

Sunni to Shia Conversion in Indonesia

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Abstract

Since the Iranian Islamic revolution led by Imam Khomeini, Shia and its community have received a lot of attention as a research subject. This paper aims to examine how the phenomenon of conversion from Sunni-Shia in Indonesia. What underlies the choice to convert even with the consequence that conversion to Shia has the potential to cause psychological, economic, social and political tensions. This research was conducted in four cities in Indonesia, namely Jakarta, Bandung, Yogyakarta and Makassar. These cities are used to represent Indonesia. The results of the study show that there are at least four 'gates' which are the main arguments in their decision to convert from Sunni to Shia. These gates are 'philosophy', 'history', 'Irfan/Sufism', and 'fiqh gates'. The typology of encounters through the four doors is a strong typology that I encountered in my research. most people who convert from Sunni to Shia usually pass through one or several gates that become milestones for their acceptance of Shia.

Keywords: Religious Conversion, Sunni, Shia, Islam, Indonesia.

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1. Introduction

Religious communities in Indonesia are bound by a social contact called Pancasila which is recognized by all communities. Pancasila as a national political consensus guarantees freedom of religion and equal rights for all Indonesian people (Suseno, 2013). For Indonesian Muslims, Pancasila does not conflict with Islam at all (Ismail, 1995). Indonesia at that time showed that Islam and democracy could coexist (Hughes, 2010). Indonesian society is seen as inherently tolerant because historically they have experienced and are accustomed to differences and pluralism in terms of culture, language, ethnicity and religion. This positive image has led some academics to think that the future of Islam, especially in relation to democracy and religious tolerance, is in Indonesia, rather than in the Middle East (Adeney-Risakotta, 2017, Ramage, 1995).

The positive impression of Islam in Indonesia is currently under challenge. Indonesia is in a phase that Martin van Bruinessen calls a 'conservative turn' (Bruinessen, 2013). After the fall of the New Order regime, there was an increase in radicalism and terrorism in Indonesia (Abuza, 2006). Various terrorist bombings occurred in various parts of Indonesia, such as the bombing terror incident on Christmas Eve, 24 December 2000, which occurred in several cities in Indonesia, such as Medan, Bandung, Ciamis, and Mataram. This incident resulted in 16 fatalities and injured 96 others. Then on October 12, 2002 there was a bombing in Bali which killed 202 people, most of whom were foreign tourists. The latest is the bombing that targeted three large churches in the city of Surabaya. The bombing of three churches in Surabaya occurred only six days after the riot at the Mako Brimob, East Jakarta which resulted in five police officers being killed.

The seeds of intolerance do not only occur against non-Muslim communities but also towards minority groups in Islam, particularly towards the Ahmadiyya and Shia sects (Sofjan, 2016 & 2016a). according to Suseno (2013), attitudes of intolerance and hatred towards minority Muslim groups in many cases tend to be stronger. Since the reformation era, the Shia and Ahmadiyah groups have indeed become the minority Muslim groups that are most vulnerable to acts of intolerance and violence, both physical and verbal. Just mentioning a few examples of violence against them for example the attack by thousands of people on the al-Hadi Islamic Boarding School in Pekalongan in 2000, the attack on the YAPI Islamic boarding school in Pasuruan in mid-February 2011, the attack on the Shia

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community in Ternate in October 2012, a month later the Islamic Defenders Front (FPI) forcibly disbanded the Ashura commemoration in Makassar. The worst attack on the Shia community was probably the one that occurred in Sampang, Madura on 26 August 2012 which left one person dead, dozens of them seriously injured, dozens of houses burned, hundreds of Shia followers had to flee (Formichi, 2015: 20-21).

Even though Shia Islam has existed in Indonesia for quite a long time, the tension between these two groups in Indonesia can be said to be a fairly new phenomenon, perhaps it can be said that it only started in the early 1980s as a response to the Iranian Islamic revolution. The success of the Islamic revolution attracted a lot of attention, especially from young Indonesian intellectuals who wanted to find out more about the ideology behind the revolution. This interest was seen by the Suharto government and by some religious authorities as a potential threat to their social stability and status quo. As time went by, the tension continued to heat up. If during the New Order era only verbal intimidation occurred, during the reform era the intimidation went further to the level of physical intimidation (Formichi, 2015: 22).

The phenomenon of Sunni-Shia tension is actually not a phenomenon unique to Indonesia. anti-Shia phenomena also occurred in several Middle Eastern countries such as Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Pakistan and in several Southeast Asian countries such as Malaysia and Brunei Darussalam. International political dynamics and the prolonged conflict in Syria also contributed to exacerbating relations between the two groups (Sharif, 2017: 33). Sunni-Shia relations throughout its history have been very difficult to escape from political contestation in seizing the meaning of Islam. According to Terhalle, the propaganda about the so-called “Shia awakening” in various countries, especially in the Middle East (and maybe also in Southeast Asia), is only part of a political strategy to create anxiety and at the same time reaffirm state and religious authority through the creation of a common enemy. Terhalle sees that what is known as the 'Shia awakening' is actually not dominant, especially in relation to the image that the spread of Shia is a systematic part of Iran's foreign policy efforts to hegemonize the Islamic world (Terhalle, 2007: 69).

This paper aims to examine how the phenomenon of conversion from Sunni-Shia in Indonesia. Until now there is no exact number of how big the population of the Shia community in Indonesia. But what can be said is that most of the population today (perhaps 80-85%) are the result of conversions from various religious backgrounds (especially Sunnis). Very few members of the Shia Islamic group in Indonesia have been followers of the sect since their birth.

