2. The Leaders

Currently, there is no single person who is recognised as leader by all of the Shi’i groups in Indonesia. This lack of a central figure originates, in part, in the divided formation and development of the community as described in Chapter One. The leaders can however be classified into two types: the ustadhs and the intellectuals, corresponding to the divide between ‘ulama and intellectuals in the Muslim world in general. The ‘ulama, who are also known by various popular terms such as kyai in Central and East Java, ajengan in West Java, tengku in Aceh and tuan guru in parts of Sumatra, Kalimantan and Lombok are on the whole products of traditional Islamic educational institutions. The intellectuals, on the other hand, are graduates from secular universities. The position of both types has been discussed by scholars such as Steenbrink¹. The divide between the two, or more specifically, attempts to bridge the gap between them in terms of knowledge and leadership, has been of great concern to Indonesian Muslim intellectuals. In this chapter I will examine the general characteristics of both types of leaders. I will then consider the roles of Husein Al-Habsyi and Husein Shahab as ustadhs and that of Jalaluddin Rakhmat as the most prominent Shi’i intellectual. The portraits will focus on determinants of leadership: educational background, profession, leadership experience and Islamic scholarship.

A. Ustadhs and Intellectuals

Traditionally, the term ustadh (ustadz in Indonesian) means ‘religious teacher’. It commonly denotes those who teach in traditional institutions of Islamic learning, the pesantren, in formal Islamic schools, the madrasa, and in religious gatherings, the pengajian. Within the leadership structure of the pesantren, the term ustadh usually refers to teachers who are yet to achieve the high position of ‘ulama and become men of religious learning and prestige)² or kyai, head of the pesantren. The position of ustadh remains firmly below that of kyai in this hierarchy. Among the Shi’is of Indonesia however the term ustadh denotes both leaders of Shi’i institutions and religious teachers. In fact, the term has been increasingly used to refer to ‘ulama and leaders of certain groups of Muslim society in Indonesia. A case in point is Husein Al-Habsyi, a Shi’i ustadh who has also achieved the status of ‘ulama.

It is quite possible that the growing tendency to use the Arabic term ustadh in Indonesia is due to the influence of the community of Arab descent on the

¹ Steenbrink (1985).
religious, educational and cultural aspects of the Shi‘i community. This tendency can also be seen in the so-called ‘scripturalist’ segment of the Indonesian Muslim community at large, which is also experiencing an increasing voluntary ‘Arabisation’; for example, in their communications scripturalists prefer to use the term *ustad* to mean ‘ulama rather than the local term *kyai*. This can be disadvantageous from the perspective of the international Shi‘i intellectual tradition, as the term indicates that the education of Indonesian Shi‘i leaders and scholars is not to the same standard of other qualified scholars. The term *ustad* suggests that the teacher has not achieved the position of *mujtahid*, or independent legist, or of the higher rank of *marja‘ al-taqlid*, ‘source of emulation’. In the field of jurisprudence, the *ustadhs* of Indonesia become *muqallid*, followers, of certain *marja‘ al-taqlid* in Iran or Iraq. Nevertheless, the *ustadhs* enjoy prestigious status in the Shi‘i community in the country.

Shi‘i *ustadhs* have two general characteristics of note. First, their education usually takes place at institutions where a basic knowledge of the various branches of Islamic knowledge is introduced. Several Shi‘i *ustadhs* in Indonesia studied at *pesantren* and then went on to pursue their studies at institutions of Islamic learning, the *hauza ‘ilmiyya* in Qum. A small number of Shi‘i *ustadhs* - the most prominent of all - pursued their learning at other tertiary institutions in Indonesia or abroad. On the whole, this is because their education in Qum only reached the *muqaddamat*, or introductory level. A number of *ustadhs* have entered the State Islamic University in Jakarta. Among them were Umar Shahab, Abdurrahman Bima, Muhsin Labib and Khalid Al-Walid, who undertook doctorates at this university. We should emphasise that generally the Shi‘i *ustadhs* specialise in Islamic studies in the classical meaning of the term. Further education in the field of religious knowledge contributes to establishing and increasing their prestige. It should be kept in mind however that the field of specialisation chosen by this group is different from that taken by the Shi‘i intellectuals in Indonesia.

Second, the *ustadhs* devote themselves to the fields of *da‘wa* and educational activities at institutions of Islamic learning. Many have set up and led their own institutions. Others have affiliated themselves to Islamic institutions as religious teachers or spiritual guides for the *jama‘a* of the institutions. Only the heads of such institutions receive a regular salary, while the *ustadhs* are paid for *da‘wa* activities. Most *ustadhs* rely on endowments or payments from the institutions and their *jama‘a* for their living. They are well respected and enjoy close relations with the *jama‘a* who follow their instruction and guidance.

Like the person of the *ustadh*, the intellectual also has a respected position within the community. In everyday life, the intellectual is also given the title ‘*ustadh*’ as a sign of honour. “The intellectuals are the aggregate of persons in any society who employ in their communication and expression, with a relatively higher
2. The Leaders

frequency than most other members of their society, symbols of general scope and abstract reference, concerning man, society, nature and the cosmos”. This general definition of the intellectual corresponds with the characteristics of such Shi’i leaders.

Shi’i intellectuals can be distinguished from the ustadhs in a number of ways: first, their educational backgrounds differ. On the whole, intellectuals are graduates of secular universities trained in various fields of the secular sciences. Some prominent intellectuals graduated from renowned universities in Indonesia and in other countries. Jalaluddin Rakhmat completed his tertiary education in Communications at Padjadjaran University and took his Masters in Science (also in Communications) at Iowa State University in the US. He then enrolled at The Australian National University to study political science, without however finishing the course. Haidar Bagir completed a degree in Industrial Technology at the Bandung Institute of Technology (ITB) and a Masters in Philosophy at Harvard University. He is currently writing a PhD thesis on philosophy at UI. Hadi Swastio completed a PhD at a university in the UK. Dimitri Mahayana completed an Engineering degree at ITB, a Masters at Waseda University in Japan and then returned to ITB for a PhD in Electrical Engineering. These intellectuals never received religious education or learned about Shi’ism either at any formal Islamic institution in Indonesia or abroad. On the whole, they studied and converted to Shi’i Islam while still students or upon graduation from university, where they had been active in religious circles and had attended lectures at campus mosques or in other Islamic institutions. Their religious knowledge was gained through non-formal education and training carried out in mosques or da’wa institutions and through reading books and periodicals. They are considered less qualified than the ustadhs in terms of traditional Islamic knowledge.

Secondly, the intellectuals generally earn their living in fields independent of the Shi’i community; they lecture at universities and educational institutions and/or are engaged with social, cultural and business institutions. For instance, Jalaluddin Rakhmat is Professor of Communications at Universitas Pajajaran (UNPAD) and head of the Muthahhari Foundation; Haidar Bagir is director of the Mizan Publishing House and affiliated with several social and educational institutions; Dimitri Mahayana is a lecturer at ITB, while Hadi Swastio is a lecturer at the College of Telecommunication Science. All of these institutions are located in Bandung, West Java. As lecturers or businessmen, the intellectuals, with certain exceptions, never take on the role of religious teacher, preacher or guide to the Shi’i community; nor do they lead or deliver sermons at the Shi’i rituals. For these reasons, their connection with the jama’ā is not as close

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3 Shils (1968:399).
as that between the *ustadh* and *jama’a*. Instead, they build their position in the community through strong commitment and contribution in the form of material assistance, strategic insight and critical thought.

That said, we do find a small number of intellectuals who also take part in religious instruction and guidance. A case in point is Jalaluddin Rakhmat. While generally known as an influential Shi’i intellectual in Indonesia, his activities as both an academic and a religious figure mean that he is actually positioned more as a combined intellectual and *ustadh*.

**B. Husein Al-Habsyi (1921–1994)**

Husein Al-Habsyi⁴ was the most widely recognised leader in the development of Shi’ism in Indonesia. During his lifetime, his leadership was recognised by all Shi’i groups in the community. Since his death in 1994 however his position has not so far been filled by any current Indonesian *ustadh* or intellectual.

Husein Al-Habsyi, or al-Ustadh al-Habib al-Shaykh Husayn bin Abi Bakr al-Habshi - as his student Muhsin Husein⁵ wrote in an article in *Al-Isyraq*, a magazine put out by his educational institution - became one of the most famous Indonesian Shi’i ‘ulama after the Iranian Islamic Revolution of 1978-1979. (He should not be confused with Husein bin Ali Al-Habsyi, the current President of *Ikhwan al-Muslimin* (Muslim Brotherhood) of Indonesia.) Born in Surabaya, 21 April 1921, Husein Al-Habsyi was the second son of a Sayyid Arab family. Very little is known about his parents’ life. It is said that his father passed away when he was six years old and Husein went to live with his maternal uncle, Muhammad bin Salim Baraja, a prominent ‘*alim*, and then President of the Hadramawt School in Surabaya. Baraja had also been editor of the twice-monthly magazine *al-Iqbal* in the same city. He had strong links with the Shi’i figure, Abu Bakr bin Shahab mentioned in Chapter One.⁶ In short, Husein Al-Habsyi grew up in a religious environment.

He began his formal education in *Madrasa Al-Khairiya*, one of the oldest and most famous Islamic schools in Surabaya, East Java, co-founded by the Shi’i ‘*alim* Muhammad al-Muhdar. We are told that at the age of 10 Husein Al-Habsyi was an active participant in religious gatherings, which provided him with instruction in several branches of Islamic knowledge⁷ including *fiqh* (Islamic jurisprudence), ‘*aqida* (Islamic doctrine) and *akhlaq* (ethics). At the age of twelve he was said to have been capable of reading such Arabic books as al-Ghazali’s

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⁴ A study on the biography and role of Husein Al-Habsyi has been published in *Studia Islamika* (Zulkifli 2004).
⁵ Muhsin Husein (1997).
Ihya ‘Ulim al-Din (The Revival of Religious Sciences), one of the most famous classical texts on ethics and Sufism used in Indonesia. While there is no complete information about who his teachers were during his time in Surabaya, reports from his sons and students suggest that, besides his maternal uncle, he was influenced by other ‘ulama of Hadrami descent, including Muhammad Baabud, Abdulqadir Bilaqiq and Abubakar Assegaf of Gresik. He also studied with the Moroccan religious scholars Muhammad Muntasir al-Kattani and the Palestinian teacher Muhammad Raba’a Hasuna at the Al-Khairiyya school, which also hired religious teachers from Hadramaut, Yemen.

Husein Al-Habsyi’s Islamic knowledge was also garnered from institutions abroad. Together with his brother, Ali Al-Habsyi he went on to further his studies in Johor, Malaysia. One influential teacher there was Habib Alwi bin Tahir al-Haddad, the then Mufti of the Johor Sultanate (1939-1961). In Johor, Husein Al-Habsyi also taught at the Al-Attas school for a period of time. His students came from various regions in Malaysia and some of them are said to have later become prominent ‘ulama. It is also reported that he visited the Hadramaut for Islamic education before moving to Saudi Arabia, where he stayed for about two years. He then spent a further year in Najaf, Iraq pursuing Islamic studies with eminent ‘ulama, including Sayyid Muhsin al-Hakim (d.1970). He returned to Malaysia and married his uncle’s daughter, Fatima bint Abdurrahman Al-Habsyi, with whom he had several children. After living in Malaysia for several years, Husein Al-Habsyi took his family back to his hometown of Surabaya, where he engaged in missionary and educational activities.

Husein Al-Habsyi’s cultural capital (his valuable experience and educational qualifications) enabled him to establish himself as a religious scholar and teacher within the Muslim community. With the knowledge he had acquired in Indonesia, Malaysia and the Middle East, he became an important ustadh at Islamic schools. Moreover, he had started teaching at an early age, while still a student: when he was just 15 years old, he spent two years (1936-1938) teaching at his alma mater, the Al-Khairiyya school.

There was also a period in Husein Al-Habsyi’s life in which he was politically active. In his thirties, he joined Masyumi (Majelis Syuro Muslimin Indonesia,
Consultative Council of Indonesian Muslims), the largest Muslim party during
the era of Sukarno’s Old Order (1945-1965). Through this membership, he
became acquainted not only with influential Masyumi leaders such as M. Natsir
d.(1993), Kasman Singadimedjo and Sjafruddin Prawiranegara (d. 1989) but
also with other political figures in Indonesia. He was selected to be a member
of Konstituante (Constituent Assembly) at the eighth Masyumi conference in
Bandung, 22-29 December 1956 and from within the Constituent Assembly
he was appointed head of the Human Rights Commission. Like the majority
of Masyumi leaders, he was known to have held a very negative attitude
towards the PKI (Indonesian Communist Party). In 1954 he participated in the
establishment of Front Anti-Komunis (Anti-Communist Front), which was set
up to prevent the spread of the communist movement in the Old Order.

Husein Al-Habsyi’s involvement in the political arena did not last long,
however. There were several reasons for this, the most important being that
Masyumi was banned in August 1960 as a result of the party’s opposition to
Sukarno and Guided Democracy. Masyumi also became involved with the
separatist movement of PRRI (Revolutionary Government of the Republic of
Indonesia). Disillusioned with political developments after the break-up of
Masyumi, Al-Habsyi ceased all political activities, devoting himself instead
to Islamic education and da’wa. For him the growth of Islam simply could
not be achieved through political practice; he believed it could only succeed
through education. This sea-change is particularly significant in the context of
Indonesia’s New Order era, beginning in 1966, which implemented a policy of
the de-politicisation of Islam. Programmes promoting cultural Islam, education
and da’wa then became the way forward. We should bear in mind however
that Al-Habsyi’s brief political experiences clearly had an impact on his later
position as a Shi’i ustadh; he gained important social capital by maintaining
good connections with retired political leaders such as Natsir.

Husein Al-Habsyi returned to his position of ustadh at the Al-Khairiyya school
in Surabaya, where he engaged in instructing students and developing the
school. His career progressed not only because of his commitment to Islamic
education but also due to his comprehensive religious knowledge, managerial
capabilities and social connections. He became head of the branch of Al-

14 Panitia (n.d:1).
15 Front Anti-Komunis was a radical wing of Masyumi established in September 1954 and supported by
leaders of Masyumi in Java, Sumatra and Sulawesi. Its chairman was Isa Anshary, chairman of the Masyumi
branch of West Java (Campton 1995:41).
18 “Social capital is the aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a
durable network of more or less institutionalised relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition...”
(Bourdieu 1986:248).
Khairiyya located in Bondowoso, East Java and led the school for several years. During this period, his worldview was said to have been strongly influenced by the ideology of the Ikhwan al-Muslimin (Muslim Brotherhood) of Egypt, an organisation founded by Hassan al-Banna (d. 1949). The banning of Masyumi and the de-politicisation of Islam under Suharto caused many Masyumi leaders to turn to the ideology of Ikhwan al-Muslimin. Al-Habsyi became a follower of this so-called ‘fundamentalist’ movement and established links with its leaders and other high-ranking ‘ulama in the Middle East, such as Yusuf Qaradawi (b.1926) and Muhammad Ghazali. He travelled to Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Kuwait, Libya, Iraq and Iran to meet with these men and to collect donations from individuals and Islamic organisations for the development of education in Al-Khairiyya and the Muslim community at large. He attempted to implement the ideology of Ikhwan al-Muslimin, maintaining a negative attitude towards secularism and Western worldviews in the pedagogic system of Al-Khairiyya. However, the strict discipline and rules imposed on the students and teachers at the school resulted in the majority of the staff rejecting his fundamentalist approach. Conflict ensued between Al-Habsyi and the madrasa teachers, as well as the Sayyid ‘ulama in Bondowoso. He was forced to leave Al-Khairiyya and Bondowoso for Bangil but many qualified students, sympathetic to his ideas, followed him.

In 1976, Husein Al-Habsyi founded an Islamic educational institution called YAPI (Yayasan Pesantren Islam, Foundation of Islamic Pesantren) in Bangil. This pesantren has become an important centre of Islamic learning for Shi’is in Indonesia. As a learned man with a comprehensive grasp of Islamic knowledge, Al-Habsyi himself formulated the educational programme. The YAPI principles and approaches to Islamic education followed the Ikhwan al-Muslimin model, which combined strict discipline and rules with the strong anti-Western attitude which Al-Habsyi considered to be the best model for achieving his educational ideals. As the leader of YAPI responsible for its development and progress, he not only managed the institution but also carried out instruction in several fields of Islamic knowledge, particularly Arabic language, tafsir (Qur’anic exegesis) and usul al-fiqh (principles of Islamic jurisprudence). He was also proactive in the formation of cadres. He believed his framework for establishing and reviving religious zeal among students was essential, so that they would later engage in the struggle for Islam and the Muslim umma. Over the course of time, YAPI and its head have become increasingly recognised by ‘ulama not only in Indonesia but also in the Middle East.

21 Muhsein Husein (1997:5).
22 Muhsein Husein (1997:5).
23 Panitia (n.d:2).
Husein Al-Habsyi’s endeavours in the field of religious education were relatively successful. Under his leadership, his pesantren has become the most famous Shi’i educational institution in Indonesia. This is evident from the fact that a number of YAPI alumni were able to pursue their education in countries such as Iran, India, Pakistan, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Syria, and Qatar. This was due to their high standard of proficiency in Arabic and in the various fields of Islamic learning, as well as the links established with ‘ulama in these countries by Al-Habsyi. As mentioned in Chapter One, he was responsible for selecting students to study in Qum, Iran and until his death on the 14th of January 1994, he was the most important confidant of Iranian leaders and ‘ulama with respect to the development of Shi’i education and da’wa in Indonesia. A large number of YAPI alumni, after studying in Iran, went on to become ustadhs in Islamic institutions and to engage in da’wa in various parts of Indonesia, some even returning to work at YAPI itself.

Husein Al-Habsyi was a popular preacher. He regularly delivered religious lectures and sermons in mosques in Bangil, Surabaya, Gresik, Jember and other towns in Java. He was an excellent orator, capable of captivating his audiences with his comprehension of Islam, broad insights into the latest developments in the Muslim world and his ability to use the techniques of modern mass communication in his lectures.

His commitment also extended to undertaking da’wa activities and creating educational institutions in Indonesia’s remote outer islands, including West Irian, East Timor and Maluku, all places where Islam is less well represented. In these regions his main aims were to preach in mosques and places of prayer and to make contact with teachers to discuss the social and religious problems faced by the small Muslim communities. In some areas he set up pesantren, which at first were branches of YAPI but later became independent institutions. A number of YAPI alumni were sent out to teach there. One such institution is Nurul Tsaqalain located in Hila, Central Maluku, founded in 1989.

When exactly Husein Al-Habsyi converted to Shi’ism remains unclear. His students and children suggest that it was after the Iranian Revolution, but there is a possibility that he had acquainted himself with Shi’i doctrine before that time. The co-founder of Al-Khairiyya, Muhammad al-Muhdar (d.1926) was Shi’i and is known to have taught Shi’i doctrines in Indonesia, so it is quite possible that certain aspects of Shi’ism had spread among teachers and students of the madrasa. The Al-Khairiyya school was frequently visited by Middle Eastern ‘ulama to discuss Islamic teachings, including the Shi’i doctrine, with

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26 Panitia (n.d:2).
the teachers and students. It is also recorded that Husein al-Habsyi engaged in discussions with a Shi’i scholar from Iraq who came to visit Al-Khairiyya in the early 1960s, and it is known that he studied for a time with the Grand Ayatollah Sayyid Muhsin al-Hakim, a marja’ al-taqlid in Najaf, Iraq.

Husein Al-Habsyi’s students, however, suggest that his primary interest was in understanding the nature of Iran’s Islamic Revolution. According to Muhsin Husein, it was Khomeini’s victory over the powerful Shah, and not the Shi’i doctrines, that first attracted him. His interest in that victory sparked his curiosity and desire for a deeper understanding of the ideology behind the revolution, which was strongly rooted in the doctrine of the imamate, that fundamental tenet of Shi’ism adhered to by the majority of Iran’s population.

According to Muhsin Husein, Al-Habsyi went to great lengths to obtain Shi’i books in order to develop his understanding of Shi’ism. His efforts included making contact with the Iranian embassy in Jakarta and with ‘ulama in Iran. The Iranian embassy in Jakarta distributed books and its magazine, Yaumul Quds, free of charge to Islamic foundations and individuals who requested them. Through these printed materials and his personal communication with figures in Iran, Al-Habsyi’s knowledge of Shi’i teachings and the development of Shi’ism in the world became extensive. He was frequently invited to participate in meetings with Shi’i ‘ulama in Iran. He was also pushed ever more towards Shi’ism by the hostile attitude and conduct of some Sunni leaders in Indonesia, the Sunni view being that Shi’is were unbelievers. Al-Habsyi attempted to defend Shi’i teachings by emphasising that Shi’ism was a true madhhab and that its adherents were genuine Muslims. In fact, as Shi’is are permitted to do under tawiyah in a hostile environment, he even declared himself to be a Sunni.

From the early 1980s, Husein Al-Habsyi was known for openly praising the Iranian revolution. He paid great respect to Imam Khomeini in his da’wa activities in the mosques of cities such as Surabaya, Malang and Bangil, all with the aim of reviving Islamic religiosity within the Muslim community. In turn he gained the respect of the majority of Muslims in the region, and in particular the youth, who regarded him as an ideal ‘alim and leader. However, he also experienced hostile reactions from anti-Shi’i groups once he became generally acknowledged as a Shi’i ustadh.

Husein Al-Habsyi’s position as an influential ustadh can be seen from his intellectual achievements, which began at an early age. Besides teaching and leading Islamic schools, he wrote books and translated books on Islam into Indonesian. He engaged in polemics with one of the most prominent Sunni

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27 Hamzah Al-Habsyi, interview, (15/10/2002).
reformist leaders in Indonesia, Ahmad Hasan (1887-1958) of the organisation Persis (Persatuan Islam, Islamic Union), who in April 1956 published a book entitled Risalah al-Madhhab (Treatise on the Madhhab) which suggests that slavish adherence to a single school of law like Shafi’i jurisprudence is forbidden. Ahmad Hasan also wrote Halalkah bermadzhab? (Is Following One School of Islamic Jurisprudence Lawful?). In response to these two books, Al-Habsyi produced a critical treatise with the pithy title, Lahirnya Madzhab yang Mengharamkan Madzhab (The Birth of a School of Jurisprudence which Forbids Schools of Jurisprudence). The polemics continued with the publication of Ahmad Hasan’s refutation of Al-Habsyi’s criticisms in Pembela Islam in January 1957. In April of that year, Al-Habsyi wrote yet another critical book, Haramkah Orang Bermadzhab II (Is it Unlawful for People to Follow a School of Jurisprudence II), in which he affirmed that following a particular school is strongly determined by the Qur’an and Sunna and the opinions of the ‘ulama. In this long-running and at times heated clash of ideas, both writers accused the other of having insufficient knowledge of Islam and both omitted views that did not support their arguments. Finally, both authors agreed to a public debate on the issue in the hope of achieving a final pronouncement. But the debate never took place. Ahmad Hasan’s supporters accused Al-Habsyi of avoiding participating in the debate. Al-Habsyi claimed that Mohammad Natsir, another Persis leader and a close associate from his Masyumi days, had advised him not to engage in the debate, as it would provoke religious conflict and disunity within the Muslim community. This claim is supported by one of his close associates, O. Hashem.

Husein Al-Habsyi was not an ustadh who was content to remain quiet. In 1979-1980 he once again engaged in theological polemics with the same reformist group, this time regarding the mawlid literature and the concept of Nur Muhammad (Light of Muhammad) published in Al-Muslimun, an organ of Persis in Bangil. It should be noted that there have been controversies among Muslim scholars concerning the nature of this concept at regular intervals. It is a term central to Sufi and Shi’i speculations, transcending the notion of the Prophet Muhammad as a mere human being. “The historical Muhammad was

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30 Several studies have been devoted to Persis and its scholars. Federspiel (1970) provides us with a detailed discussion of this organisation. It was founded in 1923 and Ahmad Hasan, born in Singapore of Indian origin, joined in 1924. Persis’ views on theology and law are generally similar to that of Muhammadiyah, but can on occasion be more extreme. Ahmad Minhaji (2001) provides a detailed account of Ahmad Hassan and his reformist legal thought.


34 Al-Samarrai points out that the concept might be an invention of Sufis, influenced by ideas from Judaism, Christianity or perhaps Zoroastrianism. The Light of Muhammad is believed among some Sufis to have been created before all things (Al-Samarrai 1968:147:147).
thus metamorphosed into a transcendent light, like the sun, around which everything created revolves.’” Suherman Rosjidi wrote an article criticising the concept, which he saw as contrary to Islam, reason and history. Rosjidi also points out that the concept is adopted from Christianity and Hinduism. In reaction to this, Al-Habsyi wrote an article published in *Al-Muslimun*, maintaining that the concept of *Nur Muhammad* has a strong basis in Hadith. These polemics continued. Another reformist writer, Imron A. Manan refuted Al-Habsyi’s view, claiming that *Nur Muhammad* is not mentioned in the Qur’ān and that the Hadith on it are not sound. Once more, Al-Habsyi responded in the same magazine, stating that *Nur Muhammad* is mentioned in the Qur’ānic verse 5:15 and many Hadith and is confirmed by the views of a number of ‘ulama. He also asked Manan to justify his claim that such Hadith are weak. Manan wrote another criticism directed towards Al-Habsyi’s article and towards a book written by Abdullah Abdun. *Al-Muslimun* also published an article by Abu Hasyim critical of Manan. Finally, in the same edition, the editorial board of the magazine decided that the debate should be brought to a head. It published conclusions and final notes favouring the Persis/Manan view of *Nur Muhammad*, upholding the claim that the concept is based on unsound Hadith that are contrary to the Qur’ān itself.

Husein Al-Habsyi’s intellectual activities are also marked by the publication of a number of books of a Shi‘i nature. His 34-page booklet on the exegesis of Qur’ān, *Surah Abasa: 1-10* became one of the most controversial publications for Sunni-Shi‘i relations in Indonesia. Published in 1991 under the title *Benarkah Nabi Bermuka Masam? Tafsir Surah Abasa* (‘Did the Prophet Really Frown and Turn Away? Commentary on Surah Abasa*), the central idea of this book is that the Prophet Muhammad, who is held to be the most perfect human being and immune from major and minor sins, did not frown and turn away from the blind ‘Abdullah bin Ummi Maktum, who asked the Prophet for religious instruction while the latter was in conversation with unbelieving members of the Qurayshi elite. Al-Habsyi maintains that the one at the meeting who did frown and turn away was Al-Walid bin al-Mughira, a tyrannical infidel from Mecca. This opinion is in striking contrast to that of the books of Qur’ānic commentary widely read and distributed in Indonesia. It also opposes the views

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36 *Al-Muslimun* (117/1979).
38 *Al-Muslimun* (125/1980).
40 The complete title of the book is *Sanggahan atas Tulisan Pengingkar Nur Nabi Besar Muhammad SAW* (A Refutation of the Writings of the Denier of the Light of the Great Prophet Muhammad). Unfortunately I have been unable to obtain a copy.
41 *Al-Muslimun* (127/1980).
of the majority of Sunni ‘ulama, who believe that the Prophet himself frowned and turned away. For these reasons, the controversy surrounding the book is not surprising.

There have been intellectual reactions to the book, including an article by Ibnu Mursyid in Al-Muslimun, January 1992 and a book by Ja’far Umar Thalib, the former leader of Lasykar Jihad. In response to these criticisms, Al-Habsyi wrote another scholarly work reaffirming his point of view on the perfection of the Prophet Muhammad: that he was free from bad moral conduct, which meant that he could not have frowned and turned away from a follower when he requested instruction. The work, entitled Nabi SAWW Bermuka Manis tidak Bermuka Masam (‘The Prophet [God grant him and his Household peace and salvation] Smiled and Did not Frown’) appeared in 1992.

Somewhat surprisingly in the light of the above, Husein Al-Habsyi promoted the idea of ukhuwwa Islamiyya, Islamic fraternity between Sunnis and Shi’is in a book entitled Sunnah-Syi’ah dalam Ukhuwah Islamiyah: Menjawab ‘Dua Wajah Saling Menentang’ Karya Abul Hasan Ali Nadwi (Sunnah and Shi’ah in Islamic Brotherhood: Responding to ‘Two Opposing Faces’, the Work of Abu al-Hasan Ali Nadwi). The book has become well known. Al-Habsyi criticises Ali Nadwi’s work for distorting Shi’i teachings, but the book is also directed to others who make the same mistake of creating division between the madhabs. Al-Habsyi demonstrated weaknesses in the writings about Shi’ism by Sunni ‘ulama and intellectuals, whose works do not reflect an appropriate or deep comprehension of Shi’ism and even contain serious misunderstandings. Such criticisms do not deal accurately with matters that are actually agreed upon by the majority of Shi’i ‘ulama. A second weakness in the writings of Sunni ‘ulama and intellectuals about Shi’ism is that in their use of sources they cite only the parts upon which they agree. A third weakness is their reliance on their own interpretations, without reference to existing interpretations by Shi’i mujtahid. Provocatively, Al-Habsyi concludes that the Sunni interpretations of Shi’i teachings are mainly based on passion and hatred.

Husein Al-Habsyi appeals to the Sunni ‘ulama to stop distorting the Shi’i teachings, and to stop slandering and judging the Shi’is as a group deviating

43 Thalib (1993).
44 SAWW is an abbreviation of Salla Allah ‘Alayh Wa Alih Wa Sallam, rather than SAW (Salla Allah Alayh Wa Sallam, May God Grant Him Peace and Salvation) which is common in Indonesia. The concept of the Prophet Muhammad’s Household is explained in Chapter Three.
45 Abu al-Hasan Ali Nadwi is an Indian scholar whose anti-Shi’i work entitled Dua Wajah Saling Bertentangan Antara Ahlu Sunnah dan Syi’ah was published in 1987 by Bina Ilmu, Surabaya.
46 Husein Al-Habsyi [1992a:12-13].
from the true teachings of Islam. He calls on Sunni ulama and intellectuals to hold workshops or conferences in which both Sunni and Shi‘i ulama participate, so that there may be opportunities to address various polemical matters:47

There can be no doubt that the Shi‘i ulama will always be prepared to participate in all of such meetings to present proof of the validity of their madhhab which can satisfy their Sunni fellows. The basic aim (will be) that the Muslim umma be united and the relationship among all can become closely and strongly tied. Certainly, we very much hope for the realisation of these approaches and demand the unification of fronts, instead of the breaking up of once united fronts.48

Al-Habsyi argues that if these conditions are realised, both Sunnis and Shi‘is can live in harmony, tolerance and mutual cooperation. Furthermore, the minority group will have nothing to fear from the majority Sunnis, who will then always protect, not oppress them.49

Another published work of Husein Al-Habsyi, Sunnah Syi‘ah dalam Dialog (Sunnah-Shi‘ah in Dialogue, 1991) originates from a recorded dialogue held with students of Universitas Gajah Mada (UGM) and the Indonesian Islamic University (UII). In this book, Al-Habsyi explains a number of the arguments surrounding Shi‘ism that are widely spread among the Sunnis, arguments such as the accusation that the Shi‘is are infidels and cursers of the Prophet’s companions, also the validity of Hadith of Ghadir Khum on the appointment of ‘Ali bin Abi Talib as the first Imam to succeed the Prophet.50 As in other writings, Al-Habsyi practiced taqiyya. Not only did he declare himself to be a Sunni but he also cited Sunni sources in support of the validity of Shi‘i teachings. This, he states, he did in order that “attacks directed to Imamiyya Shi‘ism can be terminated, because there are no differences in terms of principal matters between the two madhhab.”51 In this work, he also appealed for an end to cursing one another and devoted great attention to the social, economic and cultural problems that are faced by Muslims.

Another aspect of Husein Al-Habsyi’s intellectual activities can be seen in his translations. They include a translation of Pendekatan Sunnah Syi‘ah (Sunnah–Syi‘ah Approach) and the Christian Barnabas Gospel52 published by YAPI (Yayasan Penyiaran Islam) in Surabaya. He also provided us with an authoritative Arabic—

50 A text of this Hadith can be seen in Chapter Three.
51 Husein Al-Habsyi (1991a:3).
52 Most Muslims consider the Barnabas Gospel to be the most original version of the Christian Gospels.
Indonesian dictionary entitled *Kamus al-Kautsar Lengkap*, first published in 1977 by YAPI of Bangil. This 564-page dictionary has been reprinted several times, including twice by Thinker’s Library in Selangor, Malaysia.

These printed works confirm Al-Habsyi’s position as a prominent Shi’i ustadh. In them we find the religious thought which he directed to his followers. The works also confirm his leading role in the propagation of Shi’i teachings in Indonesia. Arguably though, his greatest contribution to the Indonesian Shi’i community has been YAPI, the organisation that has become synonymous with the name Husein Al-Habsyi, dedicating his knowledge, material assistance and time to its pesantren. And his influence has spread beyond YAPI. In the 1980s, when the Shi’i community was beginning to develop, Al-Habsyi was in his sixties. He wore a turban, the outward symbol of a man of religious learning. His *habitus* exerted great influence on the Muslim community. He had accumulated economic, social and cultural capital which was transformed into symbolic capital; that is, the recognition of his position as a renowned ustadh, head of a pesantren and leader of the Shi’i community in Indonesia.

C. Husein Shahab

In contemporary times, Husein Shahab is one of the most prominent Shi’i ustadhs in Indonesia. He was born in Palembang, South Sumatra on 27 December 1961 and as his clan name indicates, he is also a Sayyid. Both his primary and secondary education were completed in his home town. He finished *‘aliyyah* (religious senior high school) at Pesantren Ar-Riyadh, a well-known Islamic institution run by Arabs in Palembang. During this period, he had a close relationship with the head of the pesantren and his teacher, Sayyid Ahmad Al-Habsyi, who also had links with other Sayyid ‘ulama, including Husein Al-Habsyi.

Husein Shahab furthered his education in the *hawza ‘ilmiyya* of Qum, Iran. His choice of Qum was determined by his good relations with Ahmad Al-Habsyi, who maintained links with ‘ulama in Iran, and also by information from his brother, Umar Shahab, who was already studying there. Husein Shahab left for Qum in September 1979, with motivations more educational than sectarian.

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53 Husein Al-Habsyi’s other published book is *Agar Tidak Terjadi Fitnah* (In Order That Division Does Not Take Place, 1993). It contains his standpoint on a number of polemical topics and includes his views on the most famous Shi’i Hadith collection, *al-Kafi* (The Sufficient) by Muhammad al-Kulayni (d. 939). Al-Habsyi uses this book to defend the validity of a number of Shi’i teachings based on both Sunni and Shi’i sources. He concludes with an appeal for the scrutiny of any specific madhhab based on its own authoritative sources.

54 The notion of *habitus* can be understood as “a system of lasting, transposable dispositions which, integrating past experiences, functions at every moment as a matrix of perceptions, appreciations and actions and makes possible the achievement of infinitely diversified tasks” (Bourdieu 1977:82-83).

He saw his overseas education first and foremost as a prestigious opportunity, something many students in Indonesia could only dream of. The fact that Qum was a centre for the study of Shi’ism was secondary to him. During his time at Pesantren Ar-Riyadh, he had studied books written by Shi’i ‘ulama, such as al-Tabarsi’s *Makarim al-Akhlāq*\(^{56}\) (The Perfection of Morality) but it was his schooling in Qum which converted him to Shi’ism.

Husein Shahab was enrolled at the Islamic educational institution, *Dar al-Tabligh al-Islami*, renowned for its non-Iranian student body. For about two years he followed the modern system of instruction offered by the institution. As previously noted, *Dar al-Tabligh* was dissolved by the Islamic government of Iran. Its leader, the Grand Ayatollah Shari’atmadari was formally demoted from the rank of *marja’ al-taqlid* in April 1982.\(^{57}\) Husein Shahab himself had a bad experience during the raiding of the Islamic school by the Iranian military. His education in Qum ceased and in 1982 he returned to his hometown, Palembang.\(^{58}\)

After a year in Palembang, Husein Shahab departed once more for Qum. This time he headed for the *Madrasa Hujjatiyya*, another institution offering educational programmes for foreign students, but whilst he was registered at the dormitory of the institution, he did not follow its formal programmes. Instead, he decided to participate in the learning circles, the *halaqat* that were conducted by ‘ulama in Qum. In this educational and spiritual city, a variety of religious subjects are offered via these learning circles, while *fiqh* has dominated the educational system of the *hawza ‘ilmiyya*. Husein Shahab started out attending the circles on *fiqh* and then changed his orientation to Islamic philosophy and other intellectual sciences. His participation in the *halaqat* enabled him to study under the guidance of a number of renowned ‘ulama and scholars of Qum. Among his *fiqh* teachers were Ayatollah Hasan Zawakhiri and Ayatollah Shaykh Muhammad al-Nuri. He studied Qur’an exegesis under Ayatollah Javadi Amuli (b. 1930),\(^{59}\) doctrine under Ayatollah Sayyid Adil al-Alawi and Islamic history under Ayatollah Sayyid Ja’far Murtada al-‘Amili (b. 1945).\(^{60}\) He completed his study in Qum in 1986.\(^{61}\)

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\(^{56}\) Al-Fadl bin al-Hasan al-Tabarsi (d.1153) is a renowned Shi’i scholar and theologian whose most important work is in Qur’an exegesis, *Majma’ al-Bayan fi Tafsir al-Qur’an*.

\(^{57}\) Momen (1985:296).


\(^{59}\) Ayatollah Javadi Amuli is a leading theologian, philosopher and Qur’an exegete in Qum. He was born in 1933 in Amul, Iran where he completed his primary education and entered the *hawza ‘ilmiyya*. In 1950 he moved to Tehran to continue his religious study and then to Qum, where he was guided by renowned scholars including Ayatollah Burujirdi and ‘Allama Tabataba’i (d. 1981).

\(^{60}\) Born in South Lebanon, Sayyid Ja’far Murtada studied in Najaf (1962-1968) and Qum and returned to Beirut, where he is a theological historian and directs the Islamic Centre for Learning (Rosiny 2001:208-209). His debates with the liberal Muhammad Husayn Fadlullah are discussed by Rosiny (2001:207-219).

Husein Shahab’s field of specialisation is Islamic thought. In 1994 he pursued a Masters programme in this field at the International Institute for Islamic Thought and Civilization (ISTAC) in Kuala Lumpur, a tertiary educational institution founded and led by Muhammad Naquib Al-Attas. Here he developed his academic interests by conducting research and following lectures delivered by contemporary Muslim thinkers, including the renowned liberal Iranian intellectual, Abdul Karim Soroush. He did not complete the programme, being forced to leave Malaysia after three years. The Malaysian government prohibits Shi’ism in its country because it is seen as contrary to the Sunnism practiced by the majority of the population. I was informed that during his time in Malaysia, the police pursued Shahab because of his Shi’i beliefs, even though he was not actively promoting his madhab. In spite of his untimely departure from Malaysia, many Shi’is in Indonesia believe Husein Shahab actually graduated from ISTAC.

His career as an ustadh began about five years after his study in Qum. On his return to Indonesia, he went to Bandung to join Jalaluddin Rakhmat’s Muthahari Foundation. Between 1991 and 1994, he became an important ustadh at that foundation. During this period Jalaluddin Rakhmat and his family spent a year in Qum, leaving Husein Shahab to carry out some of Rakhmat’s duties, including leading religious rituals, delivering sermons and lecturing for various da’wa and educational programmes. Transcripts of his writings and preaching from this period were distributed through Al-Tanwir, a da’wa periodical of the Muthahari Foundation. Since this time, the popularity of Husein Shahab as a Qum alumnus and ustadh has been widely acknowledged by Shi’is in Indonesia.

Since 1999, he has chosen to live in Jakarta, where the largest numbers of Shi’is reside. With the cultural capital gained through his religious education in Qum and Kuala Lumpur, Husein Shahab began to build his career by involving himself in a number of da’wa and educational activities. He became a popular preacher and attracted the attention of leaders of Islamic institutions, being appointed a lecturer at several Islamic institutions, both Sunni and Shi’i, including Paramadina, Madina Ilmu College for Islamic Studies, the IIMaN centre for positive Sufism, Taqwa Nanjar Foundation and Al-Batul. In addition, he has involved himself with the religious programmes of several national television and radio stations. He is both a popular and a prominent ustadh in Indonesia.

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63 On the social, political and religious behind the prohibition of Shi’ism in Malaysia, see http://www.e-fatwa.gov.my/fatwa_search_result.asp?keyID=194.

ever-present in leading national Shi‘i activities. He teaches and preaches in more than 20 Islamic institutions. With such an extensive da‘wa programme, he is one of the ustadh who is able to live very comfortably in Jakarta.\footnote{Abaza (2004:183).}

In relation to his position as an ustadh and leader in the Shi‘i community, Husein Shahab also participates in the establishment of Shi‘i institutions. He is a co-founder of the Islamic Cultural Centre of Al-Huda (ICC). The programmes of this Iranian-sponsored institution include publishing, teaching and preaching. Husein Shahab’s involvement with organising ICC programmes lasted only a year, however. In 2001 he resigned his post as a result of misunderstandings concerning the organisation of a workshop rejecting IJABI, the national Shi‘i organisation founded by Jajaluddin Rakhmat on 8\textsuperscript{th} June 2001.\footnote{My account of this workshop can be seen in Chapter Five.} After this episode he established the Fitrah Foundation in collaboration with Othman Omar Shihab which has become a teaching centre of Sufism in Jakarta. Husein Shahab also participated in the establishment of Forum Al-Husainy in 2004. This forum for ustadhs and intellectuals living in Jakarta is a new association, active in da‘wa activities, including a monthly collective dhikr session of Sufi practice and da‘i, or a da‘wa leader training programme.

With regard to his intellectual achievements, Husein Shahab has produced several scholarly works. Most deal with his interest in Sufism and Islamic philosophy. However, his first book, published in 1988, was Jilbab (The Veil) dealing with what the Qur’an and Traditions of the Prophet say about women’s head coverings. This work is based on two texts, both with the same title - Hijab - written by Abu al-A‘la Maududi and by Murtada Mutahhari. Husein Shahab’s book attempts to offer new perspectives on controversies surrounding the wearing of jilbab in Suharto’s New Order era. He analyses textual evidence, from verses of the Qur’an and Hadith, as well as using rational argument to support the obligation of women to wear a jilbab. His other book is a practical manual on observing the pilgrimage to Mecca, a chief pillar of obligatory Islamic ritual. Its title is Cara Memperoleh Haji Mabrur: Tuntunan Ahli Bayt Nabi (Methods of Achieving Beneficial Pilgrimage: The Guidance of the Prophet’s Family) published in 1995.

Husein Shahab’s work on Sufism includes the two volumes of Dialog-dialog Sufi (Sufi Dialogues, 1994, 1995) which contain interesting stories about questions raised by disciples and answers given by Sufi teachers. His latest book, published in 2002, is Seni Menata Hati: Terapi Sufistik (Arts of Governing the Heart: Sufi Therapy). This book attempts to provide a Sufi model to ‘diagnose’ and ‘cure’ bad moral characteristics, referred to as ‘heart illnesses’ such as miserliness, arrogance and spitefulness, which harm human nature and blunt the believer’s
obedience to God. By following this model, the believer can reach the spiritual stage achieved by Sufis and the walis, saints or ‘friends of God’ in the quest to become an insan kamil, a perfect man.

Husein Shahab’s writings on Sufism, Islamic philosophy and other aspects of Islamic knowledge are also published in such periodicals as the Mutahhari Foundation’s Al-Tanwir, Al-Jawad Foundation’s Al-Jawad and Al-Huda, belonging to the ICC of Al-Huda. One of the texts focuses on the life of Fatima, the Prophet Muhammad’s daughter, whom Shahab invokes as a role model for female Sufis. According to Shahab’s analysis, and as is believed by many, Fatima was able to communicate with the angels. These communications, collected by her husband, Imam ‘Ali, are known as Mushaf Fatima. Further articles by Husein Shahab can be found in published anthologies like Kuliah Tasawuf (Lectures on Sufism) and Belajar Mudah ‘Ulmum Al-Qur’an (Easy Lessons in the Sciences of the Qur’an, 2002).

Husein Shahab’s scholarship also includes the translation of several books into Indonesian from Arabic and Persian. He translated both the fatwas, or legal judgments of Ayatollah Abu al-Qasim Khoei (d. 1992) and Ali Akbar Sadeqi’s work Pesan Nabi Terakhir (The Prophet’s Last Message). But his most popular translation is that of Muhammad al-Tijani al-Samawi’s Thumma Ihtadaytu (Then I Was Guided), first published in 1991 in Malay. Like the Arabic original and English versions, which are widely distributed in the Muslim world, the Indonesian version, Akhirnya Kutemukan Kebenaran (Finally I Found the Truth), published in 1993, is widely read in Indonesia. It is interesting to note that this book is one of the forbidden books listed in a fatwa of Johor State, Malaysia, issued on 19 November 2002.

Husein Shahab’s intellectual attainments are unquestionable. He is the prototype of a successful da’i. He transforms the cultural and social capital he has accumulated into the economic capital essential for maintaining his living as an ustadh. Although he is affiliated to many institutions of da’wa and education, there is no single institution powerful enough to establish him as the paramount leader of the Shi’i community to replace the late Husein Al-Habsyi, who was strongly supported by his own pesantren.

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67 Husein Shahab (http://aljawad.tripod.com/arsipbuletin/tasawufwanita.htm). The use of the term Mushaf Fatima is a source of controversy between the Sunnis and the Shi’is. The Shi’is are accused of having made their own alternative Qur’an. This derives from the fact that in Sunnism the term mushaf is used only in relation to the Qur’an, with the existing Qur’an being known as Mushaf Usmani.

D. Jalaluddin Rakhmat

The most prominent intellectual by far within the Shi‘i community is Jalaluddin Rakhmat, known as ‘Kang’ Jalal. His followers frequently write his full name as K.H. Jalaluddin Rakhmat. This indicates the recognition, or is possibly an attempt to legitimise Rakhmat’s religious prominence, placing him on a par with other leaders who bear title K.H., Kyai Haji. Born on 29 August 1949 in Bojongsalam, Rancaekek, a district of Bandung in West Java, Rakhmat comes from a religious family. His father was a man of learning, as well as a village chief and a Masyumi activist who then joined the separatist movement of Darul Islam, forcing him and his family to move to Sumatra for several years. Jalaluddin Rakhmat attended public school and studied religion with a traditionalist teacher named Ajengan Shidik. He learned nahw (Arabic syntax) and sarf (Arabic morphology) known within the pesantren tradition as ilmu alat, or the ‘instrumental knowledge’ for reading advanced texts. Rakhmat acknowledges that this understanding of Arabic allowed him to access the vast Arabic literature that shaped his religious thought and his thorough knowledge of Shi‘ism. This made his position distinctive compared to other Indonesian Muslim intellectuals who graduated from secular universities and this particular cultural capital underpins his present position as a renowned Shi‘i leader.

Jalaluddin Rakhmat received his formal education at secular schools and universities. After completing Junior High School (SMP Muslimin III) and Senior High School (SMA II) he enrolled in the Faculty of Communication Science at UNPAD in Bandung. In addition, he undertook Teacher Training for Junior High School (PGSLP) in the English Department and used this diploma to teach at several secondary schools in the city to support himself. His academic career in the field of communications began with his appointment as a lecturer at his alma mater. In 1980, he won a Fulbright scholarship for further study in communications at Iowa State University, USA. He finished his Masters in 1982 with a thesis entitled A Model for the Study of Mass Media Effects on Political Leaders. Some years later, he enrolled in a PhD programme at UNPAD, without completing. Finally, in 1994 he took Political Science as his PhD topic at The Australian National University, but this study was also not completed. Like Husein Shahab, he is wrongly perceived to have received his PhD, a mistake which is beneficial to his position within the Shi‘i community.

Jalaluddin Rakhmat has lectured on communications from the beginning of his academic career. His students report that they eagerly looked forward to his lectures because of his convincing rhetoric and his expertise in the field. But

69 ‘Kang’ is a Sundanese term, literally ‘elder brother’ and a common form of address for elder men.
in 1992 he was dismissed from UNPAD, following tensions with what Rakhmat describes as a certain ‘campus bureaucrat’. In the course of his academic career, he has written a number of textbooks on his technical specialisation which have become important references for students. They include Retorika Modern (Modern Rhetoric, 1982), Metode Penelitian Komunikasi (Methods of Communications Research, 1985) and Psikologi Komunikasi (Psychology of Communications, 1985). With these materials circulating among students and scholars alike, Rakhmat is widely recognised as an expert in the field. It is unsurprising then that in 2001, after an absence of almost 10 years, he was asked to return to UNPAD as a lecturer and was subsequently inaugurated as Professor of Communications.

Jalaluddin Rakhmat’s life history is infused with da’wa. This important aspect distinguishes him from most Shi’i intellectuals in Indonesia. Long before his conversion to Shi’ism, he had been affiliated with the Sunni reformist organisations Persis and Muhammadiyah, two groups strongly opposed to traditional Islamic beliefs and practices in Indonesia. During his studies at secondary school, he joined the youth branch of Persis in Bandung. Later, in 1970, he joined the Muhammadiyah training camp Darul Arqam, held with the purpose of preparing Muhammadiyah preacher cadres. He became a fanatical cadre of Muhammadiyah which, along with Majlis Tarjih Muhammadiyah, the institution through which it issued its fatwas, actively carried out da’wa in various areas of West Java. He energetically promoted the reformist ideology of Muhammadiyah, in particular the principle of ‘anti-TBC’ (Tahayul, Bid’ah, Churafat, superstition, innovation and false myth) which was an amusing pun on ‘tuberculosis’. This reformist programme provoked strong negative reactions from followers of traditionalist Islam in the region. But Rakhmat always considered himself to have been successful in carrying out his duties as a Muhammadiyah preacher. In the 1970s, his achievements in this reformist organisation saw him appointed an executive member of the Council of Education, Instruction and Culture of the Bandung branch of Muhammadiyah and of its Council of Preaching in the West Java provincial branch. It should be noted that after turning to Shi’ism however he used his da’wa outreach to promote specifically traditionalist ideas and practices such as the importance of ziyara, or the visitation of graves, tawassul, the invocation of Muslim saints or Imams in supplication and tabarruk, ‘taking the blessings’ of relics or mementoes - all of which are incompatible with his former reformist stance.

Jalaluddin Rakhmat’s devotion to da’wa is seen in the fact that he maintained these activities during his period of study in America. Together with Imaduddin

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Abdulrahim and others, he established pengajian circles at the Dar al-Arqam mosque in Ames, Iowa. One of his missionary tasks was to give the sermon at the Friday Prayers. These were then compiled and published in Khutbah-khutbah di Amerika (Sermons in America, 1988). Rakhatm formed a close relationship with Imaduddin Abdulrahim, co-founder of the Salman Mosque at ITB, Bandung, who encouraged him to become a regular preacher at the mosque upon his return from America. Large numbers attended his religious lectures. On one occasion, Imaduddin Abdulrahim was informed that his influence on the Salman activists was so great that the congregation had become divided into two factions: the followers of Jalaluddin Rakhmat and the followers of Nurcholish Madjid. Rakhatm’s expertise in communications is frequently cited as responsible for his successes in da’wa. Indeed, Rakhatm is a very popular preacher, with his religious lectures attracting large audiences. His fame as preacher and intellectual has spread rapidly, not only in West Java but throughout the country.

In interviews, Jalaluddin Rakhmat told us that his lectures at the Salman Mosque often turned into interactive discussions with his audience. Following his banning from the Salman Mosque, these lectures were first held in Rakhatm’s own home and eventually in the nearby Al-Munawwarah Mosque in Bandung. To this day he continues to deliver regular sermons at this mosque. He writes:

> It is said that these pengajian caused unrest. I was declared persona non grata from the Salman Mosque. At the request of the jama’a, I moved the Sunday dawn lectures to my own small house. The participants were crowded in the narrow rooms. Some overflowed outside. Soon after the Al-Muawwarah Mosque was established, they moved again to a mosque. Then the space was larger. The members of jama’a increased; most were university students. 

With his background in communications and experience as a preacher, Jalaluddin Rakhatm attempts not only to implement scientific concepts in his da’wa activities but also to formulate these activities from a communications perspective. His ideas can be found in essays included in two volumes: Islam Alternatif (Alternative Islam, 1986) and Catatan Kang Jalal (Kang Jalal’s Notes, 1997). Rakhatm defines da’wa as “a communication activity aimed to realise Islamic teachings in the individual and in social life.” He believes all the components of communication can be found in da’wa: da’i (the preacher), message, media, object and effect. Da’i, the agent of da’wa, can be a Muslim individual or a group, while the object of da’wa includes Muslims and non-Muslims both. While Rakhatm views the media to be the same for both communications and da’wa,
the message of *da’wa* is different from that of communications. *Da’wa* should include three elements: *amr ma’ruf, nahi munkar*, or the injunction of enjoining good and prohibiting evil, aspects of Islamic *shari’a* and the empowerment of humankind against tyranny and injustice. He also emphasises that *da’wa* must have an impact on individuals and social structures in the form of progressive change within the domains of knowledge, attitude and behaviour. Whether all aspects of his ideas on communication and *da’wa* have been realised, however, remains questionable.

One may wonder how Jalaluddin Rakhmat converted to Shi’i Islam. It is true that he was one of a group of Muslim intellectuals who were fascinated by the victory of the Iranian Revolution and its ideology. He, Amien Rais, Dawam Rahardjo and others were attracted to the works of revolutionary ideologues such as Ali Shari’ati. These works were considered to offer alternative ideological worldviews. But Rakhmat also admits that he began to engage in intensive self-study of Shi’ism in 1984, the year which appears to be the turning point in his religious, intellectual and spiritual quest. Even though we cannot ascertain the exact time of his conversion, it is safe to surmise that it would have followed this period of intensive study of Shi’i literature, discussion and reflection. A brief account of his awakening interest in Shi’ism goes like this: in 1984, Rakhmat, together with Haidar Bagir and Endang Saefuddin Anshary attended an Islamic conference in Colombo during which they became acquainted with some Shi’i ‘ulama. Rakhmat himself admits that the intellectual and religious performance of these ‘ulama at the conference impressed him greatly. What impressed him even more was that the Shi’i ‘ulama gave him a number of books. (It is interesting to note that before they left Indonesia for Colombo, the late Mohammad Natsir, the then chairman of DDII had warned Rakhmat and his peers not to accept books given out by Shi’i ‘ulama.)

Prior to the conference in Colombo, Jalaluddin Rakhmat had not been open to learning about Shi’ism, despite regular access to Shi’i books. Upon his return from Sri Lanka however he began and enthusiastic programme of reading. He says that it was a Shi’i book that really triggered his doubts about the validity of Abu Huraira (generally held to be reliable) as a communicator of Prophetic Traditions, perhaps a surprising claim when we consider that a large number of Hadith that Rakhmat upheld and practiced were narrated by Abu Huraira. From this time onwards, Rakhmat continued to study the teachings of Shi’ism, particularly through Arabic books, and found his religious truth in this branch of Islam. It is highly likely however that he would have been exposed to the works of Shari’ati and al-Musawi’s *Dialog Sunnah Syi’ah* (Sunnah-Shi’ah Dialogue) before 1984, since both of these works were available in Indonesian

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78 Jalaluddin Rakhmat, interview, (2/1/2003).
from 1983. Haidar Bagir is even of the opinion that Jalaluddin Rakhmat began to study Shi’i works when he was in America. Whatever the exact timing, Rakhmat admits that after 1984 he had dealings with with many people wanting to become Shi’is, a factor which contributed to his emergence as a leading Shi’i figure in Indonesia.

Jalaluddin Rakhmat also involved himself in discussions with Indonesian Shi’i ‘ulama such as the aforementioned Husein Al-Habsyi of Bangil. Rakhmat even calls Husein Al-Habsyi his teacher. He also established links with Shi’i ‘ulama in Iran and other parts of the world. To gain a more thorough knowledge of Shi’ism, he spent a year in Qum (1992-1993). Initially, he had intended to pursue a PhD in Theology at Tehran University, but the process of enrolment was so complex that he changed his plans. In Qum, he established connections with prominent ayatollahs and attended religious lectures and halaqat in the hawza ‘ilmiiyya. This year also provided his children with the opportunity to gain educational and religious experience in the shrine city of Qum. Some of them were enrolled at madrasas in Qum; his first son, Miftah Fauzi Rakhmat is currently an important Shi’i ustadh at the Muttahhari Foundation in Bandung. Even though Rakhmat is not included in the list of Qum alumni, the links he established with Qum ayatollahs and the knowledge he gained through attending lectures and study circles unquestionably enhanced his religious authority among Indonesian Shi’is.

In addition to such educational and da’wa experience, scholarship in the religious sciences is also seen as a crucial aspect of religious leadership. In this regard, Rakhmat provides us with numerous works in the form of books, essays, translations and introductory notes to other people’s works on aspects of Islamic scholarship. Collections of his essays written in the 1980s are published in two of his best known books: Islam Alternatif: Ceramah-Ceramah di Kampus (Alternative Islam: Campus Lecturers, 1986) and Islam Aktual: Refleksi Sosial Seorang Cendekiawan Muslim (Actual Islam: Social Reflections of a Muslim Intellectual, 1991). The former consists of essays presented in seminars and lectures at university campuses. It includes ideas about Islam as a mercy for all creatures (rahmatan li al-‘alamin), Islam and the liberation of mustad’afin (the oppressed), Islam and the right establishment of society and Islam and science. The book concludes with a call for readers to follow Shi’i Islam as an alternative. Islam Aktual: Refleksi Sosial Seorang Cendekiawan Muslim contains shorter essays which originally appeared in national publications such as Tempo, Panji Masyarakat, Kompas, Pikiran Rakyat and Jawa Pos. The essays reflect on various topics such as Islamic fraternity, communications and the mass media, politics, intellectual reform, family, leadership, poverty and social problems.
and martyrdom. Notwithstanding its promising sub-title, Rakhmat himself acknowledges that, in general, the essays are not based on deep thinking, something he sees as quite in keeping with the character of the mass media.

Jalaluddin Rakhmat has also written books on more specialised disciplines of Islamic knowledge. He has produced two books on Qur’anic exegesis: *Tafsir Bil Ma’tsur* (Qur’anic Commentary by Narrated Sources, 1994) and *Tafsir Sufi Al-Fatihah* (Sufi Commentary of the Opening Chapter of the Qur’an, 1999). “In this area”, writes Feener, “Rakhmat adopts the method of interpreting verses primarily in terms of other related ones from the Qur’an itself with material from the Sunnah used as a further means of clarification.”81 This is more correctly called *tafsir bi al-ma’tthur* or *tafsir al-Qur’an bi al-Qur’an*, literally, interpreting Qur’anic verses using other Qur’anic verses, and refers to a method developed by the renowned Shi’i scholar ‘Allama Muhammad Husayn Tabataba’i (1903-1981). In his second book of commentary, Rakhmat claims: “For the first time in Indonesian, I will include many Hadith from the Prophet’s *ahl al-bayt* (Upon Whom Be Peace).”82

Other books by Rakhmat deal with Sufism. Besides the above-mentioned Sufi *tafsir* book, there is *Membuka Tirai Kegaiban: Renungan-Renungan Sufistik* (Parting Mystical Veil: Sufi Reflections, 1994), *Reformasi Sufistik* (Sufi Reform, 1998) and *Meraih Cinta Ilahi: Pencerahan Sufistik* (Achieving Divine Love: Sufi Enlightenment, 1999). They are derived from collections of his sermons, in particular those delivered at the regular Sunday religious gatherings at the Munawwarah Mosque and from essays published in the media. Rakhmat clearly recognises shortcomings in his own works as, more often than not, he offers excuses in their introductions. For instance, despite its promising title, Rakhmat acknowledges that his *Membuka Tirai Kegaiban* does not provide its readers with the same in-depth analysis of Sufi teachings as can be found in the classical books of Suhrwardi or al-Ghazali. Nonetheless, he provides innovative interpretations of certain Sufi teachings by comparing Sufism with psychology. In other articles he suggests that the teachings of Sufism can lead to emotional and spiritual intelligence,83 the chief key to which is the Sufi teaching of patience.

In the field of Islamic history, Jalaluddin Rakhmat wrote *Al-Mustafa: Pengantar Studi Kritis Tarikh Nabi SAW* (The Chosen: An Introduction to the Critical Study of the History of the Prophet [May God Grant Him Peace and Salvation], 2002), adapted from the transcription of his lectures in the *Muthahhari* Foundation. In

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83 There are three articles by Rakhmat dealing with Sufism and its relation to emotional and spiritual intelligence: “Emotional Intelligence dalam Perspektif Sufi”, “Dengan Tasawuf Meningkatkan Spiritual Intelligence” and “Sabar; Kunci Spiritual Intelligence”. See Bihar Anwar (2002).
this case, ‘critical study’ means that criticism should be aimed at Sunni sources, particularly those Hadith narrating occasions or events which Shi’is believe to be contrary to the noble character of Muhammad (he being the most perfect man and the best example for mankind to follow). The spirit of this work is similar to that of Husein Al-Habsyi’s exegesis. However, Rakhmat does not actually give readers an historical description of the life of the Prophet, save for providing examples of interpretations of events which he believes are worthy of criticism.

Jalaluddin Rakhmat also writes about the validity of certain religious practices which run contrary to reformist views. In Rindu Rasul: Meraih Cinta Ilahi Melalui Syafa’at Nabi SAW (Longing for the Messenger: Achieving Divine Love through Intercessions of the Prophet [May God Grant Him Peace and Salvation], 2001) Rakhmat provides us with various ways of showing love and devotion to the Prophet and vehicles through which to approach God, such as reciting salawat (invocations), expecting his shafa’at (assistance), tawassul (prayer through intermediaries) and tabarruk (the taking of blessings). Nota bene that Jalaluddin Rakhmat had strongly opposed all such religious practices in traditionalist Islam in Indonesia before his conversion to Shi’ism. “False intellectual arrogance distanced me from loving of the Prophet (May God Grant Him Peace and Salvation). The modernist ideology penetrating my thought had dried my soul.”

Through Rindu Rasul, Rakhmat aims to demolish the intellectual ‘arrogance’ of reformist groups which denies these practices and he appeals for more reflective religious views. In the wider context of Indonesian Islam, he may have actually contributed to maintaining practices upheld by traditionalist Muslims in Indonesia.

Jalaluddin Rakhmat also wrote a work on ethics with the provocative title, Dahulukan Akhlak di atas Fikih (Prioritise Ethics over Jurisprudence, 2002a). The book is intended to solve the long-running problem in the Muslim umma, namely the factions which emerged following the death of the Prophet, by implementing his divine message on the universal necessity of noble ethics: “Indeed, I was designated to perfect noble ethics”. Rakhmat presents the differences in legal opinion among the various schools of Islamic law during the course of history and analyses the factions and fanatical attitudes of followers of schools that have created conflicts within the umma. He suggests that the believer should renounce his or her strict adherence to a certain school of law for the greater good of establishing Islamic fraternity. This scholarly work contains genuine ideas that have received credit as well as criticism from both Sunnis and Shi’is in Indonesia.

Notwithstanding this call to abandon allegiance to particular schools of law for the sake of Islamic fraternity, Rakhmat wrote several essays on fiqh. Based

84 Rakhmat (2001:xii).
on these essays, Feener identified him as one of the new Muslim intellectuals who have contributed to the development of Muslim jurisprudence in 20th century Indonesia.\(^8^5\) Like Munawir Sjadzali, a moderate Muslim intellectual and Minister of Religious Affairs from 1983 to 1993 and Nurcholish Madjid, a moderate Muslim intellectual and founder of the Paramadina Foundation, Jalaluddin Rakhmat maintains the necessity for the continuous exercise of *ijtihad*, or independent judgment, so that Muslims can adapt to social and cultural changes in their world. He writes: “*Ijtihad is difficult but necessary.*”\(^8^6\)

He hastens to add that certain requirements for *ijtihad* mean that not everyone is authorised to undertake such a difficult task. As a follower of Shi‘ism, he upholds the view that in terms of jurisprudence Muslims can be classified as *mujtahid* (legists) and *muqallid* (their followers). In Shi‘i Islam, the laity should follow a specific *mujtahid* known as *marja‘ al-taqlid*, who has the attributes of *faqaha* (comprehension of Islamic knowledge) and “*adala* (noble character, firm conviction and sincerity).\(^8^7\) Since Rakhmat is not a *mujtahid*, his response to issues of Islamic law is to promote the existing views of some ‘ulama, while emphasising the necessity of individual choice and the importance of Islamic fraternity. This attitude can be seen in his book, *Jalaluddin Rakhmat Menjawab Soal-soal Islam Kontemporer* (Jalaluddin Rakhmat Answers Contemporary Islamic Problems, 1998a) which is derived from his spontaneous responses to questions posed by audiences at his lectures at the Salman and Al-Munawwarah Mosques between 1980 and 1998. By not offering his own legal opinions, Jalaluddin Rakhmat clearly positions himself as a *muqallid* in the field of Islamic law and his answers generally reflect his adherence to the *Ja‘fari* school of Islamic jurisprudence.

Besides questions of Islamic law, *Jalaluddin Rakhmat Menjawab Soal-soal Islam Kontemporer* also includes aspects of doctrine, Qur’an exegesis, ethics, history and psychology. It addresses such problems as the imamate as the fundamental doctrine of Shi‘ism, family planning and love. In an editorial note, Hernowo points out that the image of Jalaluddin Rakhmat as a Shi‘i intellectual may be opposed by certain groups. But Rakhmat is very capable of coping with the various responses directed towards him. Hernowo surmises that his success in playing the roles of expert in Sufism, Qur’an exegesis, jurisprudence and philosophy can be attributed to his intellectual powers of logic.\(^8^8\)

Jalaluddin Rakhmat’s works have contributed significantly to Muslim scholarship and this form of cultural capital is an important determinant of Islamic leadership in the Shi‘i community in Indonesia. Nurcholish Madjid

\(^{8^5}\) Feener (1999).
\(^{8^7}\) Rakhmat (1986:240).
\(^{8^8}\) Hernowo (1998:xxviii).
The Leaders once described Rakhmat as ‘a complete intellectual’. This is true. He produces works not only on his technical field of specialisation and Islamic knowledge but also about psychology, education and so on. Another work, *Rekayasa Sosial: Reformasi atau Revolusi?* (Social Engineering: Reformation or Revolution? 1999a) begins with the explanation of what Rakhmat calls the ‘intellectual cul-de-sac’, namely intellectual fallacies that have to be overcome before social engineering can begin. “It is impossible for there to be change in the right direction if fallacies of thinking still entrap our minds.” With introductory notes presented by Dimitri Mahayana, the book offers political revolution as an alternative to the *reformasi* brought into being since the end of Suharto’s New Order regime in 1998. On revolution, Rakhmat writes:

> When the whole nation runs into crisis, all the people demand change. The more unbearable the nation’s state is, the more desirable it is that change occur soon. Revolution emerges as the best strategy. Reformation is considered too slow, while the stomach cannot wait. When corruption has been entrenched in the whole body of the nation, we need a total surgical operation, that is, revolution.

He goes on to explain four theories of revolution, based on behavioural, psychological, structural and political schools. Taking several definitions of revolution, he points out three dimensions: first, multi-dimensional, comprehensive and fundamental change; secondly, involvement of the masses that are mobilised and rise in a revolutionary movement; and thirdly, the use of force and coercion. However, he personally rejects the third dimension. Rakhmat also suggests circumstances which encourage certain tactics towards revolution, based on specific theories. For instance, according to behavioural theory, revolutionary circumstances include: impeding the fulfilment of needs of the majority of people and provoking disappointment and anger in the people when they compare their conditions with those of the regime. But Rakhmat notes that revolution can only be explained, never predicted. His ideas on political revolution seem to correspond with his appeals for martyrdom, which he considers to be the peak of Islamic wisdom

> *Shahid* literally means ‘one who witnesses’, ‘one who gives evidence’. You believe in the truth of Islam and you prove the belief with your willingness to die to support Islam. You know that all kinds of oppression

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89 *Kompas* (31/10/1997:15).
90 Rakhmat (1999a:3).
91 Rakhmat (1999a:177).
94 Rakhmat (1999a:211).
are acts of destruction of the words of God; therefore, you prove your knowledge with a willingness to sacrifice yourself in fighting oppression. Death-witnessing your belief is martyrdom.\textsuperscript{95}

Jalaluddin Rakhmat established the \textit{Muthahhari} Foundation in Bandung in 1988. Co-founders included Haidar Bagir, Ahmad Tafsir, Agus Effendi and Ahmad Muhajir. The foundation, which has the slogan: ‘The Enlightenment of Islamic Thought’, is engaged in \textit{da’wa}, education and publishing. Since 1992, it has organised the programme of SMU Plus (Senