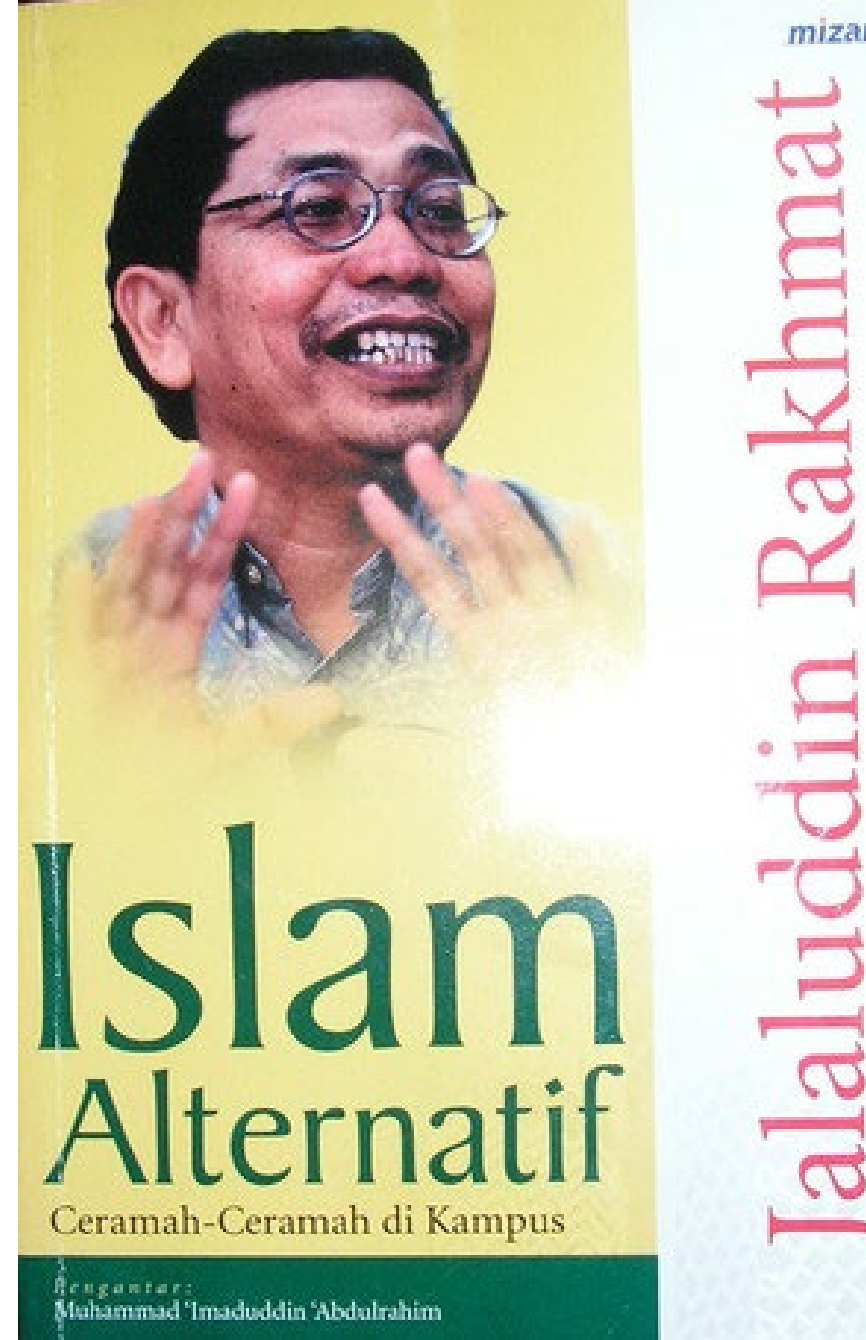
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1. Driven by the thinkers' personality and extensive works Murthada Mutahari and Ali Shariati are top in the list – mostly revolve around topics on Islamic thought, including theology, jurisprudence and mysticism
  2. History and cultural narratives are not so common
  3. Development and political economy practically none







- The appraisal of Iranian thinkers have been made by several Indonesian scholars:
- The most prominent scholar that deliberated much about Iranian thinkers and about Shiism is **Jalaluddin Rakhmat**
- In his book *Islam Alternatif* (Bandung: Mizan, 1986) – dedicate a chapter on “Islam Mazhab Syiah” – more an exposure for a largely Indonesia Sunni audience.
- Jallauddin is highly productive, and has written many introduction and commentaries on Ali Shariati, Muthahari, Ayatullah Sayyid Muhammad Husein Fadhlullah, and other venerated figures in Shiism such as Ali, Fatimah Imam Hussain, Imma as-Sajjad.
- Another is **Eko Prasetyo** who regarded highly of Mutahhari. ( dikenal sebagai penulis yang mampumenjelaskan segala persoalan sosial secarasistematis.”



kritik Islam atas  
**MARXISME**  
dan sesat-pikir Barat lainnya

Ali Syari'ati



Kata Pengantar : M. Dawam Raharjo

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### Dawam Rahardjo's appraisal of Ali Shariati

- "Tokoh modern seperti Ali Syari'ati, menganut paham yang kedua. Karena itu, dia melakukan dua langkah pemikiran. Pertama, melakukan diskursi filosofis dan teoretis-ilmiah berdasarkan petunjuk wahyu Ilahi, gun memperoleh rumusan dan keterangan mengenai nilai-nilai yang mendasar dalam Islam. Dan kedua, melakukan pengamatan empiris. Tentang hal kedua itu, dia menyebut "ijtihad yang berorientasikan riset". Dia percaya bahwa ijtihad adalah kunci gerakan pembaharuan.

# List of Ali Shariati's works translated into Indonesia

Ali Shariati, *Tugas Cendekiawan Muslim*. Jakarta: Grafindo, 1995. (Translated by Amien Rais)

Ali Syariati, *Menyambut Sang "Juru Selamat": Sekilas tentang Sejarah Hari Esok*. Bandung: Pustaka Hidayah, 2006

Ali Syariati *Peranan cendekiawan Muslim : mencari masa depan kemanusiaan : sebuah wawasan sosiologis*. Yogyakarta : Shalahuddin Press, 1985

Ali Syariati, *Pemimpin Mustadh'afin*. Bandung: Muthahari, 2001.



# Studies on Shariati

- Eko Supriyadi, *Sosialisme Islam Pemikiran Ali Syari'ati*. Yogyakarta: Pustaka Pelajar, 2003
- Suwito NS, *Transformasi Sosial: Kajian Epistemologi Ali Syari'ati tentang Pemikiran Islam Modern*. Yogyakarta: Unggun Religi & STAIN Purwokerto, 2014
- M Subhi-Ibrahim, *Ali Shariati: Sang Ideolog Revolusi Islam*. Jakarta: Dian Rakyat, 2012
- Sarbini, *Islam di Tepian Revolusi: Ideologi Pemikiran dan Gerakan*. Yogyakarta: Pilar Media, 2005
- Munir Che Anam, *Muhammad SAW & Karl Marx: Tentang Masyarakat Tanpa Kelas*. Yogyakarta: Pustaka Pelajar, 2008

# Murthada Muthahari

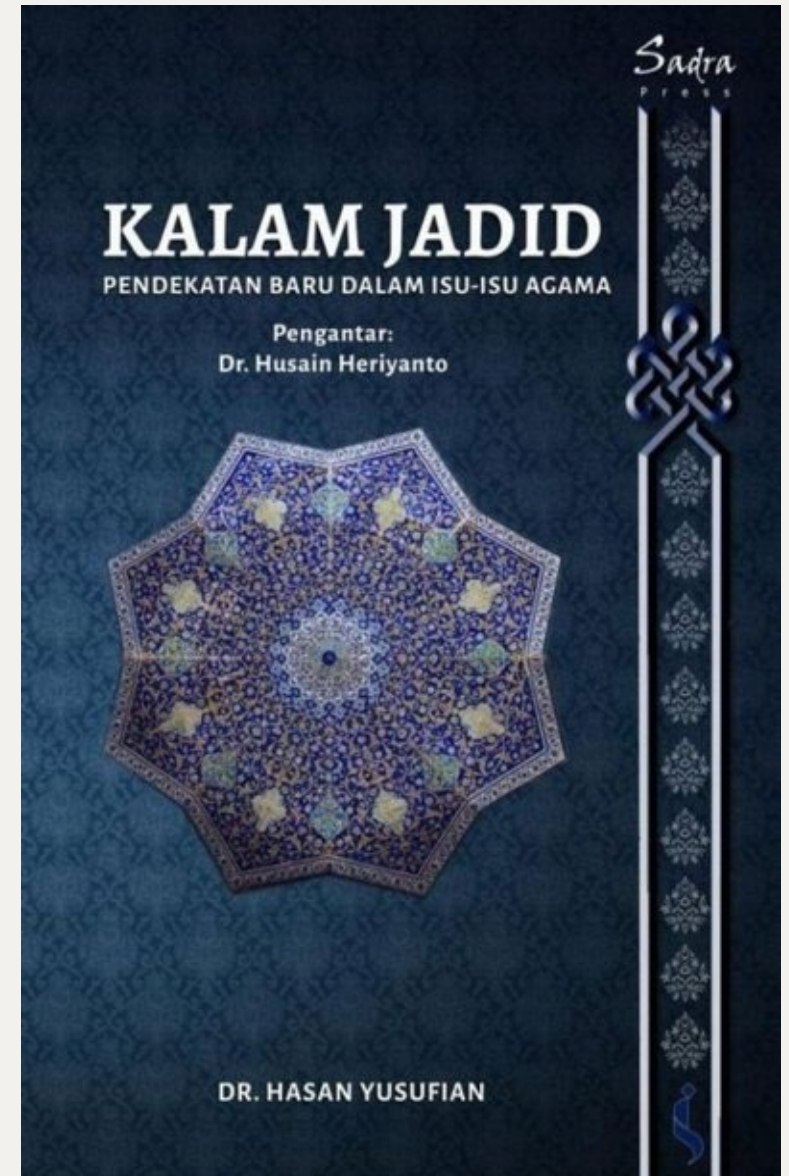
- Dasar-Dasar Epistemologi Pendidikan Islam 2005
- Teologi dan Falsafah Hijab, 2003
- Potret Insan Kamil, 2005
- Falsafah Kenabian 2014
- Manusia Sempurna, 1993
- Manusia dan Agama, 1984
- Ceramah Seputar Persoalan Penting Agama & Kehidupan, 1999
- Kritik Islam terhadap Materialisme, 2001
- Neraca Kebenaran & Kebatilan, 2001
- Allamah M H Thabathaba'i, Mengungkap Rahsoia Al-Quran, 1995
- Muhammad Husaini Behesti, *Mencari Hakikat Agama: Panduan Rasional bagi Manusia Modern*, 2003
- Syed Hussain Mohammad Jafri, *Agama & Negara dalam pandangan Imam Ali*, 2012
- Hashemi Rafsanjani, *Aspek-aspek Pokok Agama Islam*, 2008
- Mohammad Khatami, *Membangun Dialog Antar Peradaban Harapan Dan Tantangan*, 1998
- Sayid Muhammad Baqir ash-Shadr, *Sistem Politik Islam sebuah Pengantar*. 2001
- Muhsin Labib, *Pemikiran Filsafat Ayatullah M T Mishnan Yazdi*, 2011
- Muhammad Hasan Qardran Qaramaliki, *Al-Quran dan Pluralisme Agama*. 2011