Academic texts about Shia in Indonesia are still very limited (Sofjan: 2013). In my opinion, these studies tend to see Shia as a 'result', as a category that tends to be fixed. I am not at all trying to build a negative argument against the classification of the research themes, but if the majority of followers of Shia are people who carry out religious conversions, then of course there is a long 'process' of identity formation and negotiation which is absent in the study of Shia, namely how and why people want to convert to Shia, especially in a country like Indonesia where the image of Shia tends to be very bad in the eyes of most Muslims in Indonesia. This condition presupposes that conversion to Shiism is often difficult both sociologically and psychologically. Why would someone want to trade their position as part of the majority to become part of the minority group? What kind of experience changed their religious perception?

The themes of the study of Shia in Indonesia are still mostly researched within the framework of a grand narrative. Shia as an institution, Shia as a political, Shia as a religious group and so on. Studies on Shia still view Shia as 'Shia' (with a capital S) while studies on how shia (with a small s) is expressed in everyday life have not received much attention because they may be considered trivial, not bombastic. This absence is trying to be bridged in this study. This research was conducted in four cities in Indonesia, namely Jakarta, Bandung, Yogyakarta and Makassar. These cities are used to represent Indonesia. these cities were also chosen because of the large Shia population in urban areas, according to several studies (Halimatusa'diyah, 2013, Sindawi, 2011: 211) most Shia followers come from the middle class with a good intellectual background and therefore have sufficient income.

2. Literature Review

Dialogue or dialogism is an important term in Bakhtin's thinking. For Bakhtin understanding of 'self' is dialogic, through relations with other. Dialogue is fundamental. Dialogue helps someone understand how relationships work, understanding about oneself can only happen and have meaning if placed in relation to the other. The relation between self / other is a relation of simultaneity. Simultaneity is related to a sense of similarity and difference in space and time. Bakhtin thinking indeed cannot be separated from the concepts of space and time (Holquist, 2002: 18).

Dialogism argues that all meanings are relative in the sense that meaning appears only as a result of the relationship between two people (bodies) that occupy simultaneous but different spaces. What is meant by the body can be in

physical form, but also can be a political body and a way of thinking (ideology). Bakhtin says that reality is always experienced, not only felt, from a certain position. Bakhtin understands position in kinetic terms as a situation, an event to be self (Holquist, 2002: 19). One can see things behind me that I cannot see, and I can see things behind him that he or she cannot see. According to Bakhtin (Holquist, 2002: 20), we both basically do the same thing, but from different places, even though we are on the same occasion, the event is different for each of us. Our place is different not only because our bodies occupy different positions outside, physical space, but also because we perceive the world and each other from different perspectives or point of view in space / time. So, at a very basic level, dialogism is a name not only for dualism, but for diversity needed in human perception (Holquist, 2002: 21).

Bakhtin respects and recognizes differences, even differences are a way of interpreting oneself. Humans are in fact different, and become valuable because of these differences. The concept of Bakhtin's dialogism provides an opportunity to appreciate more the position and perspective of others. For Bakhtin, existence events are "unified" events, because even if it happens on a unique site, these sites are never complete themselves. They are never in the sense of being alone. They need other people to have meaning. "Being" for Bakhtin then is, not just an event, but an event that is shared. Being is a simultaneity; it is always co-being (Holquist, 2002: 24).

Bakhtin built his dialogism theory from his research on language and literature. According to Bakhtin (Faruk, 2015: 224), 'each speech is oriented towards a social horizon, composed of semantic and evaluative elements. Each speech falls into a type of discourse defined by a horizon. In the language there is no word that is neutral or does not belong to anyone. All languages are scattered, penetrated by intentions. Because of the consciousness that lives in it, language is not a system of abstract normative forms, but rather a concrete heterological opinion of the world. Each word shows traces of a profession, a genre, a particular human being, a certain time and generation.

Bakhtin criticized the tradition of linguistic studies developed by Saussure, Bakhtin diverting attention from the abstract system of language to the concrete speech of individuals in certain social contexts. Language must be seen as an inherently 'dialogical': language can be understood only in terms of an unavoidable orientation towards others (Eagleton, 1996: 101). The language of Bakhtin is not just a neutral sign system but a very diverse field of conflict of interest. For Bakhtin (Eagleton, 1996: 102), language is a field of ideological conflict, not a monolithic system; indeed signs are a very material ideological media, because without them there are no values or ideas that can exist. Bakhtin respects what can be called 'relative autonomy' of language, the fact that it cannot be reduced to a mere reflex of social interest; but he insisted that no language was not caught up in definite social relations, and that this social relationship in turn was part of a broader political, ideological and economic system. Words are 'multi-accent' and they are always the words of one particular human subject for another, and this practical context will form and shift its meaning. For Bakhtin (Eagleton, 1996: 106), all languages, just because it is a matter of social practice, cannot be avoided through judgment. Words not only show objects but also imply attitudes towards them: the tone where you say 'give me the book' can indicate how you look at me, yourself, the book and our present situation.

According to Eagleton (1996:102), 'Bakhtin's theory of language laid the foundation for a materialist theory of consciousness itself. Human consciousness was the subject's active, material, semiotic intercourse with others, not some sealed interior realm divorced from these relations; consciousness, like language, was both 'inside' and 'outside' the subject simultaneously. Language was not to be seen either as 'expression', 'reflection' or abstract system, but rather as a material means of production, whereby the material body of the sign was transformed through a process of social conflict and dialogue into meaning.

Bakhtin's dialogism concept will be used to encourage better understanding and dialogue among Sunni and Shia groups in Indonesia. as Bakhtin argued, appreciation of the others is only possible if we understand each other's position, uniqueness, similarities and differences. Deeper understanding, intense dialogue and interaction can open more understanding among Sunni and Shia groups, something that seems to have not been done much because of the pressure on the differences between the two groups as an antagonistic group.

