Introduction

This study is concerned with the Shi’is\(^1\) of Indonesia, their position as a minority Muslim group within a population of an overwhelming Sunni majority and the ways in which they act to gain recognition in the country. For the purposes of this study, Shi’ism is confined to the Ithna ‘Ashariyya (also known as Twelver or Ja’fari) form of Shi’ism. This is a madhhab, or school of Islamic jurisprudence which venerates the twelve Imams who succeeded the Prophet Muhammad and has adopted a specific set of practices as a consequence of its belief system. Shi’ism is a minority denomination of Islam and the Shi’is, constituting around 10 percent of the world’s Muslim population, have frequently been stigmatised by Sunnis. While most Shi’is reside as a minority group in Muslim countries, they form a majority in Iran of around 90 percent, in Iraq of 60 percent and in Bahrain of 60 percent. The Shi’is of Iran came to the world’s attention with the Islamic revolution of 1978-79 and the subsequent establishment of the Islamic Republic of Iran. Following the American invasion of Iraq in 2003, the Shi’is there have played an increasingly significant political role and a moderate form of Shi’ism, adhered to by Ayatollah Ali Sistani, has formed a powerful web of networks that is expected to strengthen civil society in the south of the country.

Scholars, not only in the Muslim world but also in the West, have generally focussed their attention on Sunnism. In the Muslim world Shi’ism is often seen as a heterodox schism deviating from the true teachings of Islam with regard to its theology and jurisprudence. Western scholars of Islam, who once relied on Sunni interpretations of Shi’ism, have contributed to misconceptions about its nature. Kohlberg\(^2\) reveals that this lack of appropriate understanding of Shi’ism can easily be found in the writings of the prominent German Islamologist, Goldziher and others. Shi’ism did not become a subject of central research until the Iranian revolution forced scholars to understand its ideological foundation, which is strongly rooted in Shi’i tenets.\(^3\) This led to the association of Shi’ism with radical and revolutionary movements, while creating an impression that Shi’ism is identified with Iranian society and culture. Indeed, as a result of Iran’s ambitious attempts to export its version of revolution to other Muslim countries, studies of Shi’ism outside Iran tend to attempt to measure the effects of the Iranian revolution on Shi’i communities in Iraq, the Gulf states, Lebanon, Syria and South Asia,\(^4\) as well as on Sunni communities in Southeast Asia.\(^5\) However,

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1 In this thesis, I hardly ever use the term ‘Shi’a’ and when it is used, it refers to the generic meaning, ‘partition’. I use the term Shi’ism to denote the denomination as opposed to Sunnism. The term Shi’i is used both as adjective and human noun.  
5 Esposito (1990) and Menashri (1990).
more than a quarter of a century on, no revolution following the Iranian model has occurred elsewhere, even in countries such as Iraq and Bahrain, where the Shi’is constitute a clear majority and where Iran has allegedly supported Shi’i movements. What is striking is that in the eight-year war between Iran and Iraq between 1980 and 1988, Iranian Shi’is in battle against Iraqi soldiers were fighting their co-religionists. In this regard, Nakash has shown historical, economic and political features of Iraqi Shi’i society that differ significantly from that of Shi’is in Iran. This clearly indicates that a monolithic perspective on Shi’ism does not aid our understanding of the diverse realities of its adherants. Any study of Shi’ism necessitates a consideration of social, political and cultural aspects unique to a particular society, region and history, for the simple fact that Shi’is have “employed a wide range of strategies in different times and places.”

While the Sunnism that predominates in Indonesia has been widely studied by scholars employing a variety of approaches, the reality of Shi’ism in Indonesia and its related historical, sociological, political and religious dimensions is hardly known among scholars or even among the majority of Muslims themselves. This present study attempts to address this imbalance and to understand the reality of the Shi’is in Indonesia. It describes the main aspects of the social and religious life of this minority Muslim group, including the formation of the Shi’i denomination, an examination of its prominent leaders, beliefs and practices, da’wa, or missionary outreach, education, publications, organisations and Sunni responses. Furthermore, an understanding of the Shi’is is crucial to our understanding of Indonesian religion and society at large.

**Previous Studies on Shi’ism in Indonesia**

Despite the fact of their minority in Indonesia, a number of scholars (including Muslim scholars), historians and social scientists have written articles or books concerned with aspects of Shi’ism in this region. In particular, historians and Muslim scholars studying the historical Islamisation of the Indonesian archipelago have dealt with the development of Shi’ism in the country. Here we find two opposing views with regard to whether it was Sunnism or Shi’ism which came first to the area: the first theory, widely accepted among historians, social scientists and Indonesian Muslim scholars such as Hamka and Azra, neglects the existence of Shi’ism and generally affirms that Sunnism was the first branch of Islam to arrive in Indonesia and so continues to predominate

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6 Nakash (1994).
7 Kramer (1987:2).
8 Hamka (1974).
today. In contrast, proponents of the ‘Shi’i theory’ such as Fatimi,\textsuperscript{10} Jamil,\textsuperscript{11} Hasymi,\textsuperscript{12} Azmi,\textsuperscript{13} Atjeh\textsuperscript{14} and Sunyoto,\textsuperscript{15} believe that the Shi’is have been present in Indonesia since the earliest days of Islamisation and that in fact its adherents have played an important part in this process. Their theory is based on elements of Shi’i tradition maintained by Muslim communities in the Malay-Indonesian archipelago, as well as on Arabic, Chinese and local written sources and on existing material cultures. Proponents of this theory generally admit however that most traces of Shi’ism have vanished over the course of time and as a result of the huge impact that Sunnism has had on the country.

Fatimi, Azmi, and Atjeh establish the view that Shi’ism came to the Malay-Indonesian world prior to Sunni Islam’s influence on the region. Like their opponents, the proponents of the Shi’i theory believe the present Province of Aceh to be the first place in Indonesia to experience Islamisation. Aboebakar Atjeh speculates that Arabs, Persians or Indians coming from Gujarat, India - all followers of Shi’ism - were among the first propagators of Islam in the archipelago.\textsuperscript{16} Kern shares a similar opinion, arguing that the influence of Shi’ism in Gujarat had not been less than in other areas of India.\textsuperscript{17} Fatimi points to the kingdom of Champa, in parts of present day Vietnam and Cambodia, as the place from which the Shi’is came to the Malay-Indonesian areas of Southeast Asia. According to Fatimi, there is a strong possibility that there were “Muslim settlements in the neighbourhood of Champa in the second half of the 8th century” which adhered to Shi’ism.\textsuperscript{18} Using a variety of sources, he also tries to show the close, though often neglected, relationship between the Chams and the Malays throughout history from the 7th century onwards.\textsuperscript{19} Following Fatimi’s viewpoint, Azmi tries to connect Fatimi’s description with the development of Muslim kingdoms in Aceh. He goes on to point out that the Shi’is then spread through trading centres in Southeast Asia, including Perlak in Northern Sumatra, which is said to have become the first Muslim Sultanate in the Malay-Indonesian archipelago.\textsuperscript{20}

The first Shi’i ruler of the Perlak sultanate is said to be Sultan Alaiddin Sayyid Maulana Abdul Azis Shah, who reigned from 840 until 864. However, during the reign of the third king, Sultan Alaiddin Sayyid Maulana Abbas Shah (888-913),

\textsuperscript{10} Fatimi (1963).
\textsuperscript{11} Jamil quoted in Hasymi (1983) and Azra (1995).
\textsuperscript{12} Hasymi (1983).
\textsuperscript{13} Azmi (1981).
\textsuperscript{14} Atjeh (1977, 1985).
\textsuperscript{15} Sunyoto (n.d.).
\textsuperscript{17} Kern (2001:85).
\textsuperscript{18} Fatimi (1963:47-53).
\textsuperscript{19} Fatimi (1963:53-55).
\textsuperscript{20} Azmi (1981:198).
Sunnism began to spread and exert influence on the Perlak population. In this regard, writers such as Azmi, Jamil and Hasjmy, who base their theories on local sources, conclude that the Shi’is not only arrived in the early days of Islamisation but held considerable political power in the archipelago. Yet it was at this time that the Shi’is and the Sunnis became embroiled in a long and bitter political struggle. These scholars suggest that around the end of the 10th century, as a result of four years of outright civil war between Shi’is and Sunnis, the Perlak sultanate was divided into two: Shi’i coastal Perlak and Sunni hinterland Perlak. Both territories had their own kings. It is suggested that the two kingdoms were united in the face of an attack from the kingdom of Sriwijaya to the south. During the long war which ensued, the Shi’i king died, marking the end of the Shi’i sultanate in Aceh. Sriwijaya ceased its attack and the Sunni Perlak sultanate continued to exist until its collapse in 1292.