## General interest

- Ghulam Reza Awani [...et al.] *Islam, Iran dan Peradaban : Peran dan Kontribusi Intelektual Iran dalam Peradaban Islam*. Penerjemah: Andayani, et.al. Yogyakarta : Rausyan Fikr Institute, 2012
- Habibullah Bahwi, Peran intelektual pesantren Indonesia dan hauzah Iran  
<http://ejournal.iainmadura.ac.id/index.php/karsa/article/view/58>
- Hasan Yusufian, *Kalam Jadid: Pendekatan Baru dalam Isu-isu Agama*. 2014

## Introductory books ( primer )

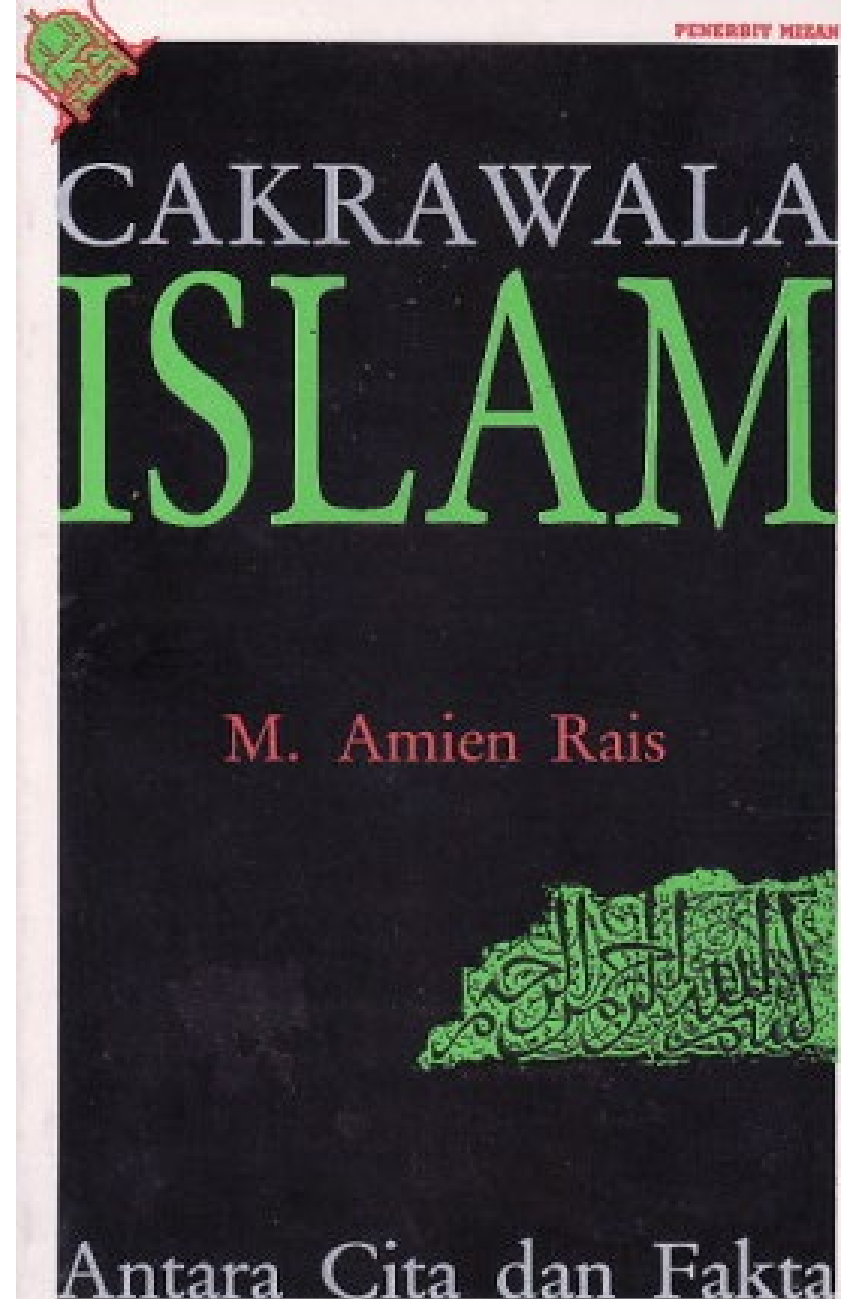
- Ahmad Baidowi, *Mengenal Thabathaba'i dan Kontroversi Nasikh Mansukh*, 2005
- Muhajir, *Filsafat Pendidikan Syi'ah*, 2013



## Challenges today –

The aversion of Shiite thought, meant relegating Iranian thinkers altogether

- Amien Rais, in his preface on the translation of Shariati's work, openly said the following:
- “Dorongan untuk menerjemahkan buku ini bukanlah untuk menawarkan percikan-percikan pemikiran Syiah di Indonesia. Bagi penerjemah, perbedaan Syiah Sunnah adalah warisan historis kuno yang telah menyebabkan lemahnya ummat Islam sebagai satu keseluruhan. Yang perlu kita kerjakan bukan membongkar- bongkar konflik politik masa silam yang jelas tidak akan ada manfaatnya. Tugas kita adalah menemukan kembali ajaran-ajaran Islam yang selama ini telah tertimbun oleh pikiran-pikiran Barat maupun Timur yang agnostik, sekularistik dan bahkan kadang-kadang ateistik. Bahwa ada konsep Syiah yang tidak dapat kita terima, seperti konsep imamat, tidak perlu kita besar-besarkan. Kita perlu berlapang dada untuk meng- ambil butir-butir kebenaran dari mana saja datangnya. Semoga terje- mahan kecil ini dapat menjadi amal saleh di sisi Allah SWT. Amien!”



# Concrete efforts

1. Exchange students – getting students from the region to have interest on Persian, Iranian and Shiites discourses
2. Promote translation of Iranian works into local languages in the region
3. Encourage independent research
4. Diversified discursive platforms: print, and digital media
5. Cultural promotion eg Film Festival for goodwill understanding and rapport
6. Media presence to correct misperception



# What we can do today?

The need to correct the misperception:

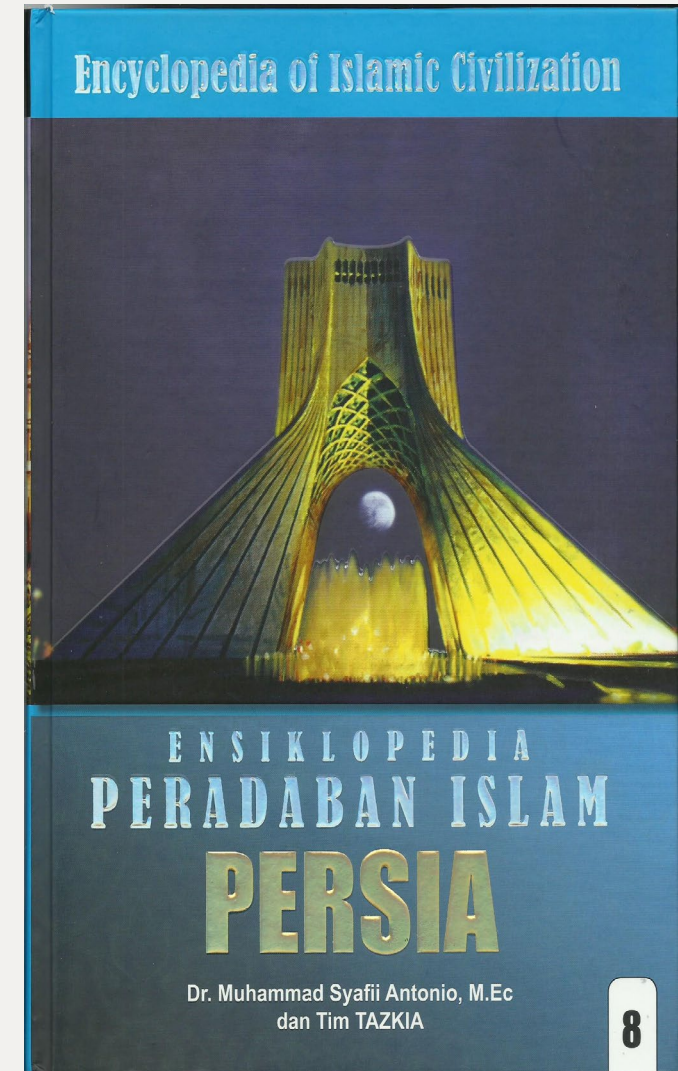
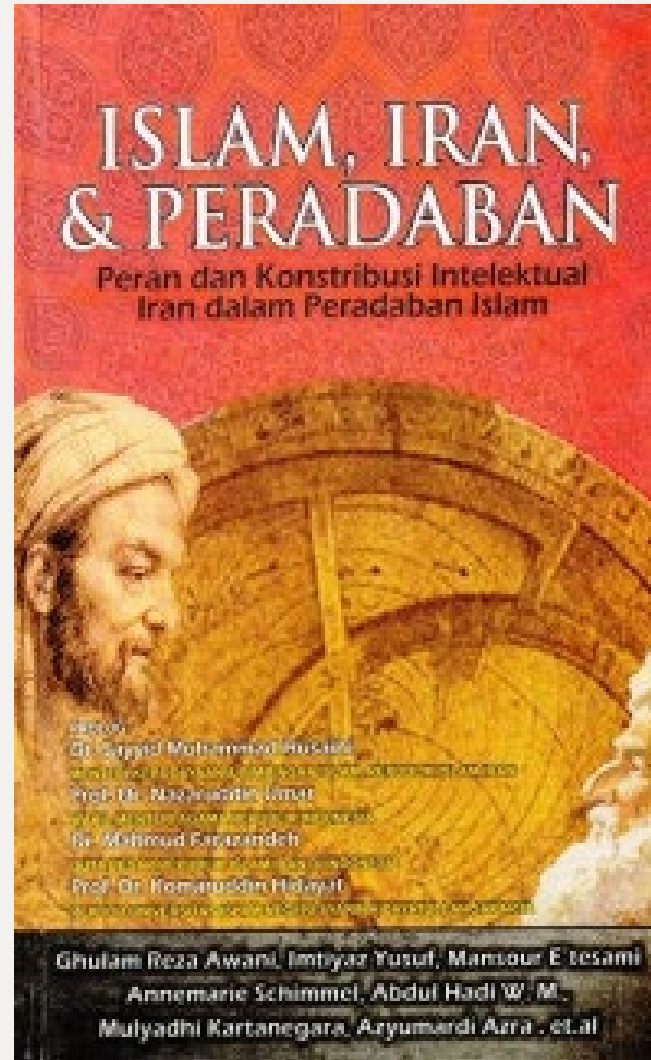
Chandra Muzaffar criticised efforts that demonised Shittes:

- “Instead of balancing sunni-Shia differences win these similarities, a huge segment of the Bahasa media has gone on a rampage, stigmatizing and demonizing Shias. Demonization of this sort not only spawns distrust and suspicion. It also breeds hatred and antagonism. If left unchecked, it may even lead to tensions and the very violence we want to avoid. Equally serious, when tension and hatred heighten within the Muslim Ummah, it would be so easy for those who want to control the community to exploit its internal, antagonism in order to conquer and rule the community, Reminding Malaysians to uphold the Amman Message”



# The need for more exposure

- Seyyed Fakhroddin Shadman
- Ahmad Fardid
- Jalal Ale Ahmad
- Ali Shari ati
- Seyyed Hoseyn Nasr
- Ehsan Naragi
- Hamid Enayat
- Daryush Shayegan
- Reza Davari
- Abdolkarim Sorush





# To encourage more