3. Research Method and Materials

This type of research is field research which carried out by qualitative research methods. The method used in this approach is an in-depth interview and field observation. This research uses lived experience and discourse This approach was chosen because the aspect of life experience is the focus of this research, namely on the experience of the subject/actor in relation to the power of discourse that works in their social environment.

This research was carried out in four cities in Indonesia, namely the cities of Jakarta, Bandung, Yogyakarta, and Makassar. These cities were chosen to represent the Shia population in Indonesia. The data in this study is

information about the conversion experience from Sunni to Shia obtained from various sources. The sources of data in this study are people or communities that convert from Sunni to Shia or certain institutions that play a role directly or indirectly in the conversion process.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1. Gate of conversion

In an effort to describe the unique experiences of the informants, I classify their personal experiences into several categories. This category will hereinafter be referred to as the 'gate' of their introduction to Shia discourse which is one of the main reasons for the informants to accept and believe in Shia as their new way of understanding Islam. I found at least four 'gates' which became the main argument in their decision to convert from Sunni to Shia. These gates are 'gate of philosophy', 'islamic history', 'Irfan/Sufism', and 'fiqh'. The typology of encounters through these gates is a strong typology that I encountered. Most people who convert from Sunni to Shia usually pass through one or several gates that become milestones for their acceptance of Shia.

4.2. Gate of Philosophy

Shiism and philosophy are often claimed to have an intimate affinity for one another. Indeed, it seems that philosophy has more space in Shia culture than in Sunni culture. The fact that most Islamic philosophers are Shia is often used as an argument in support of claims about the close relationship between Shia and philosophy. In the introduction to a book published by Ahlul Bait Indonesia (ABI) entitled '*Buku Putih Mazhab Syiah Menurut Para Ulamaanya Yang Muktabar*' implicitly states the intimacy of Shia with philosophy by mentioning the names of several Muslim philosophers such as Al-Farabi, Ibn Sina and several other Shia intellectuals (Ahlul Bait Indonesia Team, 2012, p. 3). According to Leaman (Leaman, 2016a, p. 5), one of the most frequent arguments to explain claims of the closeness of Shia and philosophy is the fact that most of the earlier Islamic philosophers came from Persian backgrounds which is an area with Shia majority population since the Safavid dynasty made Shia the official state religion around the sixteenth century.

The discussion about the relationship between philosophy and Islam in the past, whose implications are still being felt today, has indeed become a hotly debated discourse, especially in the Sunni Muslim world. Abu Hamid Al-Gazali is one of the authoritative Sunni intellectuals who initiated a systematic critique of Islamic philosophical thought and philosophers through his book entitled *Tahafut al-falasifah* (the incoherence of the philosopher) (Al-Gazali, 2015). Al-Gazali's criticism of philosophy in *Tahafut al-falasifah* was later criticized by Ibn Rushd (Averroes) in his book *Tahafut at-tahafut* (the incoherence of the incoherence) (Ibn Rushd, 2004). In the course of the history of Islamic thought, it seems that al-Ghazali's criticism has gained more place and influence in the Islamic world than various objections regarding his accusations against philosophy. Some academics even say that philosophy in the Islamic (Sunni) world has never really risen after al-Ghazali's criticism (Leaman, 2016a).

Al-Ghazali's arguments and attacks on philosophy have become a discourse that continues to be reproduced by certain Muslim groups to show hostility towards philosophy which is considered a gate to disbelief through exaltation of reason which has the potential to violate the purity of Islamic teachings that the prophet brought. The haters of science even went further than al-Gazali by claiming that philosophy is forbidden. In Indonesia, propaganda about the prohibition of philosophy is very easy to find and has even gone viral on social media.

The opposition to philosophy is not uniquely Sunni. Sunni is a community name that is too broad to be generalized into a single narrative in their attitude and assessment of a problem. Within the Sunni world, there are also many intellectuals who defend philosophy. However, when compared to Shia, philosophy has received more space and better respect in the Shia world both in the Shia community in Persia and elsewhere in the past to the present (Leaman, 2001).

Within the Shia tradition, philosophy is still used enthusiastically by many Shia intellectuals and is even still a common part of the Islamic studies learning curriculum in Shia institutions (Leaman, 2016a). Although there is some sort of connection between Shia and philosophy, according to Leaman (Leaman, 2016b) there is no essential connection between Shia and philosophy other than the fact that most Islamic philosophers have a Shia or Persian background. Therefore Leaman rejects the argument labeling that there is something called Shia philosophy, because Shia philosophers do not specialize in discussing Shia theology or their works are only devoted to Shia readers, but instead they discuss Islamic themes in general and for readers from various religious school of thought.

Conversion through the gate of philosophy can be said to be a form of conversion that demands an active search for a 'potential convert' in finding strong and rational reasons before he arrives at an unstoppable desire to convert. One form of conversion from Sunni to Shia which I categorize as a form of conversion through the gate of philosophy is conversion caused by admiration for intellectual figures or Shia scholars and their works. I have encountered this kind of conversion pattern from the experiences and testimonies of several informants in this research.

Conversion through the gate of philosophy is usually experienced by 'potential converts' who are actively involved in various forums for the study of Islamic philosophy, study groups that discuss Shia intellectual thought, or have access to various books related to Shia. Therefore, it is not an exaggeration if the phenomenon of conversion to Shia is considered as a phenomenon of urban society. This claim has also been affirmed by various studies such as by Halimatusa'diyah in Indonesia (Halimatusa'diyah, 2013) and Leichtman's research on Shia conversions in Senegal (Leichtman, 2009).

Because of its characteristic that uses academic narratives, one of the media that plays a role in one's conversion journey is various study groups. Apart from going through institutions that are affiliated with Shia, the introduction of discourse is also carried out by several institutions that do not have a direct affiliation with Shia. One of the organizations that has an important role in converting to Shia in various cities is several cadres of the Islamic Student Association (HMI). I need to emphasize that when mentioning the name of HMI, it does not mean that HMI institutionally promotes Shia theology, but rather that the organization's cadres are interested in Shia and are personally active in introducing Shia ideas to other members. As a student organization, HMI focuses on social movements and intellectual movements. The elaboration of Islamic thought by HMI has never focused on one particular school of thought, instead all types of Islamic thought are given space to be discussed.

The role of HMI cadres in efforts to introduce Shia is not a new discourse, this was also mentioned by Zulkifli (Zulkifli, 2009) who said that there were several HMI members who tried to make HMI a forum for promoting Shia. This effort, according to Zulkifli, gave rise to pro and anti-Shia within HMI. The indirect role of HMI in introducing various discourses on Islamic thought, including Shia, was also confirmed by the statements of several informants who said that their initial encounter with Shia was when they were actively involved as members of HMI.

The gate of philosophy is the most important gate in the conversion process from Sunni to Shia without ignoring the significance of other conversion gates. The gate of philosophy becomes very fundamental because through the gate of philosophy the basis for rational argumentation is formed, formulated, and established. Through the gate of philosophy, ideological commitment and identity are instilled in the consciousness of the converts. Ideological commitment and awareness of Shia identity form an image of how a Muslim and Shia in particular should be.

Conversion through the gate of philosophy can be said to be something that is quite dominant in the conversion from Sunni to Shia. This is also agreed by Jalaluddin Rahmat. In Jalaluddin Rahmat's assumption, more than 80 percent of Shia conversions were conversions through the gate of philosophy, or in Jalaluddin Rahmat's terms, cognitive conversions. According to Jalaluddin, it is very rare for conversions to Shia to be caused by affective considerations.

The rational or philosophical argument that forms the basis of conversion can be considered as something unique in Shia conversions when compared to most other religious conversions, especially in the context of internal conversion within one religion. The dominant conversion event found in this study is more of an active search for potential converts and is based on the assumption that the religious teaching content offered is rational and meets intellectual standards. It is very rare that the conversion to Shia incidents found in this research depart from psychological problems due to certain problems that a person experiences in his life, or because of certain supernatural events. In short, the impression of dramatic events that are usually assumed to be attached to various narratives of religious conversions is not often found in cases of conversions from Sunni to Shia in Indonesia.

If viewed from a sociological perspective in looking at an event of religious conversion, the phenomenon of conversion to Shia is closer to the view of the contemporary paradigm than the way of the classical paradigm in viewing an event of religious conversion. In the classical paradigm, the event of religious conversion is considered to be emotional, passive, there is a dramatic self-transformation, and it takes place suddenly. Meanwhile, the contemporary paradigm views conversion as going through an intellectual or rational process, involving an active search for potential converts, occurring gradually, continuously, and everyone's experience is a unique and different (Hood et al., 2009, p. 216).

The significance of philosophical arguments in internal conversion events such as from Sunni to Shia Islam can be understood, because to be able to move from one position of belief to another but still within the same religious identity, sufficiently strong arguments are needed to convince potential converts that the position of the new belief is

not just different but represents a 'correct', more authentic, more rational interpretation compared to the theological position previously held by potential converts.

Because the style is an intellectual conversion based on rational arguments, the Shia da'wah usually targets certain circles from the middle class, especially in terms of educational level. This can be seen from the character of Shia preaching which is usually based on study group circles or through the translation of Shia books. Because it requires rational and deep arguments, the use of academic language is sometimes unavoidable in an effort to show differences in Shia and Sunni arguments both conceptually and practically, so many people who convert usually only keep their conversion experiences for themselves or only those experiences with limited people/groups who are considered to be able to understand their conversion experience both psychologically and rationally. There are many informants who keep hiding the fact that they have converted to Shia from their parents, siblings or family in general because they feel that they are unable to convey what Shia is in simple language or think that these people do not have sufficient intellectual competence to understand their decision to convert.

Apart from being a basis for argumentation to build an ideological understanding of Shia theology, for many Shia adherents, philosophical discourse is also an effective da'wah strategy. Religious discourses based on philosophical discourses are considered more acceptable by various groups because the emphasis on philosophical theology lies on the substance of the teachings, not on the technical implementation of rites whose practices may very well vary. The emphasis on the area of the substance of religious teachings is considered as something that can lead various groups and schools of thought in Islam, especially Sunni and Shia, to achieve '*kalimatun sawa*' (meeting point) or what Laclau terms as a chain of equivalent (Laclau, 2005).

Conversion through the door of philosophy can occur either self-taught or through the initiation of certain people or groups who actively promote Shia to potential converts. Self-taught searches can be through books or getting information about Shia from various sources. Information about Shia is all things about Shia that are considered interesting, whether described in positive or negative narratives because even negative narratives can make someone convert if he conducts deeper verification and finds the fact that Shia is not what his haters describe. In self-taught conversion, potential converts do not need encouragement from other people to believe in Shia, if they then decide to seek a learning community, this is usually done in order to affirm their beliefs and learn more deeply about their new beliefs or it is done for technical purposes such as looking for a prayer community and so on.

Meanwhile, conversions initiated by people or communities usually occur through people affiliated with various organizations and foundations that focus on introducing Shia theology and thought, even though the decision to convert is a personal decision. One of the interesting features of conversions through community initiation is that they usually have a distinctive narrative indicating that a particular community focuses on various dimensions of Shiism, whether they focus on philosophical aspects, jurisprudence, morality, culture and so on.

Most of the informants involved in this research had never studied Islam in depth in educational units such as traditional pesantren, and some even claimed to have no well-understood theological views. In short, in terms of Islamic knowledge they can be categorized as lay people. The absence of an established theological understanding doctrine is quite helpful in the smooth process of their acceptance of Shia theology which they consider rational and philosophical.

This is different from the conversion experience of people who have an established religious understanding such as the conversion to Shia which was carried out by several pesantren alumni. According to the confessions of several informants from the pesantren tradition, they experience more intense psychological tension, especially with matters relating to Islamic jurisprudence. However, traces of the previously believed understanding and practice of the rites were not lost after their conversion. This tension made some respondents need more time between conceptually accepting Shia and practicing it in the rituals of worship. However, there are also some respondents who come from the pesantren tradition who do not experience psychological tension, for them, Shia rational arguments are sufficient, differences in rites are considered normal as such differences are common in the Sunni tradition.

4.3. Gate of History

There is an impression that the problem of Islamic history, especially if it is related to historical defects in the phase of Islamic development involving several central figures of the Prophet Muhammad's companions, is quite taboo to be discussed in the sunni intellectual realm and theology. This is because the companions of the prophet are generally considered to represent the so-called golden generation of Islam in the sunni faith. The idealization of the era of the Prophet and his companions which was often propagated by Sunni preachers gained its` theological legitimacy

through the words of the prophet Muhammad who said that the best human generation is my age, then after, and after[†].

Construction and interpretation related to Islamic history, especially involving the figure of the Prophet's companions after the death of the Prophet Muhammad, may be said to be the most dramatic episode in the conversion process from Sunni to Shia or even in Sunni-Shia relations in general. Because it involves figures who are considered special (not to say sacred), historical events are very difficult to simply be interpreted as past events. Some events in Islamic history are very thick with ideologically charged interpretations or contain sect sentiment.

Just as the Shia consider their imams as postulates and sources of post-prophet religious authority, the Sunnis also seem to make the companions of the prophet a religious postulate, although not to the same degree as the Shia's understanding of their imams. So, apart from things that are conceptual theology, the difference between Sunni and Shia also lies in the source of post-prophet religious authority. This difference is often failed to be understood by many Shia critics who criticize Shia but within the standards of Sunnism. Although the Sunnis do not consider the companions of the Prophet to be infallible as the Shias perceive their Imams, the Sunni defense, especially in the theme of the wisdom of the Prophet's Companions, is part of the religious symbol of the Sunni group. Criticism of a certain personality of the Prophet's companions will be considered as an attack on Islam itself, especially if those who are criticized are directed at the main companions such as Abu Bakr, Umar, Usman, or Aisha.

One of the criticisms often labeled of the Shia community is that they go too far in glorifying the ahlulbait with their belief that the figure of the ahlulbait imams is infallible and a source of post -prophetic divine authority. Such criticism was countered by some research informants who argued that although Sunnis do not believe that companions are infallible, their blind glorification and anti-criticism attitude towards the figure of companions is also the same as the Shias' attitude towards ahlulbait, while the divine legitimacy and superiority of ahlulbait are clearer mentioned in the sacred texts of both the Qur'an and the hadith of the Prophet.

The understanding of Islamic history, especially those related to the figure of the Prophet's companions in the Sunni world, is generally constructed in an idealistic and romantic sense. This idealistic construction may be carried out in order to fulfill the tendency that the era of the Companions is the golden era as stated in the hadith. In fact, if we want to be more honest and objective, the era of the companions of the prophet not only contained brilliant achievements, but it was also an era of history filled with blood, intrigue, and power struggles that often use religious narratives as a tool to fulfill the desires of worldly power.

Because the Companions are considered postulates, the main source of 'true' Islamic understanding and considered that they are all fair people, there is an impression that the companions of the Prophet should not be criticized, even though the prophet's companions and history itself are not sacred things that cannot be criticized. If the prophet alone can be considered to have made a mistake, then of course his companions have a greater potential to make mistakes. If the companions of the prophet are generally defined as people who have met the Prophet, of course all those who have met the prophet have various personal qualities and it is difficult to generalize into a single quality. Arguments like this are not unique to Shia, this kind of impression is also often found from Muslim researchers who want to be objective and not get caught up in the sentiments of schools of thought such as Faraq Fouda and Hasan Bin Farhan Al-Maliky. But of course, taking a critical position on Islamic history can easily be accused of being Shia, Mu'tazilite, orientalist, infidel and many other labels.

In the context of Sunni-Shia differences, it is also very difficult to discuss them without involving their interpretation of Islamic history. In fact, the difference between the two is largely due to their different political positions in interpreting Islamic history, especially events involving the prophet's ahlulbait and the prophet's companions. Therefore, it may be important for us to know what events can be considered as the historical roots of the differences between the two groups and also become the main consideration for potential converts in their decision to convert to Shia.

[†] The full text of the hadith narrated by Imam Bukhari is as follows "The best people are the people who live in my time (my generation) then the people after them then the people after them. Then there will come a people whose testimony one of them precedes his oath and his oath precedes his testimony". Hadiths with similar texts that emphasize the superiority of the three early generations of Islam are also found in various hadith books such as in Sahih Muslim, Tirmidhi, Sunan Ahmad and others. quoted from http://carihadis.com/Shahih_Bukhari/2458

Some of these events are the Ghadir khum incident, the tragedy of Thursday where the Prophet asked for pen and ink to write his last will but was not given by the Companions, the attack on the house of Ali and Fatimah to force the Prophet's family to acknowledge and pledge allegiance to the caliphate of Abu Bakr, the events of the Land of Fadaq, and its culmination was the massacre of Husain bin Ali and his family in the fields of Karbala by the forces of Yazid bin Muawiyah.

The interpretation of the Shia related to several historical events, especially those that occurred after the death of the Prophet Muhammad and involving the ahlulbait by many of the research informants, became an important marker in changing their theological understanding and impacted on the decision to perform a religious conversion. The Shia's distinctive interpretation of Islamic history has shaken their minds and faith. The Shia perspective on Islamic history undermines the historical dogma that has been established in their beliefs. The Shia perspective on Islamic history gives potential converts a different fact about Islamic history that they rarely find in historical education taught in schools, not even in recitations, or if mentioned, these facts seem to be refined to maintain the authority of the Prophet's companions.

In general, the most shocking historical fact is the assumption that ahlulbait received oppression after the death of the prophet. Starting from the struggle for the right to caliphate which according to the Shia should be handed over to Ali bin Abi Talib, based on clear arguments contained in the hadith traditions of both Sunni and Shia. Then after the rights to the caliphate were taken, the houses of Ali and Fatimah were surrounded to force them to pledge allegiance to the caliphate of Abu Bakr. This incident caused the miscarriage of the baby Fatimah was carrying and according to the Shia this incident was one of the causes of Fatimah's death just a few months after the Prophet's death. During the reign of the Umayyads, hatred of the ahlulbait was also continuously reproduced with the dynasty ordering to berate Ali in the Friday sermon.

The most dramatic of the episodes of tyranny against the prophet's ahlul bait is of course the episode of the Karbala massacre where Imam al-Husain was accompanied only by women and children and no more than 72 adult men to face thousands of Yazid bin Muawiyah's army. al-Husayn and his followers were left to thirst before being brutally massacred, and they were massacred by those who professed to believe in the religion brought by his grandfather, the Prophet Muhammad. Throughout human history, the event of Karbala is one of the most ironic crimes against humanity.

Encounter with a different perspective on Islamic history for some potential converts is a completely new historical knowledge that they have never known before making them question their theological position. In a Focus Group Discussion that I conducted with several converts at the Islamic Cultural Center (ICC) Jakarta, a participant said that when he was faced with historical facts that showed the oppression of the prophet's ahlulbait, especially the karbala tragedy, he felt he had no other choice, for him in the tragedy of Karbala, then there are only two choices, namely with al-Husayn or with the killer of al-Husain.

Like conversion through the gate of philosophy, conversion to Shia through the gate of history is something unique to the Shia. The view that Islamic leadership is something that is the absolute right of ahlulbait and a critical view of the companions of the prophet is something that distinguishes the Shia from most Islamic groups, especially with the Sunnis as the majority group embraced by most Muslims around the world. Acceptance of these two things is an important sign that someone has converted and accepted Shia as their new Islamic identity. The argument about the important role of Islamic philosophy and history in a conversion event to Shia was also shared by Jalaluddin Mercy in an interview I conducted with him.

In my opinion, what turns people into Shia a lot is if the discourse reaches unique Shia characteristics, for example regarding the concept that the recipient of the will as the successor of the prophet is Imam Ali. The Shia view of the companions of the Prophet. That's uniquely Shia. Most access to it is through history, therefore the Sunnis try to prevent history from being studied. History books should be shunned (interview with Jalaluddin Rahmat).

However, the gate of history usually cannot be separated from the gate of philosophy, the two gates presuppose each other. The door of history is usually used to spark awareness of potential converts that something is not in line with 'the idealistic conceptions' of the Qur'an and Sunnah in historical dialectics and the way Islam 'should' be constructed. However, the gate of history is not enough to convince someone to convert, it must be accompanied by rational explanations, distinctive theological concepts, and the formation of ideologies which are usually formulated through the gate of philosophy.

4.4. Gate of Irfan/sufism

The term Irfan's gate in research is used to describe the unique experiences of informants which in some ways may not be in line with rationality, but this experience opens the way for them to know Shia in more depth. Inside Irfan's door, encounters with Shias occur through limited subjective experiences, it can be in the form of supernatural experiences with things leading to early awareness of Shia as something different from the religious understanding that he knows. In this study, various forms of supernatural experiences were expressed by informants such as dreams of meeting certain figures, sixth sense abilities, certain mystical experiences with spiritual teachers, or even certain feelings that arise when reading Shia prayers such as Kumail prayers and so on.

Indeed, there are some studies and researchers who claim the closeness or similarity of religious style between Sufism and Shia as if the two are identical and interrelated especially because Shia imams are also glorified by Sufists (Al-Shaibi, 1991; Halim, 2015; Nasr, 1970). In fact, sometimes Sufism is considered as a potential meeting point that can overcome or transcend the sectarian identity of Sunni and Shia without negating the distinctive identity of the two groups. This potential is mainly based on the fact that both Sunnis and Shias respect the prophet's ahlulbait even though they have different levels of ideological understanding in interpreting the position of ahlulbait in their religion. Respect for ahlulbait or what Formichi termed "Alid Piety is manifest in many Muslim traditions, especially in Southeast Asia, where the majority of the population is Sunni Islam. (Zulkifli, 2016).

Although considered to have a close relationship, in the view of Hossein Nasr the comparison between Shiism and Sufism is a complex and complicated relationship because 'we are not dealing with the same level or dimension of Islam'. According to Nasr, Islam has exoteric (dahir) and esoteric (batin) dimensions that represent what he calls the 'vertical structure of revelation'. On the other hand, Islam is also divided into at least Sunni and Shia which can be said to represent the 'horizontal structure of Islam'. (Nasr, 1970).

