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## FROM FLUID IDENTITIES TO SECTARIAN LABELS

### A Historical Investigation of Indonesia's Shi'i Communities

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#### Abstract

*Since 2011 Indonesia has experienced a rise in intra-Muslim sectarian violence, with Shi'a and Ahmadi communities becoming the target of radical Sunni groups. Taking as point of departure the attacks on Shi'a Muslims and the rapid polarization of Sunni and Shi'i identities, this article aims at deconstructing the "Shi'a" category. Identifying examples of how since the early century of the Islamization devotion for the Prophet Muhammad and his progeny (herein referred to as 'Alid piety) has been incorporated in the archipelago's "Sunni" religious rituals, and contrasting them to programmatic forms of Shi'ism (adherence to Ja'fari fiqh) which spread in the socio-political milieu of the 1970s-1990s. This article argues not only that historically there has been much devotional common ground between "Sunni" and "Shi'a", but also that in the last decade much polarization has occurred within the "Shi'a" group between those who value local(ized) forms of ritual and knowledge, and those who seek models of orthopraxy and orthodoxy abroad.*

*[Sejak tahun 2011, kekerasan bernuansa aliran dalam internal muslim di Indonesia mengalami peningkatan, dengan komunitas Syiah dan Ahmadiyah menjadi sasaran kekerasan dari kelompok-kelompok Sunni radikal. Berangkat dari kasus penyerangan terhadap kelompok Syiah dan cepatnya polarisasi identitas Sunni-Syiah, artikel ini berusaha mendekonstruksi kriteria "Syiah" di Indonesia. Beberapa contoh praktik keagamaan menunjukkan bahwa sejak awal proses Islamisasi di nusantara, pengagungan terhadap diri*

*Nabi dan keturunannya (dalam hal ini adalah keluarga 'Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib) telah menyatu dalam ritual-ritual keagamaan kelompok Sunni. Artikel ini menunjukkan bahwa tidak hanya secara historis terdapat banyak kesamaan antara "Sunni" dan "Syiah" di Indonesia, bahkan juga terjadi polarisasi pada beberapa dekade terakhir di tengah penganut Syiah antara kelompok yang memilih bentuk-bentuk ritual dan pengetahuan local dengan kelompok yang mencari rujukan ortodoksi dan ortopraksi dari luar.]*

**Keywords:** shi'a, shi'ism, Indonesian Islam, shi'a-sunna relationship, ahl al-bayt.

## A. Introduction

In 2012-2014 local religious groups across Indonesia became involved in acts of physical violence against Muslims identified as Shi'a, leading several branches of government bodies to issue statements that criminalized this Muslim minority as deviant. A by-product of this phenomenon has been the lumping together of multifarious groups of *muhibbūn ahl al-bayt* (Id: Pencinta Ahlulbait; En: Lovers of the house of the Prophet) into a "Shi'i community".

The emerging stress --in the media, in mosques and on the streets alike-- on the polarization between "Sunna" and "Shi'a" implies the application of a distinction between clearly defined and opposing sectarian groups. Narrowly applying a paradigm, Shi'ism --that in Indonesia is relevant to a small portion of the lovers of the ahl al-bayt-- having here emerged not earlier than the 1980s, and solidified in the 2000s in response to global dynamics, such process not only fuels further tensions and identity politics, but also side-lines more complex historical trajectories.

As in the 2000s-2010s Indonesia experienced a gradual narrowing of what religious authorities consider acceptable Islamic understanding, with Shi'is (and Ahmadis) coming under attack as "deviant" and "blasphemous" Muslims, it becomes even more important to delineate the multiple historical, social and political trajectories that have contributed to the emergence and shaping of communities of "lovers of the *ahl al-bayt*" in the archipelago, as well to the changes in their relations with the country's Sunni establishment.

In this article I pursue a historical analysis of the trajectories that brought about the formation of these communities, with a focus on the

cultural milieu of their emergence and their later re-shaping in respect to social and political dynamics, both domestic and international. The following sections address the process of institutionalization of the lovers of the ahl al-bayt in the post-Suharto era and the frictions that the attempt at unification and coordination has since created. This, I argue, is mostly the result of a polarization of devotees around two identity models, one committed to locally generated histories, forms of knowledge and devotion; and the other inspired by narratives of exogenous patterns of orthodoxy and orthopraxy. This situation, first illustrated in socio-political and historical terms, is further elaborated upon through the analysis of Āshūrā' ritual performances and that of a text's translation (Peshawar Nights).

## B. Lovers of the *Ahl al-Bayt* and Shi'ism

A legacy of the political shifts of 1965, Indonesia still displays a form of “delimited pluralism”, in which only a specific set of religions are recognised as official. Although the debate is alive, by presidential decree citizens are nonetheless obliged to declare affiliation to one of the six officially recognized religions: Catholicism, Protestantism, Islam, Buddhism, Hinduism, and Confucianism (the latter having been added in 2006). Whereas diversity within Christianity is recognised by law, Muslims are all accommodated under the umbrella-voice “Islam”. What could be read as a progressive stance, for which all forms of Islam are equally accepted, has recently become an opportunity for religious authorities to dictate the boundaries of what fits “within the pale of Islam”.

Another consequence of this choice, in more practical terms, is that the national census does not collect information on Muslims' “denominations”. Out of 200 million Muslims, unofficial estimates suggest that Shi'a Islam counts a following of around 2.5 million,<sup>1</sup> equivalent to 1.2% of the Muslim population, and 1% of the total population. Indonesia Shi'is could thus be more than the country's followers of Confucius (at 0.72%)<sup>2</sup> and represent a larger proportion

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<sup>1</sup> According to Jalaluddin Rahmat, chairman of IJABI, government statistics report 500,000 followers whilst the highest estimation counts them to 5 million. According to IJABI, there should be about 2.5 million Shi'a in the archipelago; “Kang Jalal on Shia in Indonesia”, *Tempo News* (4 Sep 2012), <http://www.tempo.co/read/news/2012/09/04/055427522>, accessed 16 Sep 2012.

<sup>2</sup> “Sensus Penduduk 2010: Penduduk Menurut Wilayah dan Agama yang Dianut”, *Badan Pusat Statistik*, <http://sp2010.bps.go.id/index.php/site/tabel?tid=321&wid=0>, *Al-Jāmi'ah*, Vol. 52, No. 1, 2014 M/1435 H

than the USA's entire Muslim population (set at 0.8%).<sup>3</sup> But the issue of who is a Shi'a is not related to the census and raw numbers only, calling into question how we define Shi'i affiliation: is it jurisprudence (*fiqh*)? is it ritual (*'ibāda*)? is it participating in the commemoration of Ḥusayn's martyrdom? or displaying interest in the Iranian Revolution? And more importantly, does it make any sense to talk about "Indonesia's Shi'is" as one community? Shi'a communities have emerged in Southeast Asia throughout the centuries, with their origins rooted in the Middle East and South Asia, to gradually take up new shapes in their own localised contexts.

The very use of the term "Shi'i" ought to be qualified. In this article I use "Shi'a" only to refer to individuals or organizations who abide to or promote Ja'fari *fiqh*, whilst I elect to use the expression "lovers of the Ahlul Bayt" to cast a broader net which is able to include complex expressions of loyalism and piety towards the "people of the house", i.e. the Prophet Muhammad, his daughter Fatima, her husband 'Alī, and their offspring Ḥasan and Ḥusayn. In contemporary Indonesia the expression *Pecinta Ahlul Bayt* is used by several organizations (*ormas* and *yayasan*) who either wish to avoid the stigma that the label "Shi'ism" has accumulated in decades of repression (more on this below), or have the specific intention of appealing to a larger audience of Muslims who do not recognise themselves as followers of Ja'fari jurisprudence. Presiding over the inauguration of IJABI (The all-Indonesia Assembly of Ahlul Bait Associations, Ikatan Jama'ah Ahlul Bayt Indonesia), in July 2000 Jalaluddin Rakhmat stated that the organization's foremost intention was to embrace a wide community of devotees, leaving the door open to "lovers of the *ahl al-bayt* regardless of their *madhhab*",<sup>4</sup> and to those who only "partially" followed Shi'a Islam.<sup>5</sup> Jalaluddin Rakhmat was treading

<sup>3</sup> "The Future of the Global Muslim Population", *Pew Research Center's Religion & Public Life Project*, <http://www.pewforum.org/2011/01/27/the-future-of-the-global-muslim-population/>, accessed 16 Jun 2013.

<sup>4</sup> Mission statement of the all-Indonesian Assembly of Ahlul Bait Associations (Ikatan Jama'ah Ahlul Bayt, IJABI) "Visi dan Misi", *Majulah IJABI*, <http://www.majulah-ijabi.org/visi-dan-misi.html>, accessed 8 Nov 2014. In his proclamation speech, Jalaluddin also stated: "In IJABI right now, in fact many people come from many different *madhhab* and groups. They are all united in their love for God, the Prophet Muhammad and his *ahl al-bayt*"; "Kang Jalal: Tujuan IJABI Berdayakan Kaum Lemah", *Pikiran Rakyat* (2 Jul 2000); "IJABI Dideklarasikan di Bandung", *Kompas* (4 Jul 2000), p. 20.

<sup>5</sup> Jalaluddin Rakhmat, "Dikotomi Sunnah-Syi'ah tidak Relevan Lagi", in *Catatan Kang Jalal: Visi Media, Politik, dan Pendidikan*, ed. by Miftah F. Rakhmat (Bandung: PT

the path of Abdurrahman Wahid, who as chairman of Nadhlatul Ulama --the largest Muslim organization in Indonesia-- a decade earlier had declared: "to be honest, NU itself is a reincarnation of Shi'a culture."<sup>6</sup>

What these Muslim intellectuals were referring to as *Syi'ah kultural* is what American scholar Marshall Hodgson had identified, in the 1970s, as 'Alid piety. With such a term Hodgson referred to the loyalism several Muslims displayed towards 'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib and his descendants, an attitude he identified as on the one hand granting these figures "an exclusive role in special religious systems" (what evolved as Shi'ism), and on the other hand channelling such reverence towards the people of the house "to color in manifold ways the life of Sunni Islam."<sup>7</sup>

The understanding of the origins of today's "*pecinta abl al-bayt*" bears witness to the multiplicity of forms that devotion to the family of the prophet can take, from cultural manifestations of 'Alid piety to (partial) adherence to Ja'fari *fiqh*. Broadly speaking we can identify five sub-groups -- at least across the islands of Java, Sumatra and Sulawesi -- each either rooted in a recasting of genealogical and spiritual lineages or inspired by the Iranian revolution of 1979.<sup>8</sup> As it is further discussed below, I refer to five groups: first are the Haḍrami *sayyids* who see themselves as part of the *abl al-bayt*, and who might narrate their family histories reconstructing a Shi'i past in 10<sup>th</sup>-14<sup>th</sup> century Yemen and a story of *taqiyyah* after their migration to Southeast Asia. Second, some of the Javanese connected to the *kraton* sultan palaces in Yogyakarta and Surakarta, who have reinterpreted local traditions within the framework of 'Alid devotion. Third, are the inhabitants of Bengkulu and Pariaman, in West Sumatra, who every year commemorate 'Āshūrā' as part of their local identity, a legacy of the short-lived colonial presence of the British and thus of South Asian soldiers. Fourth, is a number of Indonesians who in the 1970s-1980s, being interested in Shi'ism for multifarious reasons,

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Remaja Rosdakarya, 1997), p. 460.

<sup>6</sup> "Semangat Qom Imam Muda", *Editor* (16 Sep 1989), p. 44; "Syiah di Sekitar Kita", *Tiras*, no. 3 (20 Feb 1996), p. 19.

<sup>7</sup> Marshall Hodgson, "How did the Early Shi'a Become Sectarian?", *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, 75 (1955), p. 2; quoted from Chiara Formichi and R. Michael Feener, "Debating Shi'ism", in *Shi'ism in South East Asia: 'Alid Piety and Sectarian Constructions*, ed. by Chiara Formichi and R. Michael Feener (London: C. Hurst, 2014).

<sup>8</sup> In a previous publication (based on preliminary research only) I pointed to four sub-groups. In the light of further research, I would like to re-assess that analysis and identify the Tabut/Tabuik tradition of Sumatra as a group by itself.

pursued further studies in Iran, returned to Indonesia to become *ustaz* and open *pesantrens* teaching Shi'i doctrine and jurisprudence. Last is a group of Indonesians whom being involved in the 1980s-1990s *Islam kampus* phenomenon (also known as *tarbiyah*) in Java and Sulawesi, came to be exposed to and deeply involved with-- Shi'i philosophical and metaphysical thought.

## C. The origins of *Ahl al-Bayt* Communities in Java: Ritual, Devotion, Philosophy and the Law

### 1. *Historical Legacies: Yemen, Persia, and South Asia*

Research into the Islamization of Southeast Asia has often pointed to the role of maritime traders who, as early as the mid-seventh century, roamed the Indian Oceans between Yemen, the Persian Gulf, South Asia and the Indo-Malay archipelago, leading to a lively debate on the influence of Persianate forms of Islam.<sup>9</sup> It is in this context that some scholars see the *Hikayat Muhammad Hanafiyah* as the peak of Shi'i influences on Indo-Malay Islam, as much as they interpret the absence of later manuscripts of similar leaning as a marker of a de-Shi'itization process.<sup>10</sup> Yet forms of piety centred on the figure of Ali and his progeny did not disappear and are still evident today. An alternative explanation, advanced by a group of scholars in the volume *Shi'ism in Southeast Asia*, suggests that in fact there was no systematic de-Shi'itization of Islamic forms, rather that devotion for the *ahl al-bayt* was incorporated into local

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<sup>9</sup> Brian E. Colless, "Persian Merchants Missionaries in Medieval Malaya", *Journal of the Malaysian Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society*, vol. 42, no. 2 (1969); Claude Guillot and Ludvik Kalus, *Les Monuments Funéraires et l'Histoire du Sultanat de Pasai* (Paris: Harmattan, 2008); Elizabeth Lambourn, "From Cambay to Samudera-Pasai and Gresik—the Export of Gujarati Grave Memorials to Sumatra and Java in the Fifteenth Century C.E.", *Indonesia and the Malay World*, vol. 31, no. 90 (2003), pp. 221–84; G.E. Marrison, "Persian Influences in Malay Life", *Journal of the Malayan Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society*, vol. 28, no. 1 (1955), pp. 52–69.

<sup>10</sup> L.F. Brakel, *The Hikayat Muhammad Hanafiyah: A Medieval Muslim-Malay Romance* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1975); Edwin Wieringa, "Does Traditional Islamic Malay Literature Contain Shi'itic Elements?: 'Alī and Fatīmah in Malay Hikayat Literature", *Studia Islamika: Indonesian Journal for Islamic Studies*, vol. 3, no. 4 (1996), pp. 93–111; Edwin Wieringa, "Taming a Text: The incorporation of the Shi'itic Hero Muhammad Hanafiyah in a Sundanese Version of the Prophetic Tales", in *Society and Culture of Southeast Asia: Continuity and Changes*, ed. by Lokesh Chandra (New Delhi: International Academy of Indian Culture and Aditya Prakashan, 2000), pp. 355–64.

manifestations of Sunni Islam.<sup>11</sup>

At the grassroots level groups of Indonesians have been aware of these remnants of Alid devotion, pointing at practices of *tablil* (repetition of the name of god), *doas* (prayers) that invoke the protection of the *abl al-bayt*, tombstones' inscriptions, the Persian origins of the *Wali Sanga* (the 'nine saints' who, according to local traditions, Islamised the Indonesian archipelago), and a number of traditions linked to the *Bulan Suro*, the Javanese equivalent of *Muharram* (the alliteration bearing witness to its original reference to Āshūrā', which refers to the tenth day of Muharram, when Husayn, grandson of the prophet Muhammad, was killed).

For the most part, however, historical evidence gives way to self-narratives. A group of 'indigenous' Javanese families connected to the Yogyakarta Sultan palace – either genealogically or spiritually -- point to family traditions or rituals performed at the *keraton* (palace) as evidence of a culturally Shi'i substratum. One (Sunni) informant recalls the family tradition of not eating *ikan lele* (catfish) and connects it to the Shi'i prohibition to eat fish without scales; another explains his brother's habit of praying with a long-sleeved shirt on his shoulders as a reminder of the Shi'i practice of praying with extended arms (rather than folded on the bosom, as is customary among Sunnis).

These narratives extend to the history of Java's Islamisation: during fieldwork (2009-2012) I was told that the *Babad Tanah Jawa* suggests that *Seh Subakir* came from Persia; his original name being Sayed Muhammad al-Baqir, *Seh Subakir* would then be the fifth Imam of the Shi'i tradition (ca. 677–732 CE) and the son of Zayn al-'Abidin (ca. 658–712 CE). I also heard that *Sunan Kalijaga's* name is the Javanese adaptation of the expression *jaga 'Ali*, meaning 'the guardian of Ali',<sup>12</sup> and that he thus was responsible for the transmission of *abl al-bayt* traditions to Java. And Ki Ageng Siti Jenar was often pointed to me as a focal figure in the local Alid tradition, as his name is read as the Javanese translation of *tanah merah*, the 'red/bloody land' of Karbala'. The examples continue stretching from the architectural symbolism of the *keraton* to the numerous rituals performed during *bulan sura*.<sup>13</sup>

<sup>11</sup> Chiara Formichi and R. Michael Feener (eds.), *Shi'ism in South East Asia: 'Alid Piety and Sectarian Constructions* (London: C. Hurst, Publishers, Limited, 2014).

<sup>12</sup> As the Arabic letter 'ayn is transformed in 'nga' first and 'k' then, thus resulting in 'k-alī'.

<sup>13</sup> The material in this section is expanded to article-length in C. Formichi, "One Big Family?", in Chiara Formichi and R. Michael Feener (eds.), *Shi'ism in South East Asia: 'Alid Piety and Sectarian Constructions* (London: C. Hurst, 2014).

Rituals related to Muharram spread across the archipelago, such as the cooking of a special porridge on the evening of the ninth day of Muharram -- white and red, generally said to symbolise Ḥusayn's purity and blood -- which has been documented in Aceh (*kanji acura*),<sup>14</sup> Ternate (*bubur asyura*),<sup>15</sup> Makassar (*jepe su'rang*)<sup>16</sup> and Java (*bubur merah-putih*). Even though some contest the origin of the porridge as a commemoration of Karbala and root it instead in a Sunni celebration of the salvation of the Prophets,<sup>17</sup> other Muharram rituals which are beyond doubt connected to Ḥusayn's martyrdom take place in Sumatra.

One such ritual is the *Tabot* (or *Tabiuk*), a procession re-enacting the battle of Karbala (perhaps: a ritual in which the battle of Karbala is re-enacted?), which has its origins in the short-lived British colonization of Western Sumatra in the early 1800s, and the related presence of South Asian *sepoys* soldiers, a number of which were Shi'ī. Communities in Bengkulu and Pariaman have since performed this elaborate 10-day ritual with alternating fortunes. During Suharto's New Order era (1965-1998), for example, these religious performances were transformed in expressions of "local cultural identity", with all connections to Ḥusayn's battle at Karbala erased from its meaning<sup>18</sup>. It was only recently (since the early 2000s) that the religious -- and specifically Shi'ī -- dimension has been re-injected in the ritual, even though the event remains a non-denominational city-wide cultural manifestation. As Frank Korom has highlighted for the *Hosay Trinidad* performance,<sup>19</sup> in Bengkulu and Pariaman alike we witness a stratification of experiences. The descendants of the South Asian *sepoys*, preserving the specific knowledge of the religious ritual, have consistently participated in the performance to thus retain its original meaning, but in more recent times the members of the "local" Shi'ī community have been actively re-claiming the public religious

<sup>14</sup> Baroroh Baried, "Le Shi'isme en Indonésie", *Archipel*, vol. 15, no. 1 (1978), p. 76.

<sup>15</sup> Smith Alhadar, "Sejarah dan Tradisi Syi'ah Ternate", *al-Huda*, vol. 1, no. 1 (2000), p. 99.

<sup>16</sup> Gilbert Hamonic, "La Fête du Grand Maulid à Cikoang, Regard sur Une Tarekat dite «Shi'ite» en Pays Makassar", *Archipel*, vol. 29, no. 1 (1985), p. 186.

<sup>17</sup> Julian Millie, *The People's Religion: The Sermons of A.F. Ghazali* (Bandung: Cupumanik, 2008), pp. 48–75.

<sup>18</sup> R. Michael Feener, "Alid Piety and State-sponsored Spectacle: Tabot Tradition in Bengkulu, Sumatra", in *Shi'ism in South East Asia: 'Alid Piety and Sectarian Constructions*, ed. by R. Michael Feener and Chiara Formichi (London: C. Hurst, 2014).

<sup>19</sup> Frank J. Korom, *Hosay Trinidad: Muharram Performances in an Indo-Caribbean Diaspora* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2003).



valence of the ritual from the New Order's culturalisation policies (with the help and support of external actors).<sup>20</sup> Yet neighbourhood associations continue to participate in the event as a marker of community identity and solidarity, barely noticing the changes.

Amongst those who see their being a *pecinta abl al-bayt* as a marker of their lineage are also a number of Arab sayyids. For Indonesian Haḍramis who are committed devotees of the *abl al-bayt*, or even teachers at Shi'a pesantrens, the explanatory key to their religious allegiance by and large lies not with "conversion" but rather "re-discovery". The pattern is here as well one of self-narrative: 'Isa al-Muhajir (820-924 CE), ancestor of Indonesia's Haḍrami sayyids and himself the grandson of Imam Ja'far al-Sadiq, was a follower of the latter's *madhhab* (i.e. Ja'fari *fiqb*), but following his migration from Southern Yemen to homogenously Sunni Southeast Asia in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, these Haḍrami sayyids went into *taqiyyah* and assimilated. Old *doa* prayers, lullabies and various heirlooms are today used to substantiate these narratives. Without implying that all sayyids identify themselves with this reconstructed narrative, it is noteworthy that the 1880s Arab stronghold towns in Eastern and Central Java (most notably Gresik, Bondowoso and Pekalongan)<sup>21</sup> eventually hosted the first nuclei of *abl al-bayt* devotees in the 1900s; also, proportionally to the number of Arabs in Indonesia, this constituency is overrepresented in the ranks of lovers of the *abl al-bayt* as well as among the hierarchies and the pupils of Shi'i pesantrens.<sup>22</sup> It is indeed from amongst the Arabs of East Java that the first *fiqb*-oriented Shi'is emerged, as early as the first quarter of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The activities of Habib Ahmad Muhdar (1861-1926) and Sayyid Husayn al-Habshi (1921–1994),<sup>23</sup> and the establishment and

<sup>20</sup> Chiara Formichi, "Shaping Shi'a Identities in Contemporary Indonesia between Local Tradition and Foreign Orthodoxy", *Die Welt des Islams*, vol. 54, no. 2 (24 Aug 2014), pp. 212–36.

<sup>21</sup> Lodewijk Willem Christiaan van den Berg, *Hadramaut dan Koloni Arab di Nusantara* (Jakarta: INIS, 1989), pp. 68–70.

<sup>22</sup> An early piece of scholarly research on the emergence of Shi'ism in Indonesia is by Syed Farid Alatas, *The Tariqat al-Alawiyah and the Emergence of the Shi'i School in Indonesia and Malaysia* (Leiden: Royal Institute of Linguistics and Anthropology, 1999); Werner Ende, "Schiiitische Tendenzen bei Sunnitischen Sayyids aus Haḍramaut: Muḥammad b. 'Aqīl al-'Alawī (1863-1931)", *Der Islam*, vol. 50, no. 1 (1973), <http://www.degruyter.com/view/j/islm.1973.50.issue-1/islm.1973.50.1.82/islm.1973.50.1.82.xml>.

<sup>23</sup> Born in Surabaya, al-Habshi is said to have been attracted to Shi'i Islam in his teenage years -- an interest apparently further substantiated by his early links with Najaf ulama in the 1950s–1960s, his leadership of the Arab Shi'a Imamiyya community in Java, and the regular commemorative gatherings held in his house for *'Id al-Ghadir* and *Al-Jāmi'ah*, Vol. 52, No. 1, 2014 M/1435 H

flourishing of pesantrens across East Java<sup>24</sup> are a strong indication that Shi'ism – as a programmatic set of beliefs and rules – was well rooted before the Iranian revolution of 1979.

## 2. *The Iranian Revolution*

The year 1979 marked a watershed, as the accession to power of *Ayatollah* Khomeini and the establishment of the Islamic Republic of Iran was to bear important consequences across the Muslim world and beyond. But I am not concerned with the global political implications of such developments, rather more narrowly with the impact of the revolution -- and its shockwaves -- on Indonesia's *pecinta ahlulbait* communities, both as a driving engine for its followers and as a source of worry for the government.

The press followed the revolution with much attention, and for the first time Indonesians were being exposed *en masse* to the ideas of Shi'i Islam. In the pre-1979 years some texts had appeared on the subject, but these had a highly localised distribution; in the immediate aftermath to the revolution (1979-1982) a few books on Shi'ism or Iran in general were written by Indonesian authors, but more were circulating in English or Arabic, covering the theological, social, political, and historical dimensions of Iran and its *aliran*, Shi'i Islam. In early 1983 no book had appeared in Indonesian language, yet “scores of [Iranian] organizations [were] printing books on Shi'a Islam in several languages (Arabic, English, French, Persian, etc)”, and these were being distributed at the embassy of the Islamic Republic of Iran in Jakarta.<sup>25</sup> Half a year earlier, when Balfagih of Bangsri was investigated by the Ministry of Religious Affairs, Iran's involvement with the *pesantren*'s activities was ruled out, and despite the fact that his ideas were labelled “extreme” and inspired to Khomeini's,<sup>26</sup> *Āshūrā*. Al-Habshi considered his devotion to the *ahl al-bayt* an inherent characteristic of his being a descendant of 'Isa al-Muhajir, and his furthering of Shi'i doctrine and Ja'fari fiqh an aspect of the 're-discovery' of his own roots.

<sup>24</sup> Just focussing in Bondowoso we see that the Yayasan al-Sadiq was established as early as 1966, Pesantren al-Wafa in 1972, and YAPI started its activities there in 1973, before being moved to Bangil in 1976. Abdul Qodir Balfagih had established the Pesantren al-Khairat in Bangsri (Jepara) in 1974-1975.

<sup>25</sup> “Buku-buku Syi'ah”, *Panji Masyarakat*, no. 395 (11 May 1983), p. 7. The direct involvement of the Iranian Embassy in spreading Shi'a thought and the principles of the revolution through the distribution of literature had gained the government's attention, as the Ministry of Religious Affairs conducted an investigation in the Embassy's Indonesian language magazine *Yawm al-Quds*.

<sup>26</sup> “Agama: Khotbah Bilfagih dari Desa Bangsri”, *Tempo* (2 Nov 1982), pp. 25–6.

the Ministry's report concluded that Shi'a Islam could not be forbidden because of its recognised legitimacy across the Islamic world.<sup>27</sup>

The government's approach changed rapidly. In mid-1983 a group of students belonging to a *halaqa* gathering at the Bandung Institute of Technology's Salman Mosque started a new press, Mizan, committed to distributing Islamic books of high quality offering a "fair and objective [view] on the variety of streams, *madhhab*, and thought that proliferates within the unity and brotherhood of Islam." Their first book was a translation of Sharaf al-Din al-Musawi's *al-Muraja'at* (in Indonesian titled *Dialog Sunnah-Syi'ah*), a famous epistolary debate that had taken place in the 1910s between the Sunni head of al-Azhar University in Cairo and al-Musawi, a Shi'a cleric from Lebanon. The introduction expressed the importance of understanding "what Shi'a Islam is really about" and "what the key differences between *madhhabs* are"; the book went through two editions within six months.<sup>28</sup>

Having taken stock of the spreading of Shi'i Islam in the country -- limited but evident -- and following up on over a decade of suppressing Islamic activism, the Ministry of Religious Affairs published, in December 1983, an internal circular reminding all staff that Indonesia's *madhhab* was *ahl al-sunnah wa-l-jamaah*. Second, in March 1984 the central branch of the Majelis Ulama Indonesia issued a *tamsiyah* (recommendation) warning the country's Muslims of the dangers of Shi'i Islam. But as Indonesians had been gradually become exposed to Shi'i Islam, the *tamsiyah* generated more curiosity for Shi'ism than acceptance of the edict: in the following months much of *Tempo* and *Panji Masyarakat* readership expressed their interest in knowing more about this "sect" they knew so little about.<sup>29</sup>

Between April and August 1984 the "Commentary" section of *Tempo*, for example, featured at least a dozen letters inspired by the MUI *tamsiya* and discussing the historical presence of Shi'a Islam in the archipelago. At the same time publishing activities were taking off across Java, as by mid-1984 Shari'ati's writings were also being translated

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<sup>27</sup> Zulkifli, *The Struggle of the Shi'is in Indonesia* (ANU E-Press, 2013), pp. 28, 272.

<sup>28</sup> It is possible that the text was already known in its Arabic version in the early 1970s. In 1984 Balfagih of Jepara was found to own a copy received from Kuwait, which he was reported having received in 1974 together with other books; Ahmad Syafi'i, *Agama dan Perubahan Sosial di Indonesia* (Jakarta: Departmen Agama, 1984 1983), p. 3.

<sup>29</sup> The emergence of anti-Shi'a discourses in New Order Indonesia (and post-*reformasi* as well) is explored in Chiara Formichi, "Violence, Sectarianism, and the Politics of Religion: Articulations of Anti-Shi'a Discourses in Indonesia", *Indonesia*, vol. 98, no. 1 (Oct 2014), pp. 1–27.

in Indonesian and published by Mizan as well as other printing houses that were now mushrooming in Yogyakarta and Bandung. In 1984 also the Jamaah Salahuddin, still today the official *da'wah* (lit. “call to Islam”) organization of the Gadjah Mada University in Yogyakarta, opened its printing house publishing Ali Shari’ati’s lectures *Man and Islam*, translated and introduced by Amien Rais. By 1987 Mizan had published translations of works by Fazlur Rahman, Mawdudi, Qutb, al-Qaradawi and al-Ghazali, but most interestingly also those of Ali Shari’ati, Tabataba’i, and Murtadha Mutahhari.<sup>30</sup>

It is from this milieu of *tarbiyah* (education) and *da'wah* circles, shaped by the 1970s Islamic revival, that another group of lovers of the *ahl al-bayt* was soon to emerge. As shown by their printing houses, Salman Mosque and Jamaah Salahuddin’s acolytes were exposed to an eclectic assortment of Muslim intellectuals. As many explain today, exposure to the social thought of Shari’ati and Muthahhari and the metaphysics of Khomeini gradually led to their curiosity in doctrinal matters, and although some remained committed to Sunni Shafi’i *fiqh*, others “converted”. The intellectual roots of this phenomenon are inextricable from its emergence in institutions of higher education and an urban setting; and their legacy still today remains in the same social context, as proven by *yayasans* promoting Shi’i philosophical thought in Bandung, Yogyakarta, and Makassar.<sup>31</sup>

Another direct consequence of the 1979 revolution was the possibility for Indonesians to travel to Iran albeit illegally to enroll in *hawẓab* seminaries, numbers soaring from just a handful in the 1980s to about 50 Indonesians at any given time in the early 1990s. But in the early 2010s official scholarship schemes have allowed over 100 new students to depart each year from Indonesia to reach Qom, mostly to enroll at the international *hawẓab al-Mustafa*, but also at the Imam Khomeini, Bint al-Huda, and al-Zahra universities. If the key aspect of the *da'wa* group sympathizers was their fascination with Shi’i intellectualism, in the case of the *hawẓab* circle the focus is on doctrine and *fiqh*. This difference remains evident, as the former group went on to run philosophy courses whilst in *fiqh* terms they might still follow the Shafi’i *madhhab*. The latter

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<sup>30</sup> Mizan, *Katalog Buku Mizan dalam Indeks 1990: Khazanah Ilmu-ilmu Islam* (Bandung: Mizan, 1990).

<sup>31</sup> For a detailed analysis of 1960s-1980s publications on Shi’i-related topics see Hilman Latief, “The Identity of Shi’i a Sympathizers in Contemporary Indonesia”, *Journal of Indonesian Islam*, vol. 2, no. 2 (2008), pp. 300–35.

group, instead, is deeply committed to a doctrinal understanding of their religious identity and to being socially involved in *pesantren* teaching.

Looking back at the five sub-groups analysed here, it is possible to see a wide variation of what it means to be a lover of the *abl al-bayt*. The shaping of Indonesia's "communities of *pecinta ablul bayt*" in the twentieth century has been affected by waves of transnational flows which on the long run have created localized forms of piety. This interaction and transformation should not be seen as limited to the twentieth century, and when analyzing these communities in the post-*reformasi* era the tensions between local understandings and foreign forms of devotion remain a key factor.

#### D. Institutionalization and Polarization

During his presidency, Abdurrahman Wahid (1999-2001) advanced a number of reforms to push for an official opening towards institutionalized religious pluralism. Although many of these reforms did not succeed, the "lovers of the *abl al-bayt*" were nonetheless able to benefit from the new political environment, becoming recognized as a legitimate Muslim group.

Until the year 2000, the only institutions representing Shi'i Islam were private *pesantrens* promoting Ja'fari *fiqh* as a "fifth *madhhab*" within the framework of "comparative *fiqh*", or *yayasans* tasked with the organization of private commemorations for Āshūrā' and Ghadir Khumm. But through Wahid's commitment to "pluralism" and the perseverance of community leaders, after almost a century of Sunni domination in the realm of religious civil society whether through the reformist Muhammadiyah, the traditionalist Nahdlatul Ulama, or scripturalist Persatuan Islam a new *ormas* was established to offer an official platform to the lovers of the *abl al-bayt*.<sup>32</sup>

Jalaluddin Rakhmat, a former leading member of the Salman Mosque *tarbiyah* movement, a Muslim intellectual who participated since

<sup>32</sup> Greg Fealy, "Wahab Chasbullah, Traditionalism and the Political Development of Nahdlatul Ulama", in *Nahdlatul Ulama, Traditional Islam and Modernity in Indonesia*, ed. by Greg Barton and Greg Fealy (Monash Asia Institute, Monash University, 1996), pp. 1-41; Mitsuo Nakamura, *The Crescent Arises Over the Banyan Tree: a Study of the Muhammadiyah Movement in a Central Javanese Town, c. 1910-2010* (Yogyakarta: Gadjah Mada University Press, 1983); Robin Bush, *Nahdlatul Ulama and the Struggle for Power within Islam and Politics in Indonesia* (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 2009). On Persis see Howard M. Federspiel, *Islam and Ideology in the Emerging Indonesian State: The Persatuan Islam (Persis), 1923 to 1957* (Leiden: Brill, 2001).

its inception in the Mizan enterprise as translator and editor, proclaimed in July 2000 the establishment of The all-Indonesia Assembly of Ahlul Bait Associations (IJABI) as an ormas committed to “bring[ing] together the lovers of Ahlul Bait, regardless of their legal school of thought”.<sup>33</sup> Within this framework IJABI has been able to prioritize personal ethics (Id: *akhlak*) and avoid legalistic understandings of Islam, thus remaining open to followers of any of the five madhahib.<sup>34</sup>

The analysis of Indonesia’s *pecinta abl al-bayt* communities pursued in the previous pages has highlighted the variance in origins and manifestations, yet for over a decade IJABI was able to accommodate all sub-groups under its umbrella organization. Inclusiveness has been a key feature of IJABI since its foundation, as stated by Jalaluddin Rakhmat himself: “some people practice Shi’a fiqh only by 10%. For example, they only attend Shi’a rituals during Muharram. There are those [who follow] at 50%, and also those at 70%, and so forth. The difficulty in identifying who is a Shi’a is not only because of taqiyyah, and they do not want to declare themselves as Shi’a, but also because the process of socialization of Shi’a values occurs in stages, not at once, therefore it is difficult to define with precision who is a Shi’a.”<sup>35</sup> As it will be further explored below, it is this very attitude that has allowed the survival of cultural forms of Shi’ism, reflective of traditions of mysticism and ethics, to survive in contemporary Indonesia, especially in its rural areas.

But cultural Shi’ism is not the only face of *abl al-bayt* devotion in Indonesia, and IJABI’s fluid identity has in recent years been challenged by a group characterized by a heart-felt commitment to Ja’fari *fiqh*, and which yields its most prominent members from among Indonesian Qomi graduates. Since the early 2000s groups committed to formalistic, doctrinal, and jurisprudential understandings of Shi’i Islam have been gaining momentum in the country’s urban areas. Initially gathering around the Islamic Cultural Centre (ICC) in South Jakarta, these groups

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<sup>33</sup> Mission statement of the all-Indonesian Assembly of Ahlul Bait Associations (Ikatan Jama’ah Ahlul Bayt, IJABI) “Visi dan Misi”, *Majulah IJABI*, <http://www.majulah-ijabi.org/visi-dan-misi.html>, accessed 17 Jan 2013. The expression “lovers of the *abl al-bayt*” refers to the Arabic *muhibbun abl al-bayt* and has no implications of jurisprudence, often being used self-referentially by Sunnis as well; in Indonesian language is translated as *pecinta ahulul bayt* and it regularly appears in names of organizations, foundations and publications.

<sup>34</sup> Jalaluddin Rakhmat, *Dabulukan Akhlak di Atas Fiqih* (Bandung: PT Mizan Publika, 1 Jun 2007).

<sup>35</sup> Rakhmat, “Dikotomi Sunna-Syi’ah”, p. 460.

were eventually successful in their lobbying for the establishment of an alternative *ormas*, the Ahlul Bait Indonesia (ABI), in 2012.<sup>36</sup> The ICC was founded in South Jakarta in 1998 by a small group of Iranian private citizens with the stated mission of fostering mutual understanding between the two countries; through the years however its focus evolved towards becoming an unofficial liaison institute between Iranian schools and Indonesian pupils wishing to further their studies in Iran's *hawzabs* and universities. What is more, in the last decade the ICC has also acted as an "allocation centre" for returning Qomi graduates in search of jobs. It is thus worth noting that the ICC's (and possibly now ABI's) circle extends through and beyond Jakarta, as besides collaborating with Jakarta's Islamic College -- initially a Paramadina initiative, but now the Indonesian branch of Qom's Jami'atul Mustafa. The Centre is also active in sending teachers to rural *pesantrens* across the country.

As such approaches become institutionalized in different organizations, this fracture has *de facto* created a polarization of Shi'a followers between "traditionalists" who keep a focus on local culture and leadership, and the "modernists" who seek purity and legitimation abroad. The diverging paths taken by IJABI on the one hand and ICC/ABI on the other mirror the split between Muhammadiyah and Nadhlatul Ulama in the early 1900s. This polarization between lovers of the *abl al-bayt* invested with cultural, "indigenous", forms of *akbhaq* devotion and meaning, versus those committed to practicing and propagating a *fiqhi* paradigm of "orthodoxy" which reflects their transnational connections to the Islamic Republic of Iran points to the deepening of an inner fracture. Such dichotomy emerges clearly in each group's quest for legitimation, whether it is expressed through patterns of knowledge production or ritual devotion. Yet, neither group is exclusive in its allegiances: Jalaluddin Rakhmat is well acquainted with Iran's religious hierarchies, his son is a graduate of Mashhad, and Ayatollahs are known to participate at IJABI's events; on the other hand the ICC/ABI circle is conscious of the importance to engage with local traditions, but rather than embodying them, these are re-constructed as "originally Shi'i".

## E. Performing Āshūrā'

Āshūrā' events gather thousands of participants in Jakarta, Bandung,

<sup>36</sup> "Silatnas Ahlulbait V Menyetujui Membentuk Ormas Ahlulbait", *Ahlulbait Indonesia*, <http://ahlulbaitindonesia.org/berita/332/silatnas-ahlulbait-v-menyetujui-membentuk-ormas-ahlulbait/>, accessed 4 Oct 2012.

and Makassar, and hundreds in other provincial locations across the archipelago. Although a moment of community building, these occasions are also dotted with ritual details and performative confirmations of the ideological struggles that have been already delineated in theoretical terms above. Reflecting on Āshūrā' commemorations as performed in Jakarta, Bandung, and Bengkulu in December 2011, it is possible to see how each location mirrors the prevalent religio-political approach within the local lovers of the *abl al-bayt* community, and the negotiation of identities between local culture and transnational networks is a constant.

The Jakarta and Bandung events were respectively organized by ABI and IJABI. In Jakarta the stage was crowded with representatives of ICC and the Iranian Embassy, yet none of these public religious figures actively participated in the ceremonies. A connecting line with Iran was also drawn by the speakers, all Qomi graduates, and further reinforced by an Iranian *ta'ziyeh* troupe performing the tragedy of Karbala in Farsi (their visit sponsored by Iran's Islamic Culture and Relation Organization), and the event's conclusion with tearful *matam* (self-flagellation) lamentations. Amidst these rather explicit references to a foreign nation, the *matam* session was followed by the *Indonesia Raya* national anthem.

Just a few hours later, IJABI's *Ayuro Besar* event in Bandung was no less torn in striking a balance between domestic and transnational iconographies. If the previous year IJABI's event, held at the Centre for Islamic *Da'wa* (Pusdai, Pusat Dakwah Islam), was presided over by the Iranian ambassador and an Ayatollah; in 2011 the one hint to global membership to the *umma* was marked by strong images from the Shi'i protests in Bahrain. In what followed Jalaluddin Rakhmat proved his commitment to a localized form of *abl al-bayt* devotion: *matam* were substituted with Jalal's reading of his own arrangement of Zainab's experience at Karbala, and what in Jakarta had been an Iranian *ta'ziyeh* here in Bandung was the staging of Ḥusayn's last battle by a Sundanese (Sunni) theatre company following a script based on West Javanese traditions.<sup>37</sup>

The third location examined here is Bengkulu, on the island of Sumatra. The *tabot* tradition has been briefly introduced at the beginning of this article as a legacy of the British-induced South Asian presence on the Western coast of Sumatra. Under the New Order the *Tabot*

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<sup>37</sup> The fact that the Teater Senopati Company had used texts pre-dating the Iranian Revolution and published by a local printing house was highlighted to me by one of the organizers with great emphasis (personal communication, 25 Jan 2012); descriptions of the event are from my own fieldwork notes, Bandung, 6 Dec 2011.



Festival was canonized and made a feature of the city's "local identity", to the extent that by the 1990s the Provincial Governor could state: "the ceremonies of *tabot* are not religious services, but only a means for the preservation and development of local culture. Do not mix-up the *tabot* with religion."<sup>38</sup> Yet throughout the years the 10-day event has retained its complex rituality with direct references to the martyrdom of Ḥusayn at Karbala, with heavy South Asian overtones. In this context, what is of utmost interest is the gradual re-claiming -- by the local non-South Asian Shi'i community -- of what had become a carnivalesque tourist entertainment as instead an element of Shi'i Islam. Although heavily supported by the Iranian Embassy,<sup>39</sup> so far this process has not erased the traditional format of the ritual.

If Jakarta and Bandung displayed ICC/ABI and IJABI's opposed attitudes to rituality, Bengkulu emerges as a refreshing exception, as the 2011 commemorations were the result of a collaboration between the two circles and a merging of the two trends. I would like to suggest that if the activities in Bandung and Jakarta come with their political burden, Bengkulu offered an opportunity for all stake-holders to collaborate in their efforts to revert the state-guided process of acculturation of the *tabot*, in which none saw a benefit as it eradicated all references to the *abl al-bayt*. In broader terms, this collaborative effort spoke of a general desire to retrieve specifically Shi'a connotations in pre-sectarian rituals.

## F. Negotiating Textual Authority: *Peshawar Nights*

It has been illustrated how in the 1980s some Indonesian activists became gradually interested in Shi'i thought within the frame of the thriving *Islam Kampus* movement, and how Shi'i literature became gradually available in translation. Yet the activities of these young Muslim intellectuals went well beyond the mere distribution of foreign knowledge, as in fact they compiled edited volumes and wrote introductory essays and commentaries, eventually presenting this body of foreign knowledge in a format suitable to the Indonesian readership. By the end of the decade, Mizan started publishing "original" Indonesian texts which although

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<sup>38</sup> "Tabot Bukan Upacara Keagamaan", *Harian Semarang* (7 Jun 1992), pp. 1, 12; quoted in Feener, "Alid Piety".

<sup>39</sup> The local "mushalla Karbala" was refurbished in the early 2000s with Iranian funds, and in 2011 the traditional neighbourhood drumming competition was interrupted by the *ta'zzyeh* troupe that was to perform on Āshūrā' in Jakarta. For more on this see Formichi, "Shaping Shi'a Identities".

did not uniquely delve into Shi'ī thought, made constant references to Shari'ati, Mutahhari and Khomeini; it would only be in the 1990s, and more so in the post-Suharto era, that a variety of publishers started to directly tackle Shi'ī doctrine, jurisprudence, and *'ibāda*, in the vernacular.

The tensions between local and foreign patterns of authority that I have highlighted in the context of devotional practices, are mirrored in the literature addressing Shi'ī thought. Focussing on the texts used as sources of doctrinal knowledge and for the socialization of Shi'ism, community leaders' concerns about legitimation and authority emerge rather clearly. The divergent approaches of IJABI and ICC delineated above in terms of ritual modalities and educational pedigree, speak at a deeper level to concerns of legitimacy: "externally" the Shi'as struggle (*vis-à-vis* the Sunnis) to be recognized as Muslims belonging to a legitimate fifth school of Islamic law; while "internally" multiple groups compete in determining what it takes to be considered "Shi'a". This struggle for legitimation is resolved differently in IJABI and ICC circles, each in function of their respective understanding of authority. And this becomes evident in the analysis of the books used to socialize Islam, and more in the specific in their different framing of a same text.

In its Indonesian translation *Peshawar Nights* has been published several times in the span of just a decade, and it is a useful window to understand the internal transformations affecting the communities of devotees of the *ahl al-bayt* in post-New Order Indonesia. Even though the already mentioned *al-Murāja'at* (Id: *Dialog Sunnah-Syiah*) remains a more solidly established example of *munāẓara* (a literary debate or polemical text), *Peshawar Nights* has a similar format presenting a series of conversations between a Shi'a scholar and several Sunni ulama, as they took place in Peshawar, Pakistan. During a span of 10 nights, between the 23 Rajab and 3 Sha'bān of the year 1345 H/1927 M, a Shi'a *dā'i* (Ar, preacher) conducted debates with several Sunni ulama, using only sources acceptable to both sides and touching upon several topics which are "filled with controversies as long as history is, between the two big *madhhab* of Islam: Shi'a and Sunni". Generally considered books for popular distribution rather than religious texts, *munāẓara* literature draws its authority from the figures involved in the debate, and this brings our attention to the stated authorship of the Indonesian edition.

Important differences between editions are discussed below. But first it is worth noting that all versions of the Indonesian title include the term *madhhab*, thus characterizing the text as addressing issues specific

to one school of law; also, they all identify the author of *Peshawar Nights* as *Ayatullah* Sayyid Muhammad Al Musawi. As the back-cover informs the reader that this is an account of a discussion which had taken place between a Ja'fari ulama, *Ayatullah* Sayyid Muhammad al-Musawi, and a number of Sunni scholars, one is unclear on whether the book in hand is a new edition of the already well-circulated *al-Muraja'at/ Dialog*, authored by Sayyid 'Abd al-Husayn Sharaf al-Din al-Musawi, or rather something else, as no mention is made of the original language or title.

The introduction only helps clearing the waters, offering further guidance in building an educated guess as to which text we are reading; the author's full name is said to be Sulthan al-Wa'izhin al-Shirazi, a short version for al-'Abd al-Fanni Muḥammad al-Musāwī Sulṭān al-Wā'idhīn al-Shirāzī, also known as Muḥammad al-Musāwī; as the dialogue takes place in Peshawar, it becomes evident that we are reading the Persian *Shab'ḥā-yi pīshāvar: dar dīfā' aẓ ḥarīm-i tashayyū'* (translated in English as *Peshawar Nights*). Al-Shirazi however is no *Ayatollah*, nor does his name usually carry the title of *sayyid*, his honorific "Sulṭān al-Wā'idhīn" identifying him as a "preacher" or "debater". I suggest that this re-branding of al-Shirazi's name should be read as an attempt to strengthen the authority of the book, not just in terms of educational and genealogical hierarchies, but also in terms of geography: whilst al-Shirazi represents a specific *nisbah*, al-Musawi is a neutral name, potentially making the text more acceptable out of Persia.

I am most interested in identifying the different titles taken by the Indonesian translation in its various editions printed by IJABI and ICC, and to reflect on IJABI's choice of using this *munazara* as a preferred text for socializing Shi'a Islam, *versus* the ICC's preference for a textbook produced by the Majma Jahani Ahlu Bait, as these differences are telling of the emerging polarization within the Shi'a community.

The first Indonesian edition of *Peshawar Nights* was printed as *Mazḥab Syiah: Kajian Al Quran dan Sunnah* in 2001 by Muthahhari Press, the publishing house of IJABI; this was re-printed in its second edition in 2005. The third edition, released in 2009, saw two major changes, each bearing strong significance: first, the term Shi'a in the title was substituted to read *Mazḥab Pecinta Keluarga Nabi, Kajian Al Quran dan Sunnah*; this choice of using the more neutral expression of "lovers of the *ahl al-bayt*" can be connected to the fact that two decades after the 1984 fatwa had tainted the term "Shi'a" with an aura of "deviation", in 2005 the MUI was

renewing the idea of a standardized behaviour for Indonesian Muslims.<sup>40</sup> Also, referring to devotion for the family of the Prophet could open more minds to the possibility of embracing ‘Alid practices, especially as its divergence from Sunni practices was explained in the text through traditions accepted by both groups. Second, this edition was co-printed by Muthahhari Press and al-Huda, the latter being the publisher for ICC in Jakarta, suggesting that these two components of the Shi‘a community were attempting to work together.

The fourth edition of the book was however printed by Muthahhari Press alone. What is more, this edition is rather peculiar in its outlook; the year is not specified, and whilst the contents of this book are exactly the same as its previous edition, it features a different cover. This edition is not available in bookstores, I have only been able to view it at IJABI’s office in Jakarta, and in fact this is a tailor-made edition for the Sundanese audience of the organization’s West Java branch. Again, two aspects of the book bear significant changes. Instead of green (the colour used in all previous editions) this cover is yellow, and the volume appears to be part of Muthahhari Press book series *Kitab Kuning* (even though this seems to be the series’ only title). These two expedients appear to be aimed at linking the text to the Javanese tradition of *kitab kuning*, the “yellow books” representing “the corpus of classical [Islamic] books and commentaries accepted in the *pesantren* tradition”, and originally produced in the Middle East.<sup>41</sup>

Secondly, although this version retains al-Musawi as the author, another element pointing to IJABI’s interest in rooting Shi‘a Islam in West Java history as its title here changed to *Maḏhab Prabu Kiansantang, Kajian Al Quran dan Sunnah*. According to local mythology Kian Santang was born in the first quarter of the 14<sup>th</sup> century as the son of Prabu Siliwangi, King of Pajajaran, the Hindu kingdom that stretched over much of West Java between the 10<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> centuries. Following the legend, Kiansantang was a strong and brave *satria* endowed with magical powers; seeking a

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<sup>40</sup> Specifically, in 2005 the MUI issued a fatwa condemning the Ahmadiyah group as deviationist, and 2006 saw the beginning of a series of attacks against Shi‘a property and individuals. On MUI see Donald J. Porter, *Managing Politics and Islam in Indonesia* (London: Routledge Curzon, 2002); John Olle, “The Majelis Ulama Indonesia versus ‘Heresy’: the Resurgence of Authoritarian Islam”, in *State of Authority, the State and Society in Indonesia*, ed. by Gerry van Klinken and Joshua Barker (Ithaca: Cornell Southeast Asia Studies Program, 2009).

<sup>41</sup> Martin van. Bruinessen, *Kitab Kuning, Pesantren, dan Tarekat: Tradisi-tradisi Islam di Indonesia* (Bandung: Mizan, 1995).

worthy adversary, he was advised to travel to Mecca and find Sayyidina Ali, whom in this anachronistic encounter was identified as the only possible rival. Upon unknowingly meeting Sayyidina Ali, and awestruck by the strength and power he demonstrated after uttering the *basmalab* and *shahadatayn*, Kiansantang would eventually convert and spend several years in Mecca studying Islam before returning to Java to become the first Muslim ruler and preacher in the Priangan.

This fourth edition fulfils a double purpose for IJABI: on the one hand it invokes the authority of a Middle Eastern author, a descendant of the Prophet (*sayyid*), and a bearer of a high ranking title in Shi'a scholarship (*Ayatollah*). On the other hand, it calls upon the authority of a local figure who everyone in the Priangan region knows as one of the first Muslims and carriers of Islam (*dai*, or *wali sanga* in the Javanese tradition). This combination is characteristic of IJABI's *modus operandi* and underlying philosophy, as Jalaluddin Rakhmat often refers to statements made by Nahdatul Ulama leaders in the 1980s, suggesting that Java's Islamic traditions are permeated with elements of "cultural Shi'ism". This is an approach diametrically opposite to the ICC, which is instead entrenched in a paradigm of knowledge produced in, and distributed from, Qom. It should thus not surprise that the reference text preferred at ICC for socializing Shi'ism is a translation from the Arabic textbook originally written by *Ayatollah* Sayyid Hasan Ash-Shadr (1855-1935) and distributed worldwide by the Majma Jahani Ahlu Bait.<sup>42</sup>

## G. Concluding Remarks

In an effort to better understand the context in which the recent anti-Shi'a violence has been taking place, in this article I focused on the cultural milieu of a diversified array of groups committed to 'Alid piety. Following their historical trajectories and assessing the impact of (domestic) political transformations, I have shown how the inner diversity of these groups has been gradually homogenized". After an attempt at creating a single institutional home for all the lovers of the *ahl al-bayt* in the immediate post-Suharto era, differences surfaced in even higher relief, albeit in a dichotomous opposition. The latter part of the article has thus delved into the polarization of devotees along the local/transnational and traditional/modernist identity models, a cleavage illustrated through

<sup>42</sup> Ammar Fauzi (tran.), *Peradaban Syi'ah dan Ilmu Keislaman* (2007), <http://ilmutama.files.wordpress.com/2012/09/peradaban-syiah-dan-ilmu-keislaman-sayyid-hasan-ash-shadr.pdf>, accessed 31 Jul 2013.

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an analysis of Āshūrā' ritual performances and that of a *Peshavar Nights*' translations.

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