1. The Formation of the Shi‘i Community

The precise number of adherents to Shi‘ism in Indonesia is not known. Many notable Shi‘is have tried to estimate their numbers, even though there are no reliable sources to call upon. Several years ago the Lebanese scholar Muhammad Jawad Mughniyya (d. 1979) mentioned the figure of one million.¹ The same number was cited in 2003 by Andi Muhammad Assegaf, head of the Fatimah Foundation in Jakarta.² In 1995 Ahmad Baragbah, who leads Pesantren Al-Hadi in Pekalongan, Central Java estimated there to be 20,000 Shi‘is in Indonesia,³ while in 2000 Dimitri Mahayana, former chairman of the national Shi‘i organisation, IJABI (Ikatan Jamaah Ahlubait Indonesia) predicted a figure of 3 million.⁴ All of these estimates are without basis and therefore cannot be relied upon. It is almost impossible for researchers to provide the quantitative data necessary to produce reliable statistics. In 2000, the Islamic Cultural Centre of Jakarta, an institution sponsored by Iran, attempted to provide a database of all Shi‘i ustadhs, or religious teachers and their followers in Indonesia. The project failed, due to many Shi‘is simply not returning the distributed questionnaire. Despite this lack of quantitative data, it is certain that the Shi‘is constitute only a very small proportion of Indonesia’s Muslim population. Even though Shi‘ism has been evident in Indonesia in the past, the majority of Shi‘is are actually converts from Sunnism following the victory of the Iranian revolution of 1979.

This chapter seeks to identify the elements and factors which have contributed to the formation of the Shi‘i community in Indonesia. I begin by tracing its genesis, that is, the presence of a Shi‘i group among the community of Arab descent, and by examining the way in which the Shi‘is have maintained their existence throughout history. Secondly, I deal with the emergence of the ‘Qum alumni’ and their promotion of their Islamic education in Qum, Iran. This is followed by a description of the emergence of the Shi‘i campus group. A brief description of the ways of conversion to Shi‘ism will conclude the chapter.

A. The Arab Community

The Arabs have been a significant element of the Shi‘i community in Indonesia in terms of both quantity and quality. Quantitatively, the group constitutes a
large proportion of that community. Qualitatively, the most prominent Shi’i ustadhs in Indonesia have been of Arab origin, particularly those of Sayyid lines claiming descent from the Prophet. The Arabs are considered to be the original members of the Shi’i community in Indonesia, despite the exact date of the arrival of Shi’ism remaining unclear.

The Shi’is have existed in strength among the Arab community in the region that is now called Indonesia since at least the late 19th century. Since this period there have been close relations between the Hadramaut, the Yemeni region in the South Arabian Peninsula and the Malay-Indonesian world. Riddell suggests that European visitors to the Hadramaut in the early decades of the 20th century witnessed extensive contacts with the Malay world. He regards this period – one of an intensified increase in Arab emigration due to economic stress and political tensions - as a turning point for Hadramis, both in their country of origin and in Southeast Asia. They left the Hadramaut to become imams and teachers, and it is among Hadrami migrants and Indonesian-born Arabs, particularly the Sayyids, that we can identify adherents to Shi’ism in this region. Muhammad Asad Shahab (1910-2001), a famous Shi’i Sayyid writer and journalist mentions that several prominent Sayyid leaders and scholars belonged to the families of al-Muhdar, Yahya, Shahab, al-Jufri, al-Haddad and al-Saqqaf. There were also Shi’is among other Arab clans in the Dutch East Indies. However, we cannot generalise that all members of the aforementioned Sayyid clans were Shi’is. In fact, the majority of them were, and still are, Sunni. Moreover, as we shall see below, some members of these families actually joined anti-Shi’i groups.

The fact that some Sayyid families belonged to the Shi’i branch of Islam was not widely acknowledged among the Sunni majority. A number of them were even assumed to be Sunni scholars and leaders, since they had considerable knowledge of Sunni teachings and were involved in the religious life of the community at large. This may have been due to the practice of taqiyya, the permitted concealment of true faith. Publicly, they practiced the obligatory rituals in accordance with the regulations of Sunni Shafi’i jurisprudence while inwardly holding to the Shi’i fundamentals of belief. Only a few openly observed aspects of worship in accordance with the Shi’i Ja’fari school of jurisprudence.

From the Shi’i minority group in the Arab community there came several prominent ‘ulama and leaders who played major roles in social, religious and

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7 On taqiyya and other teachings of Shi’ism as understood and practiced in Indonesia, see Chapter Three.
8 This is not an unusual case. In the history of Islam in the Middle East, from the 10th to the 17th century, for instance, Shi’i jurists performing taqiyya not only studied with Shafi’i teachers but also participated in the Sunni legal education system. Some were recognised as professors of Sunni law, served as legal authorities in Sunni circles and wrote books within the Sunni tradition (Stewart 1998:109).
1. The Formation of the Shi'i Community

political fields. Before the first half of the 20th century, we find three eminent Shi'i leaders in the Dutch East Indies, representing different Sayyid clans. The first and foremost was Sayyid Muhammad bin Ahmad al-Muhdar (1861-1926) of the al-Muhdar clan. Very little is known about the early life of this figure. We are informed that he was born in Qereh, in the Hadramaut, Yemen, around 1861 and received a religious education in his homeland. He came to the Dutch East Indies at the age of 24, living first in Bogor, West Java and later in Bondowoso and Surabaya in East Java. He was engaged in teaching and propagating Islamic teachings in various religious gatherings in Surabaya, Bondowoso and other towns in East Java, in Pekalongan, Central Java and in Bogor and Batavia, now Jakarta. In 1908, he was involved in the establishment of Jam'iyya al-Khairiyya al-'Arabiyya, a sister organisation of the pioneering Arab Jami'at Khair (Benevolent Society) of Batavia which built Islamic schools, the Madrasa al-Khairiyya in Surabaya and Bondowoso. However, these schools were not Shi'i in character. Muhammad al-Muhdar passed away on 4 May 1926 in Surabaya, where he was buried.

During his life Muhammad al-Muhdar was said to have expressed his devotion to Shi'ism through his teaching and preaching. For instance, he was said to have been critical of the al-Sahih of Bukhari, the most authoritative Sunni collection of Hadith. Such criticism is common among Shi'is but is rarely found in the Sunni community. Among the Shi'is, both past and present, Muhammad al-Muhdar is regarded as a prominent scholar who contributed to the spread and perpetuation of the faith. Besides his teaching and da'wa, he composed a number of literary works which contain principal Shi'i doctrines, such as the doctrinal designation of Ali bin Abi Talib as the first Imam to succeed the Prophet Muhammad. These works, however, were never published.

The second prominent Shi'i figure in the Dutch East Indies was Sayyid Ali bin Ahmad Shahab (1865-1944) who greatly contributed to the educational, religious, social and political development of Indonesian society. Born in Batavia to a Sayyid father, Ahmad bin Muhammad bin Shahab and a Sundanese mother, Ali Ahmad Shahab studied basic Islamic knowledge with his father and other Sayyid scholars in the region. Widely known as Ali Menteng, he was one of the leading Arab figures in the Dutch East Indies at the end of the 19th and the first half of the 20th centuries. He was a scholar, activist and successful

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13 Ahmad bin Muhammad bin Shahab (d. 1891) was a wealthy Sayyid who financed the building of a number of mosques in Batavia and the Hadramaut (Shahabuddin 2000:43-44). Ali Ahmad Sahab's mother, Nursatri came from Cianjur, West Java (Salam 1992:17).
14 Ali Ahmad Shahab wrote a number of books, published and unpublished, in Arabic, including al-Thalatha al-Abtal (Three Heroes), Tarbiyyat al-Nisa' (The Education of Women) and al-Sa'ada al-Zawijiyya.
merchant. He was also one of the founders of the abovementioned Jami'at Khair, the first Muslim organisation in the Dutch East Indies, established in Jakarta in 1901. Ali Ahmad Shahab was elected general chairman of Jami'at Khair in 1905 when it gained legal recognition from the Dutch East Indies government. He was one of the most vocal opponents of Al-Irsyad (The Guidance), an organisation founded in opposition to Jami'at Khair because of long standing conflicts between Sayyids and non-Sayyid Arabs in both the Hadramaut and the Indies from the second decade of the 20th century. Ali Ahmad Shahab was the chief informant to the British Consul-General in Batavia until the 1920s and he used this position to provoke the British into taking action against the non-Sayyid movement of Al-Irsyad. He convinced the British to use their control over the ports of India and Singapore and prohibit the travel of followers of Al-Irsyad to the Hadramaut and to intercept their money remittances home. He also influenced the Qu'ayti sultan in the Hadramaut to establish alliances with the British. Apparently he was relatively successful in this regard, as Al-Irsyad people had difficulty visiting the Hadramaut when the British government refused to grant them entry. Their relatives in the Hadramaut also faced similar obstacles.

Like other leading Muslim figures in this region, Ali Ahmad Shahab was influenced by the spirit of Pan-Islamism. He established contact with Sultan Abdul Hamid of the Ottoman Empire, visiting Turkey to meet with the Sultan to discuss arrangements for providing education in Istanbul for Sayyid pupils from the Dutch East Indies. As a result of this mission, three Sayyid boys, his own son, Abdulmutallib, Abdurrahman al-Aydrus and Muhammad bin Abdullah al-Attas entered the Galatasary Lyceum, a modern educational establishment in Istanbul.

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16 Mobini-Kesheh (1999:60). Al-Irsyad was founded in 1914 by mainly non-Sayyid Arabs, including Ahmad Surkati, following his resignation from his position as an inspector of Jami'at Khair. The dispute between Jami'at Khair and Al-Irsyad concerned three issues of Sayyid privilege: kafa’a (equality in status between partners in marriage), the kissing of the hands of the Sayyids in greeting and the use of the title ‘Sayyid’. Whilst Jami'at Khair supported these customs, Al-Irsyad strongly opposed them (Mobini-Kesheh 1999:92-107). Other studies regarding the conflict include Noer (1973), Kostiner (1984), Haikal (1986) and De Jonge (1993).
18 Noer (1973:67).
19 Freitag (2003:210-211). From the late-19th century onwards a number of wealthy Sayyids sent their children to Constantinople to pursue their education. Before Ali Ahmad Shahab, Sayyid Abdullah al-Attas sent his four children to Turkey, Egypt and Europe to gain a modern education. In 1898, four Arab boys from Java arrived in Constantinople, which became a cause of consternation among the Dutch colonial authorities. The Dutch, fearing the influence of pan-Islam, urged the Turkish government to discourage people from Java from studying in Constantinople. In response, the Turkish government rejected a request from the Consul-General in Batavia for 30 boys from Batavia and Singapore to be sent to Constantinople (Van Dijk 2002:68-69). In spite of this, the following two years saw the number of boys from Java studying in Constantinople...
Ali Ahmad Shahab was not recognised as Shi’i among the Muslim population in the Dutch East Indies. However, his son, Muhammad Asad Shahab affirms that he not only adhered to Shi’ism in terms of belief and practice but also became a famous propagator of this madhhab.\textsuperscript{20} We do not have information as to whether Ali Ahmad Shahab was a student of Sayyid Abu Bakr Shahab, an influential Shi’i Hadrami teacher in Southeast Asia in the period. Not much is known about the ways in which Ali Ahmad Shahab propagated Shi’i teachings, but it is understood that it was exclusive, limited to his family and close associates. Ali Ahmad Shahab had many disciples to whom he granted the licence to practice and teach certain prayers, including prayers transmitted through the purified Imams. One of the prayers to be recited every morning says, “...grant us the means of subsistence, you are the best who grant it. Grant mercy to the most glad of your creatures, who is our Prophet Muhammad, his household as the ship of salvation and to all propagating Imams.”\textsuperscript{22} The last phrase clearly indicates the Shi’i character of the prayer.