Sufism itself is an inner and esoteric dimension of Islam that has its roots in the Qur'an and the practice of the life of the prophet, according to Nasr, Sufism or tariqah is a subtle aspect and sometimes difficult to understand in depth from the outside, but the understanding of Sufism is manifested in many traditions and civilizations of Islamic societies throughout the world (Nasr, 2000). Furthermore, Nasr said that the thick esoteric dimension in Sufism is also manifested in Shia theology both aesthetically and exoteric. Due to the similarity of several religious conceptions, Sufism is often accused of adopting or assimilating some Shia concepts into their religious understanding (Nasr, 1970). Certain Islamic groups especially those affiliated with Wahhabism theology are not happy with the adoption or assimilation of Sufism with some Shia concepts because Sufism usually claims that they are Sunnis, especially in the orientation of the school of fiqh they adhere (Al-Shaibi, 1991)

One of the concepts of Sufism which is considered to have a close relationship with the conception of Shia theology is the concept of walah. The concept of walah is a fundamental principle in the religious understanding of the two groups although there are differences in ideological and functional understanding of what they call as walah (Halim, 2015). In simple terms, walah is the idea of the continuation of divine authority after the death of the prophet Muhammad. According to Al-Shaibi, the Sufism concept of walah has similarities with the Shia concept of Imam, and their reference to divine authority after Muhammad is also closely related to the figure of Ali ibn Abi Talib. The fact that the existence of Shia precedes the existence of Sufism, in Al-Shaibi's view, it is Sufism that borrows the theological concept of Shia to be formulated into a new concept that is unique to Sufis (Al-Shaibi, 1991).

Although they have similarities, the concepts of walah and imamah have differences that show their ideological differences and ultimately differ in the construction of their identities, especially in terms of the image of who can achieve the function as a post-prophet divine authority. In the Sufi concept, what is called *wali qutub* is an open position that can be achieved by everyone in certain ways. Meanwhile, the position of the Imam in the Shia concept of Imam is not something that is open to everyone or can be achieved by undergoing certain personal training.

This difference when taken in the context of conversion to Shia brings certain consequences, although I previously said that people with a background in understanding Sufism can usually undergo a smoother conversion process because the cult tradition of ahlulbait imams is not something strange to them, however, because Sufism's understanding of the Shia ahlulbait imams is ideologically different from Shia understanding, involvement in Sufism is not enough to lead someone to Shia conversion, another explanation is needed that can lead them to be able to accept Shia ideology, usually conversion through gate of Irfan is complemented by argumentative explanation through the 'gates of philosophy and history'.

The experience of converting to Shia initiated by a 'supernatural' experience is not unique to the phenomenon of Shia conversion in Indonesia. Even in general, in many conversion testimonies in various religious communities, Spiritual enlightenment is often used as the main narrative in religious conversion testimonials. Even though it is highly subjective, the use of narratives related to supernatural experiences implicitly gives the impression, at least for people who experience or believe in such supernatural spiritual experiences, that the truth of the religion one converts chooses is confirmed by 'god' or His representative.

4.5. Gate of Islamic Jurisprudence

The interest of most of the respondents to Shia fiqh only strengthened after they considered that the problems of Shia theology and ideology were completely resolved or they had complete faith. Thus, in many cases, the interest in Shia fiqh is a result of the Shia faith they currently adhere to. Many of the people who converted to Shia, during the early stages of their conversion journey, continued to use Sunni fiqh -in Indonesia, the dominant Sunni fiqh used is Syafi'i fiqh - for various reasons.

These reasons are usually related to issues of comfort and safety, both regarding the security of themselves and their communities. because the shia fiqh, especially in the practice of daily worship such as the five daily prayers, is quite different from the practice of the Syafi'i Jurisprudence which is commonly known in Indonesia, thus allowing the potential for hostile responses to emerge against them, both from people who do not know Shia deeply or from groups of intolerance to Shia. Due to the reasons for bad image construction regarding Shia in Indonesia, which continuously be reproduced and propagated by several intolerant groups. Hence, most of the followers of Shia usually hiding their Islamic identity or commonly known as taqiyah (dissimulation), it will be very difficult to find Shia followers practicing their fiqh openly in public spaces, their fiqh practice is only carried out in their private space, or in their community in a limited and exclusive manner.

Another reason why the gate of fiqh is not the main argument in the conversion process to Shia is because most of the Shia fiqh can be found in its equivalent in the four schools of fiqh (Hanafi, Maliki, Shafi'i and Hanbali schools) that are recognized in the Sunni world. The similarities and differences between shia and sunni fiqh are something that is normal, as in the four of Sunni schools of thought often agree or disagree in viewing a particular product of Islamic law.

Fiqh can be said to be something that is subjective in nature. Most of fiqh products are something that is *dhanni* (conjecture) not *qath'i* (definite), because fiqh is the result of *ijtihad*[‡] or the earnest and careful efforts of a *mujtahid*[‡] in interpreting in detail God's commands that were conveyed through the prophet Muhammad. As a product of the interpretation from a certain *mujtahid*, a fiqh product cannot be separated from the values of subjectivity. The fact that fiqh is *dhanni* and subjective made it not the dominant gateway in one's decision to convert to Shia.

Another argument about why fiqh is not dominant as a gateway for conversion is due to the limited access of potential converts to figures who are considered to understand and master the field, this limitation is especially experienced by people who convert to Shia during the early 1980s to early 2000s. this can be overcome as many Qum alumni or other Shia *hauzah* have returned to Indonesia and created community nodes for *ahlulbait* lovers in various cities in Indonesia. These *hauzah* alumni are usually one of the sources for Shia followers to access knowledge about Shia Islamic Jurisprudence.