Sunyoto, acknowledging the existence of the Shi’i Perlak sultanate for nearly a century, points out that its collapse caused Shi’i followers to migrate to other regions. Some moved to Pasai, an area dominated by the Sunnis, and Sunyoto suggests that the resulting interrelationship between the two branches of Islam led to a specific formulation of Shi’ism and Sunnism. He goes on to claim that while officially the Muslims in Pasai followed the Shafi’i school of Sunni jurisprudence, they also practiced certain Shi’i rituals and ceremonies such as the commemoration of the martyrdom of Husayn, or ‘Ashura, the celebration of the fifteenth day of the eighth month in the Muslim calendar, Nisf Sha’ban, the commemoration of the dead on the first, third, seventh, fortieth days and so on after death, and the annual death commemoration known as Hawl.

Sunyoto goes on to apply his theories to the Muslims in Java. He suggests that these Shi’i traditions were also taught in Java by some of the Wali Sanga or Nine Saints, who were known to have propagated Islam among the population of the island. According to Sunyoto, two of them in particular, Sunan Kalijaga and Syaikh Siti Jenar, were responsible for popularising Shi’i traditions. He admits, however, that in contrast to these two saints, the majority of Wali Sanga expounded Sunni Islam. A moderate figure, Sunan Bonang attempted to bridge the two opposing groups. Sunyoto emphasises that this moderate, ‘third way’ - culturally Shi’i but theologically Sunni - had a great impact on the formulation of Islam in Java.

Basing his ideas on a local Javanese source, the Babad Tanah Jawi (History of the Land of Java) Muhaimin points out that Shaykh Siti Jenar,

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24 The names of the Nine Saints are frequently given as Maulana Malik Ibrahim, Sunan Ampel, Sunan Bonang, Sunan Derajat, Sunan Giri, Sunan Kudus, Sunan Muria, Sunan Kalijaga and Sunan Gunung Jati (Zuhri 1981:247-352). Many studies such as Salam (1960), Sunyoto (n.d.), Fox (1991) and Van Dijk (1998) have been devoted to the role of Wali Sanga in the propagation of Islam in Java.
also known as Lemah Abang, was said to follow Twelver Shi’ism, upholding “a doctrine that claims that the Imam should be the supreme political figure in the state”. This doctrine, also adhered to by the Persian Sufi martyr Mansur al-Hallaj (d. 922),\(^\text{26}\) is the Sufi *wujudiyya* doctrine of the unity of God and man. Muhaimin suggests that Siti Jenar came to Java from Baghdad and is said to have converted a number of rulers and their subjects on the island.\(^\text{27}\) Similarly, Rachman tries to trace Shi’i philosophical and pragmatic elements in Java. He points to the belief in the arrival of the Imam Mahdi, the twelfth Imam of Shi’ism, a belief which has been traditionally and historically significant in Java. Even though Rachman agrees with the rather speculative view that the Islam that first came to the archipelago was Sunni and Sufi Islam, he supports the hypothesis that there was peaceful interaction between Sunnis and Shi’is. This interaction “greatly and equally contributed to the emergence of the unique Islamic community in the region.”\(^\text{28}\)

Another issue relevant to the study of Shi’ism in Indonesia is the widespread commemoration of ‘Ashura, the anniversary of the martyrdom of Imam Husayn, the Prophet’s grandson and the third Shi’i Imam, at the battle of Karbala in Iraq, on 10 October 680 (10 Muharram 61AH).\(^\text{29}\) The ‘Ashura ceremony is generally celebrated throughout Indonesia with the cooking of red and white rice porridge (*bubur sura*), while on the west coast of Sumatra, in Bengkulu and Pariaman, a *Tabut* (in Iran, *ta’ziya*)\(^\text{30}\) ceremony takes place instead, with the parading of ritual sarcophagi of Imam Husayn. Snouck Hurgronje provides us with an interesting account of the ceremonies related to ‘Ashura festivals held in Aceh, as well as in Bengkulu and Pariaman at the end of the 19th century. He suggests that this celebration originated during one of two waves of Shi’i influence in Indonesia in the late-17\(^{\text{th}}\) and early 18\(^{\text{th}}\) centuries, at a time when the British brought in *Sipahis* (Sepoys) from India.\(^\text{31}\) Djajadiningrat remarks that widespread ceremonies in Indonesia relating to the martyrdom of Husayn clearly indicate a Shi’i influence on Indonesian Islam.\(^\text{32}\) Kartomi\(^\text{33}\) and Feener\(^\text{34}\) have provided anthropological accounts of the *Tabut* ceremony in Pariaman and Bengkulu respectively. Kartomi uncovered evidence of substantial Shi’i elements in the coastal Sumatran towns, including the annual *Tabut* festival.

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\(^{26}\) Mansur al-Hallaj was a famous Persian Sufi, teacher and writer who was executed in Baghdad in 922 for famously saying ‘*Ana al-Haqq*’ namely ‘I am the Truth’ and thus claiming divinity with God.


\(^{28}\) Rachman (1997:56-57).

\(^{29}\) On ‘*Ashura* commemoration among Shi’is in Indonesia today, see Chapter Three.

\(^{30}\) The *Tabut* or *Tabot* in Bengkulu and Pariaman is the annual observance which takes place from the first to the tenth of the month of Muharram. In the narrow sense, it refers to the decorated portable cenotaphs carried in procession during the observance.

\(^{31}\) Snouck Hurgronje (1906:202-207).

\(^{32}\) Djajadiningrat (1958:380).

\(^{33}\) Kartomi (1986).

\(^{34}\) Feener (1999a).
She observes that there are very few Shi’i families in the towns of Pariaman and Bengkulu and the Shi’i families that are there claim to be descendants of the British Indian soldiers who came to the area at the end of 17th and the early 18th century. Kartomi also suggests that “their beliefs and practices are tolerated, even assisted by local imams or prayer leaders, who pray and chant in the Shi’i manner on each occasion that a Tabut festival is held.” The above scholars maintain that there have been changes to the practice of ‘Ashura commemoration over time. Snouck Hurgronje points out that a wave of Islamic orthodoxy from Mecca in the nineteenth century was to purify Islam in the Dutch East Indies of sundry heresies, including the ‘Ashura ceremonies. Atjeh holds a similar view. “International relations between Indonesia and Muslim countries, especially Mecca and Egypt, made traces of the Shi’i beliefs vanish in the Indonesian Muslim community.” Kartomi also points out that since 1974 the Tabut ceremony has been diverted towards attracting tourists and this has meant a loss of “the essential element of passion, which is a distinguishing feature of Shi’ism.”

Other studies related to Shi’ism in Indonesia are concerned with the literature of the region. In scrutinising the *Hikayat Muhammad Hanafiyyah*, a major Shi’i literary work, which was translated into Malay from the Persian not much later than the 14th century, Brakel reviews remarks on the relationship between the *hikayat* or Malay epics and the Shi’i character of early Islam in Indonesia. He points out that the possibility for such a Shi’i text to be received into the body of Malay literature implies a definite role for Shi’i influences in the formation of early Indonesian Islam. Brakel writes:

> The mere fact that a Shi’a text of the more extreme kind was received into Malay literature at all, to thrive there up till the present day, is already of great significance. It provides strong proof not only of the strong links between Malay and Persian literature, but no less of the heretical character of early Indonesian Islam.