The third famous Shi’i scholar was Sayyid Aqil bin Zainal Abidin (1870-1952) of the al-Jufri clan. Born in Surabaya in 1870, he first studied Islamic knowledge with his father. When he was seven years old his father sent him to Mecca to study with Shafi’i ‘ulama and he is said to have memorised all chapters of the holy Qur’an by the age of ten, a feat considered to be a great religious and intellectual achievement. Aqil al-Jufri’s teachers of the Qur’an were Muhammad al-Sharbini\textsuperscript{23} and Yusuf Abu Hajar. He studied Arabic syntax under ‘Umar Shatta and ‘Abd al-Rahman Babasil. ‘Abd al-Rahman al-Hindi al-Haidar and other Shafi’i scholars taught him the Qur’an exegesis of\textsuperscript{24} al-Jalalayn and Hadith, particularly collections by Muslim (d. 875), Abu Daud (d. 889) and al-Nasa’i (d. 915). In this period, Aqil al-Jufri probably adhered to Sunnism. Then, in 1899, he moved to Singapore, where he studied\textsuperscript{25} al-Durr al-Manthur and\textsuperscript{26} al-Amali (‘the Dictations’) of Shaykh al-Saduq al-Qummi under the renowned

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\item increase to 17. However, their studies were not successful because of a lack of preparatory education in the Netherlands-Indies. Moreover, “they were not model students, who could be paraded as paragons” (Van Dijk 2002:69). By 1901, only eight students remained in Constantinople. Four had died, two had returned to Asia, two had travelled to other countries in Europe and one was missing (Van Dijk 2002:69).
\item Shahab (1962:47).
\item Shahabuddin (2000:78).
\item Shahabuddin (2000:155).
\item Muhammad al-Sharbani al-Dimyati (d.1903) was widely considered to be the grandmaster in the field of Qur’anic studies. A number of Indonesian students, including Shaykh Mahfuz al-Tirmisi (d. 1919) studied with him (Rachman 1998:39).
\item Al-Jalalayn (‘The Two Jalals’ after the authors’ names) is a concise Qur’an exegesis written by Jalal al-Din al-Mahalli (d. 1459) and his student Jalaluddin al-Suyuti (d. 1505). It is a well-known text in the Sunni Muslim world.
\item Al-Durr al-Manthur fi al-Tafsir bi al-Ma’thur (Scattered Pearls in Traditional Exegesis of the Qur’an) is a famous exegesis by al-Suyuthi (d. 1505) frequently cited in Shi’i works.
\item Shaykh al-Saduq Muhammad bin ‘Ali Ibn Babawaih al-Qummi (d. 991) was a leading scholar of Shi’i Hadith. His manual, Man la Yahduruh al-Faqih (For those not in the Presence of a Jurisprudent), is one of the four authoritative Shi’i Hadith collections.
\end{itemize}
scholar Abu Bakr bin Shahab (1846-1922). In addition, Muhammad bin Aqil bin Yahya (1863-1931) taught Aqil al-Jufri the *fiqh* book entitled *al-‘Urwa al-Wuthqa* (The Indissoluble Bond) by Sayyid Muhammad Kazim Tabataba’i Yazdi and consequently Aqil al-Jufri took this prominent Shi’i legist as his *marja’ al-taqlig*, or ‘source of imitation’. These Shi’i scholars may well have been influential in Aqil Al-Jufri’s conversion to the Shi’i *madhab*. Three years later, he returned to Mecca where he joined the Shi’i congregation of Ali al-‘Amri al-Madani and other Shi’i scholars. He also made contacts with prominent ‘ulama of the world, including Ahmad Zawawi of Mecca.

After several years of living in Mecca, Aqil al-Jufri went to Jambi, Sumatra, where he married a daughter of Sayyid Idrus bin Hasan bin Alwi al-Jufri. Subsequently, he moved to Mecca and stayed there until 1921, at which point he returned to his home town, Surabaya, where he remained until his death in 1952. In Java Aqil Al-Jufri devoted his life to teaching, preaching and writing. He was also known for his charitable concern for the poor. He tended to adopt an open approach to the propagation of Shi’ism. As a result, he became involved in debates with Sunni ‘ulama in Surabaya and one particular debate was cut short following physical threats against him. Like Ali Ahmad Shahab, Aqil al-Jufri was said to have been involved in the struggle for Indonesian independence. He also produced some literary works. These unpublished writings affirm his allegiance to Shi’ism and the validity of its *madhab*. In 1924, for instance, together with his brother, Ahmad al-Jufri he published one of Muhammad bin Aqil’s works, *al-‘Atb al-Jamil ‘ala Ahl al-Jarh wa al-Ta’dil* (A Beautiful Censure of Men of Sarcasm and Modification).

These three figures maintained connections with two Shi’i Hadrami scholars, Sayyid Abu Bakr bin ‘Abd al-Rahman bin Muhammad bin Shahab (1846-1922) and Muhammad bin Aqil bin Yahya (1863-1931). Abu Bakr bin Shahab wrote a large number of books dealing with various branches of knowledge and some collections of poetry. His books on logic are still taught at al-Azhar University in Cairo. The role of Abu Bakr bin Shahab as a travelling merchant, scholar and teacher was important in international Hadrami networks of the

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27 Muhammad Kazim Tabataba’i Yazdi (1831-1919) was born in Kasnu near Yazd, Iraq, and died in Najaf. He became the sole *marja’ al-taqlig* after the death of Akhund Khurasani in 1911 (Momen 1985:323).
28 See below for details on the educational system for Shi’i jurists; on the obligation of laity to follow them, see Chapter Three.
30 Al-Tihrani (1404/1984:1274), Shahab (1962:52).
31 Al-Tihrani (1404/1984:1274).
32 Shahab (1962:52).
33 Shahab (1962:51-52).
34 A lengthy biography is provided by Muhammad Asad Shahab in *Abu al-Murtada* (1996) on which Freitag (2003) relies for her account of the role of Abu Bakr bin Shahab.
second half of the 19th and early 20th centuries. Abu Bakr bin Shahab was “an important propagator of reformist ideas among Hadramis, both at home and in the Diaspora.” He travelled to countries in the Middle East, Africa, South Asia and Southeast Asia. He stayed for some time in Surabaya and Singapore for business and to visit relatives, as well as to teach. Our three prominent Shi‘i figures probably studied with Abu Bakr bin Shahab when he visited the Southeast Asian region and maintained close connections with him.

Muhammad bin Aqil bin Yahya (1863-1931) was also a student of Abu Bakr bin Shahab. Like his teacher, he was a travelling merchant and scholar. He visited Southeast Asia and stayed for a relatively long period in Singapore. In March 1908, together with Hasan bin Shahab and other Sayyid leaders, he engaged in the reorganisation of the management of al-Imam, an influential reformist magazine, and was appointed the managing director of the company. In addition, he devoted himself to teaching and writing. One of his students was Aqil al-Jufri who also printed one of Muhammad bin Aqil’s works. However, in Singapore in 1907 he triggered a hostile reaction from the Sunni Muslim community by publishing his controversial book entitled al-Nasa’ih al-Kafiya liman Yatawalla Mu’awiya (Ample Admonitions to Whomever Accords Allegiance to Mu’awiya). The book received public acclaim from Abu Bakr bin Shahab. This book clearly indicates Muhammad bin Aqil’s adherence to Shi‘ism. Werner Ende provides an important account of Muhammad bin Aqil’s Shi‘i inclinations, especially with regard to the permissibility of cursing Mu‘awiya bin Abi Sufyan, the founder of the Sunni Umayyad dynasty in Baghdad, the dynasty eventually responsible for the death of Husain. However, while Ende is reluctant to affirm that Muhammad bin Aqil was a Shi‘i, my reading of the book clearly indicates that he was. The book cites both Sunni and Shi‘i sources to prove the enjoinment of the cursing of Mu‘awiya. Muhammad bin Aqil points out that both Sunnis and Shi‘is have agreed on the historical obligation of killing Mu‘awiya when there was an opportunity and that this was an excellent deed rewarded by God. A further indication of bin Aqil’s adherence to Shi‘ism is that he used the term ‘Imam’ to address the Shi‘i Imams and the words ‘alayhi
al-salam (peace be upon him) after the mention of their names. This is a tradition not present in Sunni Islam. In addition, bin Aqil had two criticisms of Sunnism. First, he criticised consensus in the four Sunni schools of jurisprudence under the rule of tyrannical kings.42 The second criticism was that the Sunnis reject the Shi’i propagation of the infallibility of the twelve Imams, utter cries of denial, disgrace their names and reject the rational and textual evidence of their existence.43 The following quotation, from the writing of Muhammad bin Aqil, contains further aspects of Shi’i teaching rejected by Sunni scholars

Astonishingly, a large number of people and even some of the scholars think that whoever wipes his feet instead of washing them in the ablution (before prayer) is a heretic. Similarly, whoever says that good deeds come from God whilst bad deeds come from himself, whoever includes ‘hayya ‘ala khayr al-’amal’ (come to the best of actions) in the call to prayer, whoever says that ‘Ali is more excellent that Abu Bakr, whoever does not approve religious obligations by slyness, […] all are erroneous heretics in the views of most of our Sunni ‘ulama.44

Inevitably, the book provoked fierce reactions from Sunni ‘ulama in the region and particularly from prominent Arab ‘ulama, including the famous Honorary Adviser on Arab Affairs to the colonial government and Mufti of Batavia, Sayyid Uthman bin Abdullah bin Aqil bin Yahya (1822-1914).45 Muhammad bin Aqil’s father in-law and Hasan bin Shahab, Muhammad bin Aqil’s friend. Scrutinising the entire contents of the book, Hasan bin Shahab proved that Muhammad bin Aqil’s work was heavily tinged with Shi’i ways of understanding Islam.46

42 Muhammad bin Aqil (1907:37).
43 Muhammad bin Aqil (1907:138).
44 Muhammad bin Aqil (1907:112).
45 In 1911, Sayyid Uthman published his work, I’anat al-Mustarshidin ‘ala Ijtinab al-Bida’ fi al-Din (Guidance for Seekers of Direction in Avoiding Innovations in Religion). Even though Sayyid Uthman himself never mentions Muhammad bin Aqil’s work in this treatise, his book was meant to reject Shi’ism and the cursing of the companions of the Prophet Muhammad, and to demonstrate the invalidity of Wahhabism. He pointed out that Muslim scholars have agreed, in terms of textual and rational proofs, that Shi’ism is a most deceitful path and the Muslim leaders know well the Shi’is’ clever ability in deceiving. He went on to suggest that Abdullah bin Saba’ was its founder and wanted to destroy Islam. He mentioned the unbelievers (zindiq) who will destroy Islam by supporting the development of Shi’ism. Additionally, Uthman criticised the fact that Shi’is, who were ignorant in knowledge, never refer to the pious scholars of jurisprudence, Hadith and Sufism but to hypocrite unbelievers (Uthman 1911:22). “Shi’is are hypocrites whose madhhab is dissimulation” (Uthman 1911:22). Sayyid Uthman further cited several Sunni views affirming that Shi’is wanted to slander the companions of the Prophet, or even accuse them of being infidels. He regarded the Shi’is as heretics who twisted facts regarding the companions of the Prophet and denied ‘Ali’s recognition of the validity of the first two caliphat, of Abu Bakr and ‘Umar (Uthman 1911:22-25). Studies have been devoted to the role of Sayyid Uthman as a Muslim scholar in the Dutch East Indies; see Kaptein (1998) and Azra (1995a, 1997).

46 Hasan bin Alwi bin Shahab wrote a 153-page treatise, al-Ruqya al-Shafiya min Nafathat Sumum al-Nasa’ih al-Kafiya (the Curative Charm against the Poisonous Spittle of ‘the Ample Admonitions’) that was completed in 1328H/1908. In the first page of the book, Hasan bin Shahab states that Muhammad bin Aqil’s book calls upon the Sunnis, particularly among the laymen, to follow the Shi’i teachings. He emphasises that the Shi’is are known to lie when citing references in order to support their stance. The author mentions one of the reasons why he wrote the book, namely the fact that many of his fellow Muslims requested him to write a
The continuity of Shi’ism as a minority madhab in Indonesia in a later period was maintained mainly through informal education within families or private circles. Regarding teacher-student relationships, Muhammad al-Muhdar and Aqil al-Jufri had a close disciple who then became a prominent Shi’i leader, Sayyid Hasyim bin Muhammad Assegaf (d. 1970) who lived in Gresik, near Surabaya. It was said that Aqil al-Jufri had bequeathed him the future role of performing his burial ritual according to Ja’fari jurisprudence. He was known to have applied Ja’fari jurisprudence in private and public, even among the Sunni majority. In addition to his close relationships with Shi’is in Indonesia, Sayyid Hasyim bin Muhammad Assegaf made contact with Shi’i ‘ulama of the world and his fame as a Shi’i figure led to some of these ‘ulama and scholars to visit him. Abubakar Atjeh wrote: “In Gresik we met with a famous man named Sayyid Hasyim Assegaf. With him we talked very much about Shi’ism and its books.”

At times when the Shi’i group was without an institutional centre, Hasyim Assegaf provided his house as a place for Shi’i commemorations. With regard to his role, Muhammad Asad Shahab wrote:

In Gresik, East Java, the great ceremony of ‘Id al-Ghadir is celebrated annually in the big houses of Shi’i figures. In the latest years the ceremony has been carried out in the house of Sayyid Hasyim bin Muhammad Assegaf, one of the Imamiyya leaders. Today he has reached the age of eighty but he is still very healthy. The ceremony is attended by a great number of Shi’is who came to the town from various cities and from distant places. The biography of Our Hero, Master of the Faithful, Imam Ali (upon him be peace) and Arabic poems (qasida) are read and sermons are delivered. Then a meal is served.

Kinship has played an important role in the continuity of Shi’ism. Most followers are the descendants of the aforementioned figures and their relatives. Some of them have become eminent ‘ulama in a number of cities and towns in Indonesia, where they are active in the fields of Islamic education and da’wa. From the al-Muhdar clan we find two children of Muhammad al-Muhdar, who are known as ustadh. Muhdar al-Muhdar was very well known in Bondowoso and other towns in East Java whilst Husein al-Muhdar (d. 1982) gave Islamic teachings...
in religious gatherings in various cities in Java, including Jakarta. These two figures continued to spread the Shi‘i teachings among their relatives and small groups of acquaintances. Some newly converted Shi‘is, both Arab and non-Arab, in the post-Iranian revolution period had the opportunity to receive Shi‘i teachings from Husein al-Muhdar.

The best known figures of the Shahab clan are Muhammad Dhiya Shahab (d.1986) and Muhammad Asad Shahab (d. 2001), both sons of Ali Ahmad Shahab. Muhammad Dhiya Shahab was a teacher, journalist and writer. Like his father, he was a leading figure within the Arab community in Indonesia and had a major role in the development of Jami‘at Khair, becoming its organisational chief for about ten years (1935-1945). He taught at the schools of Jami‘at Khair and led al-Rabita al-Alawiyya (the Alawi League); in doing so he paid great attention to the social and religious development of the Arabs all over Indonesia. From 1950 to 1960 he worked at the Department of Information. He wrote a number of scholarly works, most published in Arabic in Beirut, including al-Imam al-Muhajir, which was written in collaboration with Abdullah bin Nuh (1905-1987).

Muhammad Asad Shahab was also a journalist and prolific writer. He first studied at the schools of Jami‘at Khair and then moved to the al-Khairiya school in Surabaya, which he completed in 1932. From 1935, he was a correspondent for several newspapers. In 1945, together with his elder brother, he founded a news agency named the Arabian Press Board (APB), which in 1950 became the Asian Press Board. In 1963 APB merged with the national news agency institute, Antara because President Sukarno wanted a single news agency in the country. Muhammad Asad Shahab was also the founder of the magazine National Press Digest. Like his elder brother, he then worked at the Muslim World League in Mecca from 1965. It is pertinent to note that Asad Shahab introduced the modernist scholar Hamka to various Iranian scholars who contributed to Hamka’s acceptance of Shi‘i books on Qur‘anic exegesis, including Tabataba’i’s al-Mizan and Ayatollah Khoei’s al-Bayan fi Tafsir al-Qur’an which also become important sources of his tafsir book, Al-Azhar. Muhammad Asad Shahab wrote a large number of Arabic books and treatises, which were published in the Middle East.

In the 1960s the two brothers established an Islamic foundation known as Lembaga Penyelidikan Islam (Islamic Research Institute) and along with it a
periodical, *Pembina* (‘The Cultivator’). The general goals of the institute were to build up a relatively representative library to provide books, journals, magazines and other sources on Islamic knowledge in general and Shi‘ism in particular, to translate foreign language books - mainly Arabic - into Indonesian, and to distribute books and periodicals to the Muslim community of Indonesia. Its last goal was to send students to pursue an Islamic education in the Middle East.\(^{55}\)

They also tried to establish close connections with the Shi‘i ‘ulama in Middle Eastern countries with a view to realising the propagation of Shi‘ism in Indonesia and received the support of a number of ‘ulama. Muhammad Kazim al-Quzwaini in Karbala, Iraq sent books and periodicals, including material on several fields of Islamic knowledge such as Ja‘fari jurisprudence, Qur‘anic exegesis, Hadith and ethics. Similarly, the Grand Ayatollah Muhsin al-Hakim (d. 1970) of Najaf, Iraq, Muhammad Jawad Mughniyya (d. 1979), Hasan al-Amin and *al-‘Irfa‘n* (the first Shi‘i publishing house in Lebanon), gifted a large number of books and other printed materials to Shi‘i Sayyids in Indonesia.\(^{56}\) With the collections of works received from these ‘ulama and institutions, the Islamic Research Institute functioned well as a centre for the spread of Shi‘ism in Indonesia. As a result of its relatively representative collections of Shi‘i works, it proved to be very beneficial for those wanting to learn about Shi‘ism. One beneficiary was the late Abubakar Atjeh, who used the institute to publish a series comparing *madhhab*, including *Sji‘ah, Rasionalisme dalam Islam* (Shi‘ism, Rationalism in Islam). Published in 1965, this was the first sympathetic book on the *madhhab* to be written in Indonesian.\(^{57}\) The institute also became a publisher of several Islamic books.

Visits to Middle Eastern Shi‘i ‘ulama were also made. In 1956 Muhammad Asad Shahab met with ‘Abd al-Husain Sharaf al-Din (d. 1957), Ahmad Arif al-Zayn of *al-‘Irfa‘n* and Muhammad Jawad Mughniyya in Lebanon.\(^{58}\) He visited Hibbat al-Din al-Shahrastani in Baghdad, the Grand Ayatollah Muhsin al-Hakim (d. 1970), Muhammad Rida al-Muzaffar (d. 1964) and Muhammad Taqi al-Hakim (d. 2002) in Najaf. He reported that the Shi‘i ‘ulama showed concern for the condition and development of Shi‘ism in Indonesia and they agreed to accept Indonesian students in their Islamic institutions. However, according to Asad Shahab, a variety of reasons, including strict regulations on visas to go abroad, meant that this opportunity could not be fully utilized at the time.\(^{59}\)

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57 Siradjuddin Abbas criticised Abubakar Atjeh’s sympathetic attitude towards Shi‘ism. It was one of his motivations to write his famous book, *I‘tiqad Ahlussunnah wal-Djama‘ah* (the Doctrine of *ahl al-Sunna wa al-Jama‘ah*), first published in 1969 by Pustaka Tarbiyah, Jakarta. Abbas dedicates many pages of the book to a discussion of the falsity of Shi‘i teachings and its contrast to the true teachings of Sunnism.
58 The visit to Lebanon is mentioned in Mughniyya (1973:205).
59 Shahab (1962:56).
Connections between Indonesian Shi’is and Middle Eastern Shi’i ‘ulama were sustained by visits of the latter, or their representatives, to Indonesia. During such visits information was exchanged and knowledge of Shi’ism was transmitted. Meetings with individual Shi’is and discussions of the principal teachings were held. In 1962, for instance, a learned Shi’i from Iraq, Muhammad Reza Ja’fari visited Indonesia to meet Muslim leaders in the country. His itinerary included a visit to the al-Khairiyya school in Bondowoso. Teachers and students at the madrasa, as well as leading Shi’i figures in the country, including Muhammad Asad Shahab and Husein Al-Habsyi (1921-1994) engaged in discussions about the principal teachings of Shi’ism. Hamzah Al-Habsyi told me that the discussions lasted for four days. Following this event, some teachers of the school converted to Shi’ism. Hamzah Al-Habsyi himself, currently a prominent Shi’i ustadh in Bondowoso, admitted that he converted to Shi’ism around 1969.60

With its albeit limited instruments of propagation and its Middle Eastern connections, this small group succeeded in maintaining continuity and attracting new members to Shi’ism in various cities, towns and villages across Indonesia. Three figures are worthy of mention in this regard. The first is Sayyid Abdul Qadir Bafaqih of Bangsri in Jepara, Central Java, who converted to Shi’ism after reading books that he had received from Kuwait in 1974. In the village of Bangsri he set up and headed Pesantren Al-Khairat where he imparted the teachings of Shi’ism, recorded his instruction and wrote a number of unpublished books.61 His teachings attracted students and a number of people from the surrounding pesantren, who in turn spread Shi’ism to other areas, such as Bulustalan, South Semarang, in Central Java.62 His propagation elicited negative reactions from Sunni figures in the region and also attracted the attention of the government and mass media in 1982.63

The second figure is Sayyid Ahmad Al-Habsyi (d.1994), the leader of Pesantren Ar-Riyadh in Palembang, South Sumatra. He established contacts with an Islamic foundation in Tehran called the Muslim Brotherhood. It was Al-Habsyi who sent his students and renowned Shi’i ustadhs Umar Shahab and his brother Husein Shahab, to pursue their studies in Qum in 1974 and 1979 respectively.64 In this regard it is also worth mentioning an effort made by the Pesantren Al-Khairat of Palu, Central Sulawesi – another sister educational institution of the Jami’at Khair of Jakarta – that had previously sent students to Qum, as

60 Hamzah Al-Habsyi, interview, (15/10/2002).
63 For the reaction from the government, see Chapter Seven. Some Indonesian mass media which provided reports on the unusual fact that Abdul Qadir Bafaqih was a Shi’i are daily Berita Buana 25/10/1982, Sinar Pagi Minggu 1/11/3100/XIII, Suara Merdeka 27, 28, 29/10/1982, and Tempo 20/11/1982.
64 Umar Shahab, interview, (9/1/2003).
illustrated in the section below. These links in the 1970s between Shi‘i Sayyids and Iranian ‘ulama contributed to a new and important development in Shi‘ism in Indonesia.

The third figure of note is Sayyid Husein Al-Habsyi, who established YAPI (Yayasan Pesantren Islam, Foundation of Islamic Pesantren) in Bangil in 1976. He and his pesantren have greatly contributed to the spread of Shi‘ism in Indonesia. As we shall see below, he sent a large number of students – most of whom were of Arab descent - to study in Qum after the establishment of the Islamic Republic of Iran. Most have since become renowned Shi‘i ustadhs in Indonesia.

The triumph of the Iranian revolution in 1979 was a very important historical moment for the foundation of the Shi‘i community in Indonesia. The revolution contributed not only to many conversions to the Shi‘i branch of Islam but also to “a consciousness and awareness of the Shi‘is and their history.” After the revolution many Arabs, both Sayyid and non-Sayyid, converted. But aside from the Iranian revolution and a heightened consciousness of neo-colonialism, Al-Attas provides us with two major reasons for conversion to Shi‘ism within the Sayyid community in Southeast Asia. The first is a general perception by the Sayyids that the other religious and ethnic communities in the region are somehow ‘backward’. Second, Khomeini, the leader of the revolution, is a Sayyid and this genealogical convergence between Shi‘ism and the Sayyids has attracted this group to turn to Shi‘ism. The position of the Arab group within the Shi‘i community continues to be significant as a result of its early experience of the Shi‘i educational institutions in Qum, Iran. It should be noted however that while this group pioneered the sending of students to Qum, quantitatively speaking, students from other ethnic groups now outnumber them.

B. The Qum Alumni

A very important contribution to the formation of the Shi‘i community in Indonesia was the emergence of Qum graduates, those who had pursued Islamic education in the hawza ‘ilmiyya (colleges of learning) in Qum, presently the most important centre of Shi‘i Islamic education in the world. The majority of renowned Indonesian Shi‘i ustadhs graduated from these colleges. For this reason, Shi‘i ustadhs are frequently identified with the Qum alumni, even though a number were actually educated in Egypt or Saudi Arabia. Among the

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65 The position of Husein Al-Habsyi as a Shi‘i leader is dealt with in Chapter Two, while his pesantren is described in Chapter Five.
Qum alumni are Umar Shahab and his younger brother Husein Shahab, two of the most popular Shi‘i figures engaged in educational and da‘wa activities in Jakarta. They are connected to a number of Shi‘i foundations in which pengajian, or religious gatherings are held. Another renowned figure, although reluctant to accept his status, is Abdurrahman Bima, who leads the Madina Ilmu College for Islamic Studies, a tertiary educational institution located in Depok, South Jakarta. In Pekalongan, Central Java Ahmad Baragbah leads a famous Shi‘i pesantren called Al-Hadi. Frequently, ustadhs who had graduated from Islamic schools in other Middle Eastern countries and even intellectuals from secular universities also went to Qum to take short-term training programmes in order to establish connections with Shi‘i leaders and ‘ulama. For example, Hasan Dalil, who finished his undergraduate programme in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, took a three-month training programme in Qum. Even the most renowned Indonesian Shi‘i intellectual, Jalaluiddin Rakhmat and his family stayed in Qum for a year so that he could attend learning circles and lectures conducted by ayatollahs. This illustrates the extreme importance of a Shi‘i education in Qum to adherents in Indonesia.

It is unclear exactly when Indonesian students began to pursue an Islamic education in Qum, but it is known that some did so several years before the Iranian revolution. They were Arabs living in various parts of the Indonesian archipelago. Ali Ridho Al-Habsyi, son of Muhammad Al-Habsyi and grandson of Habib Ali Kwitang of Jakarta, studied in Qum in 1974. Six graduates of the Pesantren Al-Khairat of Palu, Central Sulawesi followed over the next two years. In September 1976, Umar Shahab from Palembang, South Sumatra and today a famous Shi‘i ustadh, went to Qum and, he says, studied alongside seven other Indonesian students. In his fieldwork in 1975, Fischer also noted the presence of Indonesian students in Qum; among the foreign students, including those from Pakistan, Afghanistan, India, Lebanon, Tanzania, Turkey, Nigeria and Kashmir, Indonesians were however in a minority.

Since the establishment of the Islamic Republic of Iran in 1979, interaction between its government and Indonesian Shi‘i ‘ulama has intensified. The victory of the ayatollahs inspired Indonesian intellectuals and ‘ulama to study the ideological foundations of the Iranian revolution. At the same time, an ‘export

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68 Habib Ali Al-Habsyi (1870-1968) known as Ali Kwitang was an ‘alim and leader of the Indonesian Arab community. He was the founder of the famous Majlis Ta‘lim (Meeting place for Education and Da‘wa) of Kwitang. He was regarded as a sainted Wali (friend of God) and his grave has become an important pilgrimage site for Jakarta’s Muslims. After Habib Ali died, the Majlis Ta‘lim was led by his son Muhammad (1911-1993) who was close to President Suharto and to GOLKAR (Golongan Karya) political circles. Today it is under the leadership of Muhammad’s son, Abdurrahman (Abaza 2004). Ali Ridho’s brother. Ali Ridho’s sister, Farida Al-Habsyi is a well-known Shi‘i figure who runs a number of Islamic foundations in Jakarta, including Al-Bathul (The Virgin, an honorific title of Fatimah, the Prophet’s daughter).

69 Umar Shahab, interview. (9/1/2003).

70 Fischer (1980:78).
of revolution’ occurred, as Iranian leaders and ‘ulama aimed to spread Shi’ism in Indonesia and to attract Indonesian students to study in Iran. In 1982, the Iranian government sent its representatives Ayatollah Ibrahim Amini, Ayatollah Masduqi and Hujjat al-Islam Mahmoudi to Indonesia. Among their activities was a visit to YAPI (Yayasan Pesantren Islam, Foundation of Islamic Pesantren) of Bangil, East Java, where they met with its leader, Husein Al-Habsyi, who was to become Indonesia’s most important confidant to Iranian leaders and ‘ulama.

At the time, Husein Al-Habsyi was probably one of the most prominent Shi’i ‘ulama in Indonesia and played a major role in the development of da’wa and education. Following the meeting, Qum’s hawza ‘ilmiiyya agreed to accept ten Indonesian students selected by Husein Al-Habsyi. From then until his death in 1994, Husein Al-Habsyi hand-picked candidates for study at hawza ‘ilmiiyya in Qum and other cities in Iran.

As a result, among the Indonesian students who went to Qum in 1982 a number were graduates of YAPI. They have become renowned Shi’i ustadhs in Indonesia. Of the original 10 students, almost all of whom were Arabs, six were alumni of YAPI while four were from other educational institutions. The YAPI alumni include Muhsin Labib, Husein Al-Habsyi’s step-son and Rusdi Al-Aydrus, who have become Shi’i ustadhs in Indonesia, while Husein Al-Habsyi’s natural son, Ibrahim Al-Habsyi, continues his studies in Qum today. From outside YAPI, Ahmad Baragbah and Hasan Abu Ammar have become Shi’i ustadhs. In the later period, graduates of YAPI and/or those recommended by Husein Al-Habsyi still predominated among the students going to Qum. Between 1985 and 1989, Al-Habsyi sent 10 students to Qum and today most of them have established or are affiliated to Shi’i foundations in Indonesia and have been recognised as important Shi’i ustadhs.  

Subsequently, graduates of other Islamic educational institutions such as the Muthahhari Foundation and Al-Hadi were selected to pursue their education in Qum. This corresponds to the growing influence of the Shi’i intellectuals Jalaluddin Rakhmat and Haidar Bagir, whose recommendations are now recognised in Iran. Over the course of time, the educational background of the Indonesian students studying in Qum has become diversified. While most students generally go to Qum to complete their secondary education, of late several graduates of tertiary education have also continued their studies there. Among them are alumni of the Madina Ilmu College for Islamic Studies.

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71 They include Musyayya Ba’abud, Zahir Yahya, leader of the Al-Kautsar Foundation in Malang, East Java and former head of YAPI; Miqdad, head of Pesantren Darut Taqrib in Jepara, Central Java; Fathoni Hadi, founder of the Al-Hujjah Foundation in Jember, East Java and currently on the staff at the Islamic College for Advanced Studies in Jakarta; Muhammad Amin Sufyan, head of the Samadera Foundation in Surabaya; Abdurrahman Bima; Husein Alkaff, adviser at the Al-Jawad Foundation in Bandung; Herman Al-Munthahhar, head of the Amirul Mukminin Foundation in Pontianak, West Kalimantan; Muhammad Al-Jufri and Abdul Aziz Al-Hinduan.
in Depok. We also find graduates of secular universities studying in Qum. One example is Mujtahid Hashem, a graduate of the technical faculty of the University of Indonesia (UI). Hashem travelled to Qum in 2001 to engage in the study of religious knowledge. While there, he was elected general secretary of the Association of Indonesian Students in Iran (Himpunan Pelajar Indonesia, HPI).\(^72\)

The number of Indonesian students in Qum has increased significantly. By 1990, 50 Indonesian students had reportedly completed their studies or were still studying there. Ten years later the Qum graduates in Indonesia numbered more than a hundred. In 2001, 50 Indonesian students were selected to continue their studies in Qum\(^73\) and in 2004, I am informed, 90 more students were selected.\(^74\)

Meanwhile, the Iranian government, through ICIS, the International Centre for Islamic Studies (Markaze Jahani-e Ulume Islami)\(^75\) has stepped up efforts to attract international students. Since 1994 ICIS has been under the supervision of the office of the Leader of the Islamic Revolution headed by the Grand Ayatollah ‘Ali Khamene’i, who also appointed its Director. Annually, an ICIS representative conducts a selection process at such Islamic institutions as the Islamic Cultural Centre in Jakarta and the Muthahhari Foundation in Bandung. In addition to academic achievement, the knowledge of Arabic is a requisite, as it is an international language for Islamic learning and the language of instruction at certain madrasas in Qum. Upon their arrival in Iran, students are also required to follow a six-month training programme in Persian, which is the language of instruction at most of Qum’s Islamic educational institutions.

There are two educational systems at the hawza ‘ilmiyya: the traditional system, which is the most famous and influential, and the modern system. The traditional system’s curriculum includes both transmitted and intellectual religious sciences: fiqh (jurisprudence), usul al-fiqh (principles of jurisprudence), ‘ulum al-Qur’an (the Qur’an sciences), ‘ulum al-Hadith (sciences of the Traditions), nahw (Arabic syntax), sarf (Arabic morphology), balagha (rhetoric), mantiq (logic), hikma (philosophy), kalam (theology), tasawuf and ‘irfan (Sufism and gnosis). Each subject has its own standard texts,\(^76\) which are studied in halaqat, or study circles under the supervision of an ayatollah. The educational programme comprises three levels: muqaddamat (preliminary), sutuh (external) and dars al-kharij (graduation class) or bahth al-kharij (graduation research).\(^77\) All three

\(^{72}\) Syi’ar (Muharram 1425/2004:31-32). This student association was established in August 2000 (http://islamalternatif.com/tentang_kami/fpi.html).
\(^{73}\) Ali (2002:201-204).
\(^{74}\) They were classified in terms of financial support; some will receive full scholarship whilst others will receive only monthly stipends excluding airfare ticket.
\(^{75}\) A brief account of ICIS can be read in: http://www.qomicis.com/english/about/history.asp.
\(^{77}\) Momen (1985).
levels must be completed by every mujtahid or jurist who has achieved the level of competence necessary to make religious decisions based on reasoning from the principal sources of Islam.

At the preliminary stage, which lasts from three to five years, the emphasis is to provide students with various skills in Arabic. The main subjects taught include nahw, sarf, balagha and mantiq. In addition, there are optional subjects including literature, mathematics, astronomy and introductory fiqh taken from one of the risalah ‘amaliyya (tracts on practice) by a contemporary marja’ al-taqlid, an authoritative source in matters of Islamic law. The teaching method at this level involves groups of students gathered around a teacher who will go through the texts with them. Students are free to choose the teachers to become their instructors, who at this level are usually senior students or assistants of maraji’ al-taqlid.78

At the sutuh level, which usually lasts from three to six years, students are introduced to the substance of deductive fiqh and usul al-fiqh on which their progress to the next and ultimate level depends. The optional subjects provided at this level are tafsir (Qur’anic exegesis), Hadith, kalam (theology), philosophy, ‘irfan, history and ethics. Generally, courses are a series of lectures based on the main texts of the two main subjects and students are free to select which lectures to attend. The students may also attend lectures in the optional subjects. Usually, teachers at this level are mujtahids who have just achieved the authority of ijtihad and are establishing a reputation.79

Although the subjects at the ultimate level, dars al-kharij are fiqh and usul al-fiqh, the method of learning is different from that of the other two levels. Teaching is conducted by the prominent mujtahids who inform students of the schedule and places for their class. Students are free to choose whose class they will attend and it is usual for several hundred participants, including other mujtahids, to attend lectures delivered by the most prominent mujtahids. The dialectical method is generally implemented in the class; students are free to discuss and are encouraged to argue points with the teacher. At this stage, most students are accomplished in the skill of abstract argumentation and are trained to develop their self-confidence. The culmination of the learning process is the attainment of an ijaza (licence) from one of the many recognised mujtahids. A student at this level is expected to write a treatise on fiqh or usul al-fiqh and present it to a mujtahid, who will consider the student and the work. Based on

this evaluation, the mujtahid will issue the ijaza, which authorises the student to exercise ijtihad. In this way, students build their careers based on their relationship with certain mujtahid teachers.

When a student receives the ijaza that makes him a mujtahid, the honorific title of Ayatollah (Ayat Allah, ‘sign of God’) is usually bestowed upon him. An ayatollah recognised as a marja’ al-taqlid usually receives the title of Ayatollah al-’Uzma, or Grand Ayatollah. The usual term for an aspiring mujtahid is hujjat al-Islam (proof of Islam). The hierarchy of Shi’i ‘ulama is pyramidal; those of the highest level, the Grand Ayatollahs, are the fewest in number and it is these who have played a major role throughout history.

The madrasa system is a transformation of the classical system, adopting a modern system of education in terms of gradation, curriculum, classroom learning and rules. Non-traditional madrasas ‘are set up to serve needs not supplied by the traditional system.’ The curriculum consists of a combination of religious and secular sciences presented through a slightly simplified version of traditional study courses. Unlike the traditional system, the madrasa system is not intended to train students to become mujtahids but rather to become Islamic scholars and missionaries. This innovative type of education has provided an alternative for students who, for whatever reason, cannot follow the traditional system in the hawza ‘ilmiyya. Many international students, including Indonesians, undertake this modern programme.

The Islamic Republic of Iran has made educational innovations in Qum’s hawza ‘ilmiyya through ICIS, which coordinates programmes for foreign students, assigns students to madrasas and monitors their needs within the framework of disseminating Islamic knowledge and teachings globally. The Madrasa Imam Khomeini, for example, offers programmes based on grade systems that include undergraduate and graduate levels equivalent to the tertiary education of the modern educational system. Such innovation makes Qum’s hawza ‘ilmiyya even more the leading institutions of the Islamic world.

Indonesian students have been through both educational systems. The first group of Indonesian students were enrolled at Dar al-Tabligh al-Islami, a modern institution founded in 1965 by Ayatollah Muhammad Kazim Shari’atmadari (1904-1987). Dar al-Tabligh was known for its acceptance of foreign students and for arranging their visas and residence permits. It ran a five-year programme.

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81 Fischer (1980:81).
82 Ayatollah Muhammad Kazim Shari’atmadari (1904-1987) was known as a moderate clergyman. He was one of the maraji’ al-taqlid in the Shi’i world in 1975, the other being Ayatollahs Khoei and Khomeini in Najaf, Gulpayegani and Mar’ashi-Najafi in Qum, Khonsari in Tehran and Milani in Mashhad. Conducting his fieldwork in 1975, Fischer noticed mild competition and friendly rivalry among these maraji’ al-taqlid in setting up schools, hospitals, missions and conducting other activities abroad (Fischer 1980:91).
with a credit system\textsuperscript{83} and a curriculum that included both religious knowledge and secular sciences such as psychology, philosophy, sociology, mathematics and English. The language of instruction was Arabic.\textit{Dar al-Tabligh} did not follow the traditional system of learning, even though it was strongly entrenched in the traditional\textit{hawza} system.\textsuperscript{84} Accordingly, the first group of Indonesian students in Qum followed the formal modern system of education, even though they were free to attend classes or lectures provided by the traditional \textit{hawza `ilmiiyya} system.

After the dissolution of \textit{Dar al-Tabligh}\textsuperscript{85} in 1981, owing to its leader's opposition to the concept of \textit{wilayat al-faqih} (‘mandate of the jurist’) implemented by Khomeini, \textit{Madrasa Hujjatiyya} took over the provision of the same programme for foreign students. Since 1982 nearly all of the Indonesian students who have gone to Iran attended \textit{Madrasa Hujjatiyya}, including the prominent \textit{ustadh} Husein Shahab, who transferred to this\textit{madrasa} after he had studied for two years at \textit{Dar al-Tabligh}.\textsuperscript{86} This\textit{madrasa} was founded in 1946 by Ayatollah Muhammad Hujjat Kuhkamari (1892-1963) who was a student of ‘Abd al-Karim Ha’iri (d. 1936), the reformer of the\textit{hawza} `ilmiiyya of Qum.\textsuperscript{87} Unlike \textit{Dar al-Tabligh}, the\textit{Hujjatiyya} school follows the traditional system of education generally used in the\textit{hawza} `ilmiiyya. Most Indonesian students who become Shi’i\textit{ustadhs} in Indonesia only complete its preliminary level.\textsuperscript{88}

The majority of Indonesian students were registered at\textit{Madrasa Hujjatiyya}, but a small number pursued their learning at\textit{Madrasa Mu’miniyya}, which also provided a programme for foreign students. This\textit{madrasa} was founded in 1701 during the reign of Sultan Husayn of the Safavid dynasty. It was rebuilt by the Grand Ayatollah Shihab al-Din Mar‘ashi-Najafi (d. 1991) who was known for his

\textsuperscript{83} Fischer (1980:84).
\textsuperscript{84} Umar Shahab, interview, (9/1/2003). \textit{Dar al-Tabligh} also carried out a number of\textit{ da’wa} programmes such as training for preachers, correspondence courses on Islam and publishing Islamic books and journals. It had four journals, Maktab-i Islam (School of Islam), Payam-i Shadi (Glad Tidings) and Nasi-i Naw (New Generation) in Persian, while\textit{al-Hadi} (the Guide) was in Arabic. Their circulation was extensive; Maktab-i Islam reached a circulation of 60,000. With its circulation abroad\textit{al-Hadi} served a link to Muslims and Islamic institutions in other countries (Fischer 1980:84).
\textsuperscript{85} Besides his school being dissolved, Shari’atmadari himself was also formally demoted from the rank of\textit{marja’} al-taqlid on April 1982 (Momen1985:296).
\textsuperscript{86} Husein Shahab, interview, (2/4/2004).
\textsuperscript{87} Stewart (2001:218).
\textsuperscript{88} An exceptional case is Abdurrahman Al-Aydrus known as Abdurrahman Bima, coming from Bima, Lombok. He spent nine years in Qum. After graduating from YAPI in Bangil, under the recommendation of Husein Al-Habsyi he went to Qum in 1987 and entered the\textit{Hujjatiyya} school. After finishing his\textit{muqaddamat} in 1990, he pursued the\textit{sutuh} level and completed the study of\textit{usul al-fiqh} at the\textit{dars al-kharij}. He was then selected to continue at the Imam Sadiq Institute, founded and headed by Ayatollah Ja’far Subhani. At this institution, he majored in Islamic theology under the supervision of the prominent theologian Ayatollah Ja’far Subhani, with whom he continues to maintain a good relationship. He was required to write a PhD thesis for this institute (Ali 2002:246-249). In 1996, Abdurrahman returned to Indonesia and has been engaged in the fields of\textit{da’wa} and education. His activities include the directorship of Madina Ilmu College for Islamic Studies in Depok, South Jakarta. In 2000, he enrolled in a PhD programme at UIN in Jakarta.
role in the establishment of a large library in Qum which holds a magnificent collection of books and manuscripts.\(^89\) Madrasa Mu’miniyya formulated its own particular system and curriculum based on its own materials, rather than on recognised textbooks. In contrast to the Hujjatiyya, the Mu’miniyya school prohibited its students from attending religious lectures and study circles in the traditional hawza system.\(^90\)

More recently, there has been educational reform in Qum and a large number of Indonesian students have registered at the Madrasa Imam Khomeini. Since 1996, this madrasa has been organised to become the main educational centre for international students. Established after the death of leader of the Iranian revolution, it runs a modern system of education in terms of programmes and curriculum, even though it remains entrenched in the traditional character of the hawza system. It organises both undergraduate and graduate programmes in various fields of specialisation within the realm of religious sciences.\(^91\)

Early Qum alumni, such as Umar Shahab, Husein Shahab and Ahmad Baragbah, have become prominent Shi’i figures and have contributed to the development of Islamic da’wa, education and culture in Indonesia. Thus the Qum alumni can be seen as an influential element in the formation of the Shi’i community.

C. The Campus Group

Another significant group within the Shi’i community in Indonesia comes from campuses of the universities. Although the emergence of this group is generally seen as a response to the success of the Iranian revolution in 1979, there are a few figures who converted to Shi’ism long before. The first to be mentioned is Ridwan Suhud, a lecturer at ITB\(^92\) and a member of IJABI, the national Shi’i association in Indonesia. Another important figure was K.H. Abdullah bin Nuh (1905-1987), whose adherence to Shi’ism can be seen in the light of his family connections with Ali Ahmad Shahab - he was a maternal relative of the Shahab family. He was also a close friend of Muhammad Dhiya and Muhammad Asad Shahab. Early in his career he worked closely with members of the Hadrami community in the Dutch East Indies. Before studying in Egypt from 1926 to 1928, both he and his brother, Abdurrahman had been teachers at the Hadramaut School in Surabaya. Later, he became a lecturer at UII in Yogyakarta (1945-1950) and at UI in Jakarta (1960-1967). Aside from his teaching, K.H. Abdullah bin

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89 This is the largest library in Qum and may become an important research site for scholars. Reports on this library may be seen in Syi’ar (March 2003:39-40) and http://www.al-shia.com/hatml-eng/lib-najafi_h.htm.
91 Syiar (Muharram 1425/2004:31).
Nuh was also a journalist and a writer, working for APB and the magazines, *National Digest Press* and *Pembina*. He led the aforementioned Islamic Research Institute and its periodical, *Pembina* for ten years (1962-1972). In this weekly magazine he provided regular commentary on religion, discussing aspects of Islamic teachings such as jurisprudence, ethics and Sufism. He wrote a number of books, some of which are not published, and has also translated a selection of works by the famous Persian philosopher and Sufi al-Ghazali (1058-1111). After 1972, he devoted his life to teaching at his own Islamic foundations in Bogor, West Java: *Majlis Al-Ghazaly, Majlis Al-Ihya, Majlis Al-Husna and Majlis Nahjus Salam*, which have proved to be influential in the Muslim community in this part of Indonesia.93

There has been some controversy about whether Abdullah bin Nuh was actually a Shi‘i. Indonesian Sunnis claim him as one of their own, while some Shi‘is who came into contact with him regard him as Shi‘i.94 Although Abdullah bin Nuh declared himself to be a follower of Shafi‘i jurisprudence, he frequently attended Shi‘i rituals and commemorations held in the Iranian Embassy in Jakarta. He also participated in the first World Congress of Friday Imams held in Tehran in 1983.95 Further evidence of his adherence to Shi‘ism may be found in his work, *Risalah Asyura: 10 Muharam*, in which he provides a short history of Husayn bin ‘ Ali, the third Imam and a discussion of the famous Hadith of *thaqalayn* (literally ‘two weighty matters’, or safeguards, which command the faithful to uphold the Qur’an and the Prophet’s Household. Having described several versions of the Hadith from the Sunni collections, he affirms that they are all valid. He goes on to point out that the Hadith of *thaqalayn* clearly designates that the faithful should acknowledge the leadership of the Prophet Muhammad. He also cites the famous *hadith* of Ghardir Khumm, in which the Prophet appointed ‘Ali bin Abi Talib as his successor. Abdullah bin Nuh argues that one of the philosophical qualities of *thaqalayn* is the guarantee of salvation for Muslims because the members of the *ahl al-bayt*, the Prophet’s Household were most knowledgeable about Islamic teaching and practice.96 He writes: “his [the Prophet Muhammad’s] exhortation is not a fabricated matter but it is truly a required necessity, particularly in the period of growth and development of Islam.”97 With regard to the identification of the *ahl al-bayt* in the Qur’an (in the ‘purification’ verse) Abdullah bin Nuh rejects the widespread Sunni view, which includes the Prophet’s wives. Instead he shares the view of the Shi‘i

95 Jamaluddin Asmawi, interview, (2/10/2002).
97 Abdullah bin Nuh (1401/1981:19).
that limits the identity of the *ahl al-bayt* to ‘Ali, his wife Fatima and their two sons, Hasan and Husayn.\(^8\) This interpretation is completely in accord with the Shi‘i understanding of the *ahl al-bayt*, as will be shown in Chapter Three.

The appearance of a number of new converts to Shi‘ism on the university campuses of Indonesia during the 1980s was in part a response to the Iranian revolution. This does not mean however that a fascination with Ayatollah Khomeini’s victory automatically resulted in wide conversion to Shi‘ism. In fact, many Indonesian Muslim scholars who followed the historical events occurring in Iran during 1978-1979, particularly through the mass media,\(^9\) have remained Sunni. This includes Hamka (1908-1981), a prominent modernist *‘alim* and the then general chairman of MUI (*Majlis Ulama Indonesia*, Council of Indonesian Ulama)\(^10\) and M. Amien Rais.\(^11\) Among the newly converted were lecturers,

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\(^8\) Abdullah bin Nuh (1401/1981:21).

\(^9\) The events of the revolution attracted the attention of the mass media in Indonesia, particularly Muslim magazines and Muslim-led newspapers. “At the beginning, the prestige of the Iranian revolution was high in the eyes of the Muslim leaders of Indonesia, even if they were Sunni, not Shi‘i” (Tamara 1986:24).

\(^10\) Hamka (pseudonym of Haji Abdul Malik Karim Amrullah) is the only Indonesian *‘alim* to write his views of the Iranian revolution. This prominent modernist religious scholar paid great attention to what was happening in Iran at the time. In early 1979, for instance, his weekly magazine, *Panji Masyarakat* (Banner of Society) provided detailed reports, combined with reflective views crediting and supporting the revolution. Hamka regards it as one of the greatest historical events in the world and relates it to the phenomenon of Islamic revival in the 15th century of the Muslim calendar. For Hamka, the Iranian revolution is parallel with other great revolutions in the world, such as the French and Russian revolutions. He believes the most important value of the revolution is the success of the Iranians in fighting secularism.

Initially, Hamka presented his appraisal and admiration of events to Ayatollah Ruhullah Khomeini in his writings published in *Panji Masyarakat*. Under the rubric “Dari Hati ke Hati” (From Heart to Heart) of the same magazine (1/3/1979) Hamka wrote an interesting article, “Revolution and Evolution” in which he described the victory of the revolution and gave a profile of Khomeini, emphasising how the power of Islamic faith, or *iman*, strongly upheld by Khomeini, succeeded in overthrowing the Shah of Iran, renowned for his powerful army and sophisticated weapons. In his position as a leading Sunni *‘alim*, however, it can be argued that Hamka’s sympathetic view concerns the Iranian Islamic political revolution and not Shi‘ism itself.

\(^11\) In 1979 the Chicago-educated political scientist and modernist Muslim, Amien Rais wrote a column, published in *Panji Masyarakat*, entitled “Avoiding Revolution” (reprinted in Rais 1987) in response to the revolution in Iran. In it he provides a theoretical outline of why a revolution takes place, pinpointing five causal factors: contradictions between the economic and political systems of a society, a widening gap between the haves and the have-nots, a protracted financial crisis, a deepening alienation of intellectuals and the role of arrogant, stubborn and brutal elites. In his conclusion, Rais affirms that in the Qur’an there are examples of elites being shattered by a disaffected population. He suggests that such examples are valuable lessons for every nation, including Indonesia (Rais 1987:143). Even though he barely refers specifically to the Iranian revolution in this article, Rais’ theoretical construction is clearly inspired by it.

Seven years later, in April 1987, Rais published “Seven Years of the Iranian revolution” which also appeared in *Panji Masyarakat*. In this long article, Rais (1987:199-218) sympathetically describes the historical processes of the Iranian revolution, beginning with the shoddiness and corruption of the Shah’s regime, which was clearly vulnerable to revolution. He then analyses the revolutionary ideas of Iranian leaders and ideologues Khomeini, Ali Shari‘ati, Ayatollah Taleqani and Ayatollah Mutahhari. This is followed by an analysis of the social and political problems faced by Iran, including the Iran-Iraq war. Important to note here is Rais’s favourable view of prospects for Iran; he predicts the end to the Iran-Iraq war, which would enable Iran to realise its Islamic mission of justice. He is highly critical of negative views suggesting a future disintegration of Iran. The failure of the Islamic Republic of Iran is not an option for Rais, as this would mean a setback for the Muslim umma to last half a century or more. Rais does not discuss at length the importance of Shi‘i doctrines in the revolution. In another article (1985) however he states that: “the revolution itself was founded on the
some of whom have become prominent intellectuals and have played a major role in the development of Shi‘ism in Indonesia. A central figure has been Jalaluddin Rakhmat, lecturer at UNPAD (Universitas Pajajaran, Pajajaran University) in Bandung, West Java, who established a Shi‘i institution called the Muthahhari Foundation in 1988. This foundation has played a significant role in the development of Shi‘ism in Indonesia. Another Shi‘i figure of note is Muchtar Adam (b. 1939) who also lectured at UNPAD and founded Pesantren Babus Salam in Ciburial, North Bandung. Besides lecturing in Islamic educational institutions he has written several scholarly works.

Another important converted figure of the campus groups is Muhammad al-Baqir Al-Habsyi, who became familiar with Shi‘i teachings through Shi‘i works that he received from the Middle East, long before the Iranian revolution. Born in Solo, 20 December 1930, Muhammad al-Baqir adheres only to certain Shi‘i doctrines. He practices an eclectic version of both Sunni and Shi‘i jurisprudence. During the early 1980s, al-Baqir introduced several Shi‘i works to intellectuals such as Jalaluddin Rakhmat, who became convinced by the principal Shi‘i doctrines. Muhammad al-Baqir’s most important contribution, however, is his translation of a number of Shi‘i works into Indonesian, most of which are put out by the publishing house Mizan which is directed by his own son, Haidar Bagir. One of the most famous translations is Dialog Sunnah Syi‘ah (Sunni-Shi‘i Dialogue).

Before these three men were banned for propagating Shi‘ism during Suharto’s New Order, they had been engaged in delivering religious lectures at the Salman Mosque of ITB in Bandung.

During the 1980s, Indonesia’s university campuses experienced a rapid ‘Islamic revival’ which originated in the Salman Mosque. “In Java, Salman-inspired religious activities had become a conspicuous feature of campus life at virtually the basis of a revolutionary ideology originating in Shi‘ah Islam” (1985:37). With regard to Muslim responses to the USA and the Soviet Union, Rais again praises the Iranian revolution, which has attempted to restore the self-confidence of the Iranians, freeing them from the influence of the superpowers.

102 I will deal specifically with this figure in the following chapter.
103 Rakhmat (1997:440). Haidar Bagir notes that his father, Muhammad al-Baqir never distinguished between Sunnism or Shi‘ism in the field of Qur‘an exegesis, law or Islamic thought in general (Bagir 2003:73). Al-Baqir’s thought on jurisprudence may be found in his two volumes of Fiqh Praktis (Practical Jurisprudence) which contain a comparative analysis of the four Sunni schools and of Ja‘fari jurisprudence. Al-Baqir himself emphasises that although he practices religious rituals in accordance with the majority Shafi‘i jurisprudence, he is reluctant to join any particular Islamic group (1999:32-33).
104 For a discussion of Shi‘i publications, see Chapter Six.
105 A number of Indonesian Muslim leaders have paid more attention to Islamic revival movements rather than to the Iranian Islamic revolution. Collections of articles written by them can be seen in Rusydi Hamka and Iqbal E.A. Saimima (eds) n.d. In Malaysia Muzaffar (1987) points out that the Iranian revolution has two meanings for the Islamic resurgence there. First, it proves the ability of Islam to establish a state in the modern era while at the same time answering criticism posed by scholars or leaders who reject the idea of an Islamic state. Second, it shows that “an Islamic state has its own identity” and that the Iranian experience can be an example for Malaysia. What Muzaffar singles out is the fact that in Iran the imams and religious elites played a major role in the politics and administration of the state and in implementing Islamic law (Muzaffar 1987:36-37). On the rapid growth of Islamic revival among university students in Malaysia see Anwar (1987).
every major university”\(^{106}\). The ‘Salman movement’ is a puritanical movement that teaches the totality of the Islamic worldview, encompassing all aspects of human life. It was developed by Imaduddin Abdulrahim, who was heavily influenced by the ideas of Hasan al-Bana (d. 1949) of *Ikhwan al-Muslimin* (The Muslim Brotherhood) of Egypt and Abul A’la Mawdudi (d. 1979) of the *Jama’at-i Islami* in Pakistan. In Indonesia, a number of individuals, university lecturers and students, who were initially impressed with the ideas of Islamic revolution, used various publications to focus discourse on the Iranian case. (As I will show later, there was a proliferation of Shi’i works in Indonesian by such Iranian ‘ulama and intellectuals as Ali Shari’ati and Murtada Mutahhari.) Some of these Indonesians studied the Shi’i teachings intensively and this contributed to their conversion. In this regard, the influence of such figures as Jalaluddin Rakhmat, Muchtar Adam and Muhammad al-Baqir in the propagation of Shi’ism to the students was undoubtedly significant as well.

Since the 1980s, Shi’ism has become a new brand of Islam, attracting students at Indonesia’s renowned universities across the country. Campuses in Bandung, Jakarta and Makassar (renamed Ujung Pandang in the New Order era) in South Sulawesi have become centres of Shi’ism. In Bandung, students (mainly Salman activists) from universities such as ITB and UNPAD converted to Shi’ism. The most famous is Haidar Bagir, son of the aforementioned Muhammad al-Baqir al Habsyi, who was born in Solo, 20 February 1957 to a Sayyid family of Hadrami immigrants. He completed his primary and secondary education at the Diponegoro Islamic School, co-founded by his father. In 1975, Haidar Bagir entered the Department of Industrial Technology at ITB, finishing his studies in 1982. During his time at ITB he became an activist at the Salman Mosque and served on the editorial board of *Pustaka*, an Islamic student journal pioneered by Amar Haryono, an ITB librarian.\(^{107}\) Impressed by the popularity of Ayatollah Khomeini, he studied and converted to Shi’i Islam. In 1983, he founded Mizan, the largest Islamic publishing house in Indonesia, which puts out a number of Shi’i books. Today, Haidar Bagir plays a major role in the spread and development of Shi’ism in the country.

Subsequent generations of university students in Bandung who converted to Shi’ism were mosque activists with close ties to Jalaluddin Rakhmat, Muchtar Adam, Muhammad al-Baqir and Haidar Bagir. A number of them are prominent Shi’i intellectuals and activists today, such as Dimitri Mahayana (lecturer at ITB and former chairman of IJABI), Hadi Swastio (lecturer at the Communication College and former general secretary of IJABI) and Yusuf Bakhtiar (formerly deputy-chief of Muthahhari Senior High School and currently a political activist in the National Mandate Party founded by M. Amien Rais). These figures have

\(^{106}\) Hefner (1993:13).  
played, and continue to play, a very important role in the promotion of Shi’ism not only in Bandung but also in the country as a whole. It is not unreasonable to claim that Bandung has become an important centre for the spread of Shi’ism in Indonesia.

The Shi’i converts from universities in Jakarta followed a similar pattern in the sense that they too were engaged in religious gatherings, lectures and discussions on Shi’i thought and doctrine and campus mosque activities. They are found at major universities such as UI, IKIP (now UNJ, State University of Jakarta), UNAS (National University), UKI (Christian University of Indonesia) and Jayabaya University. One student, Mulhandy from Jayabaya University, admitted to converting to Shi’ism in 1983 after he and his colleagues had studied it intensively. At UI, Agus Abubakar Arsal Al-Habsyi, born in Makassar, South Sulawesi, on 6 August 1960, to a Hadrami immigrant family, a Shi’ student who was well known in the early 1980s, was active at the Arif Rahman Hakim Mosque of UI. In 1979, he was enrolled in the Physics Department. He cites his intensive learning of Shi’i teachings at university, plus a familiarity with Shi’ism before the Iranian revolution, due to the presence of some Shi’is in a close village in South Sulawesi, as factors in his conversion. Agus Abubakar gained a reputation for being a spokesman for Shi’ism following a debate with Prof. Rasjidi (d. 2001), who at that time was the Sunni imam of Arif Rahman Hakim Mosque. As a consequence, Agus Abubakar was forbidden to conduct religious gatherings at the mosque and dismissed from his leadership of student organisations. However, this did not reduce his missionary zeal. Using various approaches, Agus Abubakar continued to promote Shi’i teachings and converted a number of students. He has been the head of the Baitul Hikmah Foundation in Depok, South of Jakarta and has been engaged in political activities, becoming a national organiser for the Democratic Party (Partai Demokrat), which was co-founded by Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono, the current President of Indonesia. Agus Abubakar is undoubtedly a significant figure in the spreading of Shi’ism in Jakarta.

With the increasing number of Shi’i converts in Jakarta, study groups began to emerge. In 1989, the Shi’i students of UI founded a study group named Abu Dzar, coordinated by Haryanto of the Faculty of Mathematics and Science and Yussa Agustian of the faculty of Technology. Agus Abubakar was one of their guides. This study group was founded for the purpose of re-awakening Islamic thought and introducing Shi’i ideas to students. To achieve these goals, the group carried out discussions, training and other activities. A later development

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110 Syi’ar (Muharram 1425/2004:35).
111 Syi’ar (Muharram 1425/2004:35).
among the Shi’i students at UI was an attempt to make HMI (Muslim Student Association) a vehicle for the dissemination of Shi’i thought. Rudy Suharto of the Faculty of Mathematics and Science, (currently editor-in-chief of Syi’ar, a magazine of the Islamic Cultural Centre in Jakarta), together with other student activists including Didi Hardian of the Faculty of Technology, Kukuh Sulastyoko of the Faculty of Mathematics and Science and Syaiful Bahri of Guna Dharma university, guided by their seniors, Furqon Bukhori and Zulvan Lindan, succeeded in establishing an HMI branch in the Depok campus. Through this organisation, the Shi’i students of UI undertook various intellectual and religious activities, until 1995 when HMI split into the pro-Shi’i and the anti-Shi’i group, the latter being legitimated by the national leadership of HMI. In a subsequent development of Shi’ism in Jakarta, the FAHMI (Forum Alumni HMI) was established. This association of UI Shi’i alumni was founded in 1997 by activists such as Rudy Suharto.112

From Jakarta, we turn to consider the growth of Shi’ism in Makassar, South Sulawesi, where a relatively large number of Shi’is can be found among the student population. My research suggests that Shi’ism exists at almost all university campuses in Makassar, and the majority of Shi’is in this city are university alumni. This phenomenon has developed since early 1990, when a number of Shi’i activists in Makassar intensified their propagation on university campuses. A leading figure in Makassar is Surachman, who has headed the Al-Islah Foundation that provides studies and training in Shi’ism. As in Bandung and Jakarta, the propagation of Shi’ism in Makassar gained a certain amount of sympathy from other students associations, particularly HMI.113 The relatively rapid developments in Makassar can be put down to the holding of continuous, intensive and systematic study programmes, including the inviting of Shi’i religious teachers and intellectuals from Jakarta and Bandung. Intellectuals like Jalaluddin Rakhmat have given lectures on Shi’i thought, philosophy and Sufism. In addition, teachers (Qum alumni and others) have given instruction on Shi’i jurisprudence. Along with the growth in the numbers of Shi’i converts, several foundations have been established with the purpose of propagating Shi’i teachings. As in other cities, the pioneering propagators of Shi’ism in the area have been campus activists used to studying and discussing Islam, as well as participating in training sessions in university mosques. This means that the Shi’i teachings are easily spread through existing networks.114

The Shi’is among university students in other cities in Indonesia like Palembang, Yogyakarta, Surabaya and Malang follow similar patterns in terms of being mosque and/or student organisation activists. In the victorious Iranian

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112 Syi’ar (Muharram 1425/2004:35).
113 Tiras (1996:30).
revolution and the Islamic revivalism which followed, these young activists found Shi‘i parallels with their own revolutionary ideals. Their zeal also be related to the fact that the majority of them did not have an Islamic educational background and so had a less developed knowledge of Sunni teachings, making them more open to the ideologically revolutionary teachings of Shi‘ism.

In contrast, Shi‘ism has not received the same attention among students at Islamic universities like UIN (State Islamic University), IAIN (State Institute for Islamic Studies) or STAIN (State College for Islamic Studies), branches of which are located in most of the provincial capitals throughout Indonesia. The 1990s saw the appearance of the so-called ‘Flamboyant Shelter’ an organisation which carried out intensive studies into Shi‘i thought, established by students at Jakarta IAIN and financed by Haidar Bagir.115 However, the fact that only a handful of students from Islamic higher learning institutions became Shi‘i is pertinent. In contrast to students at ‘secular’ universities, most students of Islamic universities arrive with a good foundation in Islamic knowledge already gained in madrasa or pesantren. While Shi‘i works are widely read among these students, their educational background means that they are not easily influenced by this brand of Islamic revivalism. In addition, at Islamic institutions of higher learning the students continue to gain comprehensive religious knowledge, regardless of which department they choose to study in. The educational curricula are mainly Sunni. That said, the ideas of Islamic renewal promoted by the late Harun Nasution (1919-1998), Nurcholish Madjid (1939-2005) and others have had some impact. At most, the students take on only certain intellectual or philosophical aspects of Shi‘ism, as contained in the works of such Shi‘i scholars as Ali Shari‘ati, Murtada Mutahhari and Hossein Nasr. In general, there remain very few committed Shi‘is among students and lecturers at Islamic institutions of higher learning.

The interest in Shi‘ism among university students also corresponds to their rejection of the de-politicisation of Islam carried out by the regime during the New Order period. The Shi‘i teaching of the imamate offered an alternative solution to this process, and in this respect most of the Shi‘i converts opposed the implementation of Pancasila as Azas Tunggal, the sole official foundation of political action. The Indonesian Muslim Students’ Organisation (PII), which was dissolved by the regime in 1987, and HMI MPO (Himpunan Mahasiswa Islam Majlis Penyelamat Organisasi, Muslim Student Association and Council to Save the Organisation) were the two bodies which most fiercely rejected the imposition of Pancasila as the sole foundation of all organisations in Indonesia. HMI MPO has maintained Islam as its stated ideological foundation.116 In fact, a number of members and leaders of HMI MPO converted to Shi‘ism and are

116 For an account of HMI MPO, see Karim (1997).
important Shi’i figures in Indonesia today, such as Zulvan Lindan and Furqon Bukhori, the current chairman of IJABI (2004-2008). These two have played a major role in the spreading of Shi’i teachings among members of HMI. There are two others: Yusuf Bakhtiar was a leader of HMI MPO in Bandung, while Saifuddin Al-Mandari, former national chairman of HMI MPO, is a Shi’i who migrated from Makassar to Jakarta where he has been recently affiliated to the Fitra Foundation. Other leaders of HMI MPO have tried to include the topic of the Shi’i principle of *imamate* in the training activities of the organisation, emphasising the importance of Islamic leadership, which has led some members of the association to study Shi’i teachings and, in turn, to embrace Shi’ism.

### D. Conversion to Shi’ism

The existence and growth of the ‘traditional’ Shi’i group, the Qum alumni, and the university campus group are not entirely unconnected. They have tried to establish contact with one another for a number of reasons, not least that it is natural to seek connection with other members of the same religious denomination. In the process of conversion to Shi’ism, intellectuals and university students have also tried to establish contact with Shi’i figures known to them. Individuals from the university campus group have attempted to study with prominent Shi’i *ustadhs* among the Arab community in the country. This has coincided with the missionary zeal of Shi’i figures to attract new followers, and it is how the close relationship between the late Husein Al-Habsyi and Jalaluddin Rakhmat developed. Rakhmat regards Al-Habsyi as his religious preceptor. Today, most Shi’i *ustadhs*, both Qum alumni and non-Qum alumni, and intellectuals in Indonesia are either Al-Habsyi’s students or they have had a close connection with him. The relationship between the Shi’i intellectuals, the university campus group and the *ustadhs* has been a complex one. While all three share a common objective – the propagation of Shi’ism – and they tend to cooperate with each other in this regard, disputes have also coloured their relationship.

While the ‘traditional’ Shi’is of Arab descent, the Qum alumni and the university campus group can be categorised as forming the main segments of the Shi’i community in Indonesia, within these groups themselves there is diversity in terms of socio-economic status and ethnic origin. In the matter of conversion to Shi’ism, these variables do not appear to be determining factors. Those who convert to Shi’ism may come from economically lower or upper class society and from any ethnic origin. Moreover, we find a very small number of Shi’i

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117 Al-Mandari provides historical notes on the struggle by members and leaders of HMI MPO against the New Order regime (Al-Mandari 2003), as well as a description of the discourse on social revolution among members of HMI MPO (Al-Mandari 2003a).
converts of non-Muslim background. Also, those converts of a religious-oriented background come from both traditionalist and reformist Muslim streams and from the mainstream community, as well as from minority Muslim sects.

A notable element within the Indonesian Shi‘i community is the existence of Shi‘i converts from a dissident group background. These are minority Muslims whom the Sunni majority consider to believe and practice heterodox teachings of Islam. The dissident groups, which have spread in almost every region in Indonesia, include *Islam Jama’ah* (Islamic Congregation), now named LDII (*Lembaga Dakwah Islam Indonesia*, Institute of Indonesian Islamic Propagation),\(^ {118} \) *Kelompok Islam Isa Bugis* (Islamic Group of Isa Bugis),\(^ {119} \) *Jama’ah Tabligh* (Congregation of Islamic Preaching)\(^ {120} \) and DI/NII (*Darul Islam/Negara Islam Indonesia*, House of Islam/ Islamic State of Indonesia).\(^ {121} \) Although all of these minority groups are in fact Sunni, they are considered to be heterodox and similar to Shi‘ism in status.

Shi‘is with an *Islam Jama’ah* background are found in Jakarta, Palembang, Malang, Makassar and other cities. A few of them had been national or regional leaders of that sect, and they used such positions to convert some of their followers to Shi‘ism. On the whole, they continue to occupy an important position within their new group of converts, despite having been dismissed from their original sect. Another important element in Indonesia’s Shi‘i community comes from the DI/NII movement. A large number of Shi‘is in the region of West Java today are former members of this movement, particularly from areas within the Regional Command IX led by Abu Toto. They are scattered in cities and towns, including Bandung, Cianjur, Sukabumi, Garut, Serang and Tangerang. Slightly fewer in number are former members of *Jama’ah Tabligh*, who can be

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118 *Islam Jama’ah* was founded by Nurhasan Al-Ubaidah in Kediri, East Java, in the 1950s and spread to several cities in Java, Sumatra and other islands. Since the Jakarta Council of Indonesian Ulama banned it in 1979, it has changed its name to LEMKARI (*Lembaga Karyawan Islam*) or KADIM (*Karyawan Da’wah Islam*), denying that they were simply new associations of *Islam Jama’ah* (Anwar 1989:34-35). It was changed once more into *Lembaga Da’wah Islam Indonesia* (LDII). With regards to political orientation, this group fully supported Golkar, the party of the New Order government. For a description of this group, see Marzani Anwar (1989:21-73).

119 The Islamic Group, *Isa Bugis* first emerged in Sukabumi in the 1960s and has since spread to other areas such as Bandar Harapan in Central Lampung. As its name suggests, it is founded by one Isa Bugis from Aceh. Its major concern is the study of verses of the Qur’an which are said to be based on the view of the Prophet Muhammad, which are are then related to empirical reality (Afif HM 1989:75-140). This group attracted followers from HMI, who called their activity ‘Qur’anic studies’.

120 *Jama’ah Tabligh* was founded in India by Mawlana Muhammad Ilyas in 1930 and is thought to have come to Indonesia in 1952. It has spread throughout the country in both urban and rural areas. Azra (2002:42-43) provides a short description of this movement.

121 There are a number of studies on the *Darul Islam* movement, the most comprehensive being van Dijk (1981). The division that has come to most notice recently has been KW IX (Regional Command IX) led by Abu Toto, frequently associated with Syeikh Panji Gumilang, the founder of the luxurious **Pesantren Al-Zaytun** in Indramayu, West Java. One of my Shi‘i informants in Sukabumi, a former member of NII, suggests that Abu Toto and Panji Gumilang are one and the same person, so **Al-Zaytun** is the educational centre of NII. This can also be seen in Al-Chaidar (2000) and Umar Abdurah (2001).
found in Jakarta, Makassar and other places in Java. The final element consists of, as Syamsuri Ali observes, former members of the Isa Bugis group who may be found in Jakarta.\footnote{Ali (2002:456).}

Conversion occurs when a person or group discovers a more reasonable and correct set of religious teachings. The term ‘religious conversion’ is a complex phenomenon involving both intellectual and emotional dimensions. Based on Rambo’s classification,\footnote{Rambo (1993:12-14).} conversion from Sunnism to Shi’ism can, to a certain degree, be classified as ‘institutional transition’, involving the change of an individual or a group from one community to another within a major tradition. This interdenominational transformation may also be termed ‘internal conversion’. It should be noted that there is no external rite of conversion from Sunnism to Shi’ism, unlike the conversion from non-belief to Islam, where the convert must proclaim the confession of faith, “There is no god but God and Muhammad is the apostle of God”.

The above description of elements within the Shi’i community in Indonesia pinpoints three interconnected modes of conversion: the first is through education in its broadest sense, namely the transfer of knowledge and values. Second, conversion to Shi’ism may take place through ties of kinship and friendship. The third mode is through the reading of Islamic literature. The conversion to Shi’ism by Indonesian Arabs before the Iranian revolution may be included in the first two modes, but these modes characterise the conversion process among other groups as well. Education has become a very important means of conversion to Shi’ism.

After the Iranian revolution a number of Shi’i ustadhs from the Sayyid community have continued to propagate Shi’ism to the broader Muslim population through traditional Islamic educational institutions. While the majority of pesantren play a major role in the maintenance of traditional Sunni ideology (Dhofier 1999), a few also exist which promote Shi’i teachings. This results from the fact that the founders and leaders of pesantren tend to be relatively autonomous in organising curriculum contents and teaching materials and their autonomy provides an opportunity for Shi’i religious teachers to manage their institutions and to inculcate their own religious ideology. The most notable example is Husein Al-Habsyi, who attracted many followers through his institution, YAPI. In some respects, he was able to connect the ‘traditional’ Shi’i group with those who had converted after the Iranian revolution. A number of relatives and descendants of ‘traditional’ Shi’is studied with Husein Al-Habsyi at YAPI, which provided Shi’i books and religious guidance. Many of them converted during their studies, and over the course of time a large number of YAPI alumni have become Shi’i
ustadhs, disseminating Shi‘i teachings all over Indonesia. As described above, some have pursued Islamic learning in Qum and returned as famous ustadhs. This is the mode of conversion to Shi‘ism through pesantren. Conversion during study in Qum undergone by more advanced students is also included in this mode.

While the conversion to Shi‘ism among the university campus group more commonly occurs through non-formal Islamic education and self-study, the mode of conversion in pesantren has been heavily dependent on the leader of the pesantren who introduces Shi‘i teachings, gives instruction and provides reading material to their students. Unlike students at university who spend the majority of their time on the ‘secular’ sciences, the pesantren students dedicate themselves to acquiring Islamic knowledge, and so generally have a more comprehensive knowledge of Islam and Shi‘ism. In the residential pesantren they not only learn Shi‘ism but also put its teachings into practice in daily life. Despite pesantren students receiving such stimuli, just as with the university students, their conversion process also requires a reading of Shi‘i literature.

Conversion to Shi‘ism also frequently occurs through kinship, namely by blood, by marriage and through friendship. It is common for Shi‘is to inculcate Shi‘i teachings in their children, and where possible, in other relatives and friends. We have previously described how the descendants of Indonesian Arab figures have maintained the continuity of their adherence to Shi‘ism. Several kin of Husein Al-Habsyi have also become important Shi‘i ustadhs. As for marriage, it is often recommended that a young man seek a Sunni woman to marry and to convert for the purpose of increasing Shi‘i numbers. This mode of conversion tends to interconnect with the other modes listed above.

Woodberry has identified another two modes of conversion to Shi‘ism: individual conversion and collective conversion.\(^{124}\) Conversion among the intellectuals, university and pesantren students tends to be individual while conversion among dissident groups tends to be collective, in the sense that a group of people follow in the steps of their mentor. Regarding individual conversion among university students and intellectuals, important ways are through the reading of Shi‘i books and participating in discussions at their educational institutions. Conversion within the dissident groups frequently occurs as a result of debate between Shi‘i figures and mentors of the groups on essential doctrines within Islam, such as the imamate. Ali writes: “but conceptually, their belief is defeated by arguments of the Shi‘i concept of imamate, so that their defeat in the conceptual matter has made them change pleasantly from the former madhhab to the Shi‘i madhhab.”\(^{125}\)

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It is generally agreed that it is the intellectual and philosophical aspects of Shi‘ism that first attract the converts in Indonesia. It is even common for some university students and intellectuals only to be interested in the intellectual and doctrinal aspects of Shi‘ism, but in the course of time they are labelled as Shi‘is, despite their being ignorant of its true teachings. In this regard, Rakhmat writes:

The majority of people sympathetic to Shi‘ism came from university. Most of them were also attracted to Shi‘ism as an alternative to existing Islamic thought. At the time when many people were interested in, for instance, critical theory, in Neo-Marxist groups, some Muslims found a similar matter in Shi‘i thought, such as that of Ali Shari‘ati. Concepts of the ‘left’ such as the plight of the oppressed, pedagogy of the oppressed, or corrupt structure, has a similarity in Islam, with the term mustad‘afin [the Oppressed] and the mission of the prophets to fight against tyrants. And those who clearly present these matters are Shi‘i thinkers…. But later, it was from Ali Shari‘ati that they entered into deeper thought.  

As previously mentioned, and closely related to this quotation, the Shi‘i conception of the imamate is the doctrine that has been most responsible for attracting university students, intellectuals and members of dissident groups to Shi‘ism. Imamate becomes an important topic in discussions and training carried out in usrah, or study circles, HMI and dissident groups. The imamate within Sunni Islam is not as crucial as it is in Shi‘ism, so students and intellectuals must turn to Shi‘i books to find comprehensive accounts of this doctrine. It is legitimated by the fact that Ayatollah Khomeini can be regarded as an Islamic leader, representative of the Imam, whose revolution succeeded in overthrowing an oppressive regime. The Imamate is also very crucial to and strongly upheld within the teachings of some dissident groups, particularly Islam Jama‘ah and NII. Converts from these groups admit that a reason for becoming Shi‘i is because they found the doctrine of the imamate to be more correct and authoritative in Shi‘ism than in their former teachings. To give an example, Muhammad Nuh (65 years old), told me that he used to be the regional leader of Islam Jama‘ah in South Sumatra, Lampung and Bengkulu and was active in the propagation of its teachings in those regions. His conversion to Shi‘ism took place after participating in discussions on the imamate with Shi‘i ustadhs in Palembang, including the aforementioned Qum alumnus, Umar Shahab. Muhammad Nuh explained that he accepted the Shi‘i view of imamate as being in accordance with Bukhari’s al-Sahih, the most authoritative collection of Sunni Hadith and

127 Fuad Amsyari (1993), a lecturer at the Faculty of Medical Science, Air Langga University, chairman of Al-Falah Muslim Intellectuals in Surabaya and an influential figure in usrah circles, explains the necessity of the imamate for Muslims in Indonesia, maintaining that it does not specifically belong to the Shi‘i doctrine but that it is strongly based on Sunni sources. According to Amsyari, Muslims who do not comprehend the totality of Islamic teachings (kaffah), have neglected the Islamic teaching on imamate.
the primary source of the doctrine of the *imamate* in *Islam Jama’ah*. At the same time, Nuh is aware that the teaching of the *imamate* in *Islam Jama’ah* has been intentionally manipulated by the founder of the group for his own personal purposes. Shi’i ex-leaders of *Islam Jama’ah* from other regions share similar views. The same holds true for Shi’is ex-members of NII who also uphold the doctrine of the *imamate* and this corresponds with the fact that the leader of the *Darul Islam* movement is usually considered as the Imam.\(^{128}\)

Those who are interested in the doctrinal and intellectual aspects of Shi’ism but continue to follow Sunni jurisprudence cannot be characterised as being converts in the true sense. To be considered Shi’i, they need to abide by the code of conduct as outlined in *Ja’fari* jurisprudence. According to Jalaluddin Rakhmat, when converts did make the shift in orientation from intellectual and doctrinal aspects to jurisprudence, it occurred for political reasons and as a reaction to slander and attack from Sunnis, particularly in publications promoted by Saudi Arabia.\(^{129}\) In Rakhmat’s observation, the main motivation of this Shi’i group to study jurisprudence is to prove the invalidity of anti-Shi’i views. I was also told that people who had not previously thought of themselves as Shi’i were motivated to learn every aspect of Shi’ism after having been labelled as Shi’is by anti-Shi’i groups. With some inevitability, these people go on to become true followers of Shi’ism, observing almost all aspects of Shi’i jurisprudence. It is important to note that yet others attempted to understand Shi’i law for religious reasons, for the purpose of practicing Shi’i rituals in daily life according to *Ja’fari* jurisprudence. In this regard, the return to Indonesia of the Qum alumni has been fortuitous, since they are now religious teachers able to give instruction on any particular issue. They have established relations with the university campus groups of Shi’is.

For converts, Shi’i Islam is more reasonable and correct than the Sunni Islam they once adhered to. They tend to perceive positively both Shi’ism as a set of religious doctrines and the Shi’is as a historical reality, united in an integrated religious system. Zainuddin and his colleagues\(^ {130}\) offer their explanations of why they converted to Shi’ism. First, the Shi’i doctrine of justice, which is closely related to the doctrine of the *imamate*, they found appropriate in their struggles against the authoritarian New Order regime and for the establishment of a just government. Second, they believe the position of *’aql*, or intellectual reason, to be much stronger in Shi’ism than in Sunnism. Shi’i traditions are considered to have provided more opportunity and motivation to exercise *’aql* in developing

\(^{128}\) According to the constitution of NII’s Islamic State of Indonesia, *Qanun Asasi*, (article 12, clause 1), “the head of state was the Imam, who must be a native Indonesian, of the Muslim faith, and faithful to God and His Prophet” (van Dijk 1981:93). A comprehensive account of this constitution can be found in van Dijk (1981:93-97).


\(^{130}\) Zainuddin et al. (2000:97-103).
many fields of knowledge. Third, they point to the continued evolution of knowledge, thought and philosophy since the early history of Shi’ism, marked by the emergence of Imams and ‘ulama opposing oppressive regimes; the religious view on the necessity of *ijtihad*, or independent effort to formulate religious law; and the dominant position of a philosophical tradition. Fourth, they highlight the reality of modern Indonesian society and the emergence of unqualified Sunni ‘ulama and religious teachers, in contrast to the Shi’i ‘ulama, particularly in Iran, and those occupying the position of *marja’ al-taqlid*, who are selected on the basis both of their moral conduct and intellectual achievement. Fifth, they believe that anti-Shi’i views and judgments on Shi’ism are frequently slanderous and speculative, ignoring the true teachings of Shi’ism and the facts of history.

Viewed from these perspectives and taking into account the social and psychological characteristics of converts in the socio-political context of Indonesian society, conversion to Shi’ism can be seen as a double protest against the political regime and the Sunni religious establishment. Converts accept Shi’ism because they find “the anti-government aspect of Shi’ism and its struggle against oppression and tyranny appealing.”\(^{131}\) Shi’ism is seen as the religion of protest while Sunnism, more often than not, tends to legitimise the political regime of the day. With its lesser emphasis on *‘aql* and the emergence of unqualified religious authorities, Sunnism is no longer seen as an ideal *madhhab*, able to provide solutions to social and political problems or to offer guidance in spiritual and intellectual quests. Conversion to Shi’ism continues, albeit at a slow rate. Shi’i institutions have been established and various methods are implemented in order to promote this *madhhab* in Indonesia.

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\(^{131}\) Nakash (1994:45).