With the openness of the information system, Shia *da'wah* is also experiencing development by utilizing digital platforms, Unlike in the early 80s to 2000s where Shia *da'wah* was more focused on the circle of community studies and publishing of Shia books, nowadays, Shia *da'wah*, like *da'wah* carried out by various religious communities, has begun to penetrate the realm of social media to reach their communities in various places. For example, on the youtube platform there are a lot of channels that are created as a means of Shia preaching. These media include a YouTube channel called Kupas Tuntas, Safinah TV, Kautsar Media, al Hurr Tv, Ahlulbait Indonesia Tv, Abbas TV, SyiahIndonesiadotnet, Anshoru Sunnah, Karimah Ahlul Bait, ICC Jakarta, Al Qurba Tv, Itrah Institute official, Coffee TV, JRTV, Misykat Tv, Sahara TV, Chanel arguments, Majulah Ijabi, Maula TV, Al Kisa Channel and so on.

[‡] *Mujtahid* in terms of terminology means a person who is an expert in the field of fiqh and has the ability to perform *istinbat* (inference) of sharia laws based on sources that are recognized, trusted, and reliable. Quoted from <https://id.wikishia.net/view/Mujtahid>

These channels cover various themes ranging from discussions of *aqidah* and philosophy, discussions of *fiqh*, to discussions related to the dynamics of social issues and political views of several Shia groups. Some of these channels are also usually used as a means of carrying out various online celebration rites or commemorations of major holidays in the Shia faith especially during the COVID-19 pandemic (such as commemorations for Ashura, Wiladah, and Shahadah). Apart from being a means of education for internal members, due to the nature of social media that is open to anyone, Some channels also focus on explaining the Shia faith to outsiders and responding to various accusations or negative images attached to Shia.

However, there are also some people in this study who convert through *fiqh* issues even though they are not as dominant as conversions through the doors of philosophy and history. This is understandable because the concept of *fiqh* and its practice can be said to be the second layer of faith. *Fiqh* is a form of proof of faith. It is impossible for a person to perform prayers, pay *zakat*, or other *shari'a* orders if he/she does not believe in Islam. It's the same with Shia *fiqh*, why practice Shia *fiqh* if you don't believe it's theological concepts?

In the experience of most of the informants who converted to Shia in this study, the practice of *fiqh* is a consequence of their Shia faith and the feeling that their conversion is only perfect by also practicing Shia *fiqh*, it is not enough to just agree on the theological concept. However, apart from being a theological consequence, there are also some people who are converted due to *fiqh* arguments or problems, but the number is very limited. This is because *fiqh* can be considered as an exclusive discourse that not all Muslims have access to understand the complexity of how a *sharia* law product is determined by a *mujtahid* from a particular school of thought.

To be able to understand in depth the complexity of a *fiqh* discourse, one is required to master many traditional Islamic sciences such as Arabic and its grammar, *ushul fiqh* and so on. Usually, people who convert purely for reasons of *fiqh* in this study are people who have studied at an Islamic boarding school or *hauzah*, so they have at least a basic knowledge of traditional Islamic sciences. Once again, not many Shia converts in this study or even Indonesian Shia adherents in general have sufficient competence to simply understand the complexities of *fiqh*.

Although there are not many conversion events that make *fiqh* the main consideration, it does not mean that *fiqh* does not have an important role. Even for some people, the urgency of *fiqh* is the same as the urgency of theology itself, and that the two things are like two sides of the same coin that cannot be separated. For many converts, practicing Shia *fiqh* is one of the main indicators of seriousness in undergoing the conversion process and is a sign of their loyalty to the Shia faith. One of the conversion events due to *fiqh* arguments was carried out by a person named Ahmad Marzuki Amin. Marzuki's conversion journey is recorded on the <https://aqaed.com/> site. Marzuqi is an alumnus of the Bangil Islamic Boarding School, an Islamic educational institution affiliated with Shia. After completing his studies in Bangil, he continued his education in Syria and Iran.

In his conversion argument, Marzuki claims that based on his personal investigations he found that Shia Islamic jurisprudence more rational, authentic and has a stronger foundation from authoritative sources. One of the Islamic jurisprudence themes raised by Marzuqi is the question of whether prostration in prayer should be performed on the ground or a prayer mat/carpet. According to Marzuki, prostration in prayer is better done on the ground than otherwise, and the practice is what the Prophet and his *ahlulbait* exemplified, the evidence that shows the command to prostrate on the ground is even found in the books of Sunni *hadith*, although the practice of prostration on the ground is not a common practice in Sunni's jurisprudence.

Although arguments about speculative *fiqh* construction are views commonly accepted by most Muslims, immaturity in accepting the differences in their respective *fiqh* practices is often found in various Muslim communities. This immaturity does not only occur among ordinary Muslims, but also even by some of its scholars. Differences in *fiqh* understanding of a certain rite practice are often the cause of acts of intolerance such as accusing a certain practice of being heretical (religious innovation) or even disbelieving a different *fiqh* practice or understanding.

5. Conclusion

The typology of conversion gates is not intended to generalize the potential encounters with Shias that a Shia convert might experience outside of the four conversion triggers mentioned in the research. Of course, there are many things that might trigger people's interest in something, as well as the discourse on conversion, there are many possible conversion doors other than conversion through the doors of philosophy, history, Sufism, or *fiqh*. Likewise, the division of this typology is also not intended to simplify the complexity of the experience that converts may experience, conversion is a big narrative that cannot be simplified in a single narrative.

The experience of conversion as a formation of a new identity is a complex and ongoing journey. For many Sunni to Shia converts, their conversion experience was not just a spiritual moment but they also considered it a moment of intellectual enlightenment. It is hoped that this writing will enable us to find out the perspectives and arguments of other people regarding whatever theological choices they choose to believe in so as to create a better understanding between fellow believers and ultimately contribute to creating a climate of freedom and better religious harmony. In the case of Sunni-Shia, the relationship between the two, no matter what form it takes, may very well determine the face of Islam in the future.

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