Similar studies were made by Baried. After examining 17 Malay stories said to contain Shi’i elements, Baried concludes that these stories are rough and

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35 Kartomi (1986:141).
36 Snouck Hurgronje (1906:205).
38 Kartomi (1986:159).
39 Muhammad bin al-Hanafiyya was a son of Ali by a Hanafi woman and is regarded by Mukhtar bin Abu Ubaid al-Thaqafi, the initiator of the Kaysaniyya sect, as the person said to have taught that the Imamate was transferred from Husayn bin Ali to Muhammad bin al-Hanafiyya. After the death of Muhammad bin al-Hanafiyya, the Kaysaniyya split into a number of groups. On this Shi’i sect, see Momen (1985:47-49).
40 Brakel (1975:58).
41 Brakel (1975:60).
42 The seventeen Malay stories that she studies include *Hikayat Nur Muhammad*, *Hikayat Bulan Berbelah*, *Hikayat Raja Khaibar*, *Hikayat Pendeta Raghib*, *Hikayat Muhammad Hanafiyyah*, *Hikayat Ali Kawin*, *Hikayat
imperfect data, as “they constitute only fragments of stories about Ali and his family.” She argues that these ‘fragments’ fail to indicate real Shi’i elements but that her corpus in fact is representative of all existing Malay documents that clearly indicate Shi’i elements. This very limited study, which is based on synopses from old manuscripts catalogues, can only produce a general statement rather than a definitive conclusion. In order to discover any real elements of Shi’ism in Malay literature, all existing Malay documents would need to be carefully scrutinised to “bring light that Shi’i elements exist in stories other than those of which the contents have bearing on Shi’i narratives.”

Wieringa also remarks that through a fairly extensive range of Malay-Indonesian literature one can find Shi’i traces in Indonesian Islam which are not recognised by common readers. He affirms that traces of Shi’ism were gradually purged over time, particularly from the 19th century onwards, due to close contacts with Middle Eastern Islam. With Brakel, Wieringa regards this as “a de-Shi’itization of Malay *hikayat* literature.” He concludes that the prominent position of Ali and Fatima in Malay *hikayat* literature has to be understood in the context of early Islamisation in the Malay-Indonesian world: stories were provided to new Muslim converts at a time when Indonesian Islam was still tinged with Shi’ism, but gradually the Shi’i elements of the stories were neutralised to the extent that they became acceptable to Sunni Muslims.

Another topic relevant to the study of Shi’ism in Indonesia is the position and role of the Sayyids, or those who claim to be descendants of the Prophet Muhammad through his daughter Fatima in the Islamisation of the Malay-Indonesian world. Scholars such as Atjeh believe that the Sayyids played a major role in the spread of Shi’ism. They point to the fact that a great number of sultans in Aceh used the title of Sayyid. Atjeh suggests that most of these sultans were Shi’is, or at least sympathetic to this branch of Islam and, consciously or unconsciously, they included a Shi’i doctrine and world-view in their propagation of Islam. Scholars such as al-Baqir and Al-Attas also suggest that the *Wali Sanga* of Java and other leading figures were Sayyids. Al-Baqir cites the Sayyid construction of graves for the Muslim saints in Indonesia, a practice contrary to Sunni tradition but acceptable within Shi’ism. This, according to al-Baqir, indicates that the first propagators of Islam in the archipelago were Sayyids who upheld

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47 Atjeh (1985:35).
48 Al-Baqir (1986).
49 Al-Attas (1999).
Shi’i beliefs, despite the fact that some of them followed Shafi’i jurisprudence.\textsuperscript{50} Similarly, Pelras mentions the Shi’i influence of Sayyid Jalaluddin al-Aidid, who brought Islam to South Sulawesi, the areas of Cikoang Laikang and Turatea in particular, at the start of the 17th century. This propagator of Islam was a son of Sayyid Muhammad Wahid of Aceh and Syarifah Halisyah. He left Aceh for Banjarmasin, where by the end of the 16th century he was delivering teachings heavily tinged with Shi’ism. Al-Aidid then travelled to Goa, where he met with opposition from the ruler, so he moved back to Cikoang, where he converted the pagan nobility and population. His arrival is still commemorated every year on the occasion of the \textit{Mawlid} festival which celebrates the birth of the Prophet.\textsuperscript{51} Al-Baqir, Al-Attas and Ibrahim\textsuperscript{52} have tried to trace the early historical development of Sayyid pre-eminence from the 9th to the 13th centuries. They point to the leading historical figure, Ahmad al-Muhajir, of the 8th generation after Ali and his grandson, Alawi bin Ubaidillah who, after performing the \textit{hajj} in 930, left Basrah for Yemen. The Sayyids in Southeast Asia mainly came from Yemen. Protracted debates still exist between scholars who believe these Sayyid figures were Sunni and those who believe they were Shi’i who practiced \textit{taqiyya}, or the dissimulation of religious faith to practical Shi’i ends.\textsuperscript{53}

Azra has strongly criticised those who propound a great influence of Shi’ism in Indonesia prior to the Iranian revolution of 1979. He rejects the existence of a Shi’i sultanate in Aceh, along with the idea of political struggle between the Shi’i and Sunni sultanates there. In his view, the principal weakness of the above writers, particularly Jamil, Hasjmi and Parlindungan\textsuperscript{54} is their uncritical and unverified use of local sources and their comparison with other contemporary sources, specifically with regard to historical developments in the wider world of Islam during the period in question. Azra argues that there is no indication of political or ideological conflict between Sunnis and Shi’is in the historical evidence of Islam in the Middle East before the 16th century. He suggests that descriptions of conflict are likely to be based on Sunni-Shi’i conflicts of a later period, which are projected back onto the past, with additional support being sought in local sources. While Azra’s criticism on the question of political conflict can be historically justified, I believe there is ample indication that minority Shi’is \textit{were} present in Indonesia’s past.

Azra also rejects views that the celebration of \textit{‘Ashura} and \textit{Tabut} are irrefutably influenced by Shi’i traditions, saying they are devoid of Shi’i theological or political ideology.\textsuperscript{55} He does however recognise a significant Persian influence.

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{50} Al-Baqir (1986:51).\textsuperscript{51} Pelras (1985:113).\textsuperscript{52} Ibrahim (2000).\textsuperscript{53} For a full description of this practice, see Chapter Three.\textsuperscript{54} Parlindungan (1965).\textsuperscript{55} Azra (1995:13).}
Introduction

On Malay-Indonesian Muslim literature. A great number of early texts are translations or adaptations of Persian originals. Even the *Taj al-Salatin* (Crown of the Sultans), one of the earliest historical works in Malay, is a translation of a lost Persian original that may have been brought to the archipelago from India. Similarly, another important Malay history entitled *Sejarah Melayu* (The Malay Annals) includes a great number of Persian verses and contains terminology foreign to Malay-Indonesian. Azra admits that the relatively high degree of Persian influence upon Malay-Indonesian literature has led to lengthy debates among scholars as to whether Shi‘i doctrines were also found among Muslims in the archipelago.⁵⁶ In this debate, however, Azra takes a negative stance, arguing that Persian influence is not always identifiable with Shi‘ism, suggesting that “Shi‘i religious thought has hardly ever spread in the archipelago, let alone had a strong influence.”⁵⁷ Using a variety of written sources to examine the influence of Shi‘ism in the field of politics, literature and religion, Azra concludes “It is clear that certain Islamic practices in the Malay-Indonesian archipelago which are associated by some people as Shi‘ite, are essentially just similarities, empty of the theological framework and political ideology of Shi‘ism.”⁵⁸ According to Azra, Shi‘ism as a school of religious and political thought only attracted followers in Indonesia after the Iranian revolution and through translations of Iranian scholars and thinkers such as Ali Shari‘ati, Muthahhari, and Khomeini.⁵⁹

Interest in studying Shi‘ism in Indonesia has increased recently. In addition to the above debate concerning the historical arrival and influence of Shi‘ism, two studies on its contemporary development have appeared. The first is a preliminary study on Shi‘ism and politics conducted by a research team at the Indonesian Institute of Sciences, led by Abdurrahman Zainuddin and published under the title *Syi‘ah dan Politik di Indonesia* (Shi‘ism and Politics in Indonesia).⁶⁰ Zainuddin et al. attempt to explore the impact of contemporary Shi‘i thought on the political life of Muslims in Indonesia. They begin by briefly introducing Shi‘ism and its development up to the Iranian revolution of 1978-1979 and noting the contemporary Shi‘i concept of *wilayat al-faqih* (the guardianship of the jurists). This is followed by a comparison of the political thought of Ayatollah Khomeini, the then leader of the Iranian revolution and of Ali Shari‘ati, a prominent intellectual regarded as an ideologue of the revolution, emphasising the unique nature of Shi‘i political thought which unites religion and politics. While Khomeini maintains that during the occultation of the twelfth Imam, the jurists, or *faqih* are entitled to rule the Muslim community, Shari‘ati proposes that what he calls “the reformed intellectuals” should play a

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⁶⁰ Zainuddin et al. (2000).
major role in government. The book then attempts to explore the impact of the revolution on the development of Shi’ism in Indonesia, attempting to explain the implications of this development on the political life of Indonesian Muslims and raising an appeal for dialogue between the two Muslim communities in order to prevent conflict. It also includes Azra’s critical article and notes from an interview with Indonesian Shi’i intellectual Jalaluddin Rakhmat, previously published in the journal *Ulumul Qur’an* (The Koranic Sciences). Many criticisms have been directed towards this book, such as those by Nurmansyah who questions the significance of the comparison between the political thought of Khomeini and Shari’ati, while accusing Azra of ignorance of Shi’i history. In my opinion, one of the most noticeable weaknesses of the book is its failure to examine the identity and reality of the Shi’is in Indonesia.

Another study by Syamsuri Ali focuses on intellectual and social relations among the Indonesian alumni of *Hawza ‘Ilmiyya*, the College of Learning of Qum, Iran and how they relate to the transmission of Shi’ism in Indonesia. In this pioneering research, Ali provides us with important information on the Indonesian educational institutions and leaders who send students to Qum, biographies of Qum alumni, their discourses on aspects of Shi’ism and their role in establishing Shi’i institutions and local associations in Indonesia. However, Ali’s work comes with a caveat: the scope of his account of the Qum alumni is limited, particularly in terms of actors and regions discussed. The same is admitted by Jalaluddin Rakhmat, who was a co-promoter of the thesis as well as the most prominent Shi’i intellectual in Indonesia. Ali’s research focus excludes the important role of other *ustadh* and intellectuals who are not Qum alumni. As a result, the true extent of Shi’ism in Indonesia is not revealed in Ali’s account. Despite this caveat, however, Ali’s study is an important contribution to our topic.

Although there have been a considerable number of studies relevant to Shi’ism in Indonesia, as yet the true nature of the Shi’i denomination in the country – its leading figures, beliefs and practices, institutions and organisations as well as reactions from the majority Muslim community – is still to be fully revealed. This present work will deal with these aspects in order to provide a comprehensive understanding of Shi’ism within the context of the Sunni majority in the country, as well as to shed light on the complex nature of Indonesian religion and society.

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62 Ali (2002). This is a draft PhD thesis examined in *ujian tertutup* (examinations not open to the public) in 2002 by the Graduate Programme, UIN Jakarta, but was not promoted until April 2004, when I received a copy of the thesis. I thank Prof. Azyumardi Azra for informing me of its existence and his attempts to make a copy available to me. I also thank Fuad Jabali and Idzam Fautanu for their assistance.
63 Rakhmat, interview, (2/7/2002).
**Theoretical Framework**

In analysing the Shi’is in Indonesia as a minority Muslim group this study employs the theory of ‘stigma’ proposed by the sociologist Erving Goffman. I also follow Devin Stewart’s steps in his study of the Twelver Shi’i response to Sunni legal theory. Stewart maintains the applicability of this theory to Shi’is “who have lived as a stigmatised minority dominated by a potentially hostile majority in most areas of the Muslim world and during most periods of Muslim history.” According to Goffman’s theory, stigmatised groups tend to adopt strategies that fit into a social system dominated by the majority. While Sunnism has become the norm in the Muslim world, Shi’ism is considered ‘abnormal’ and Shi’is have to implement certain strategies in order to gain recognition and respect from the Sunni majority.

**Methodology**

This study is based on fieldwork and library research. Two periods of fieldwork, both lasting eight months, were conducted in several cities and towns in Indonesia, including Jakarta and Bandung. Each period lasted eight months: the first, from June 2002 until January 2003 and the second, from October 2003 until May 2004. I interviewed leading Shi’i figures and adherents, observed and participated in a number of religious activities at Shi’i institutions, visited their libraries, engaged in dialogue with them and collected Shi’i and anti-Shi’i books, periodicals, pamphlets, cassettes, DVD’s and other materials. I also gathered information from the websites of organisations and institutions. My relationship with the Shi’is was such that I was welcome to participate in their activities and conduct conversations with them in a way that allowed me to collect as ‘natural’ data as possible. To facilitate my interaction with members, I took a three-month course in Persian at the Islamic Cultural Centre of Jakarta in January-March 2004. To collect data on Sunni responses, I visited the offices of DDII (*Dewan Dakwah Islamiyah Indonesia*, the Indonesian Islamic Missionary Council), LPPI (*Lembaga Pengkajian dan Penelitian Islam*, Institute of Islamic Studies and Research) in Jakarta, centres of Persis (*Persatuan Islam*) in Bandung and Bangil, the library of MUI (*Majlis Ulama Indonesia*, Council of Indonesian Muslim Scholars) in the Istiqlal Mosque in Jakarta, the Office of Research and

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64 ‘Stigma’ may be defined as “the situation of the individual who is disqualified from full social acceptance” (Goffman 1986:n.p.). Goffman classifies three types of stigma: first, physical deformities; second, blemishes of individual character perceived as weak, unnatural, treacherous or dishonest; third, “the tribal stigma of race, nation, and religion” (Goffman 1986:4). The stigma of Shi’ism is included in the third category.

65 Goffman (1986).

The Structure of the Study

This study is presented in nine chapters, in addition to the introduction. Chapter One describes major elements and factors in the historical formation of the Shi‘i community in Indonesia. This is followed in Chapter Two by a description of the types of leaders in the Shi‘i community and portraits of Husein al-Habsyi, Husein Shahab and Jalaluddin Rakhmat. Chapter Three examines the characteristics of Shi‘ism as a madhhab as it is understood and practiced by the Indonesian Shi‘is themselves. This includes outlining the concept of ahl al-bayt (members of the House of the Prophet), the doctrine of the Imamate and the Mahdi, Ja‘fari jurisprudence, aspects of Shi‘i piety and the teaching and practice of taqiyya, or the approved dissimulation of faith.

Chapters Four, Five and Six deal with the efforts of the Shi‘is to spread their teachings in Indonesian society and to gain recognition for Shi‘ism as a valid interpretation of Islam. These chapters examine institutions founded by the Shi‘is and include analysis of the fields of da‘wa, or missionary outreach, education and publishing. In the chapter on da‘wa I describe the characteristics of Shi‘i institutions and the ways da‘wa has been conducted. This includes stated ideals, types of da‘wa activity and da‘wa training. The chapter on education presents accounts of educational institutions organised by leading Shi‘i figures. Another important means of disseminating Shi‘ism is by print publishing and this is dealt with in Chapter Six, with a survey of Shi‘i publishers and their products - Indonesian translations, works by Indonesian Shi‘i figures and periodicals – and the impact of such publications.

Chapter Seven scrutinises IJABI (Ikatan Jamaah Ahlul Bait Indonesia, the Indonesian Council of Ahlulbait Associations), the mass organisation established by the Shi‘is as a means of gaining legal recognition from state authorities. An historical account of its establishment, its ideological foundations and its development are presented in this chapter.

Finally, a study of Shi‘ism in Indonesia will never be complete unless the varied responses of the Sunni Muslim majority are covered. Chapter Eight therefore includes an analysis of the general attitude of large Sunni organisations, both traditionalist and reformist, to Shi‘ism and the responses of the Council of Indonesian ‘Ulama and the Department of Religious Affairs. It also presents a description of ways in which anti-Shi‘i groups propagate the fight against Shi‘ism. This is followed by an examination of the moderate attitudes of
influential Muslim intellectuals which have paved the way for the further development of Shi’ism in Indonesia. Chapter Nine provides the conclusion to this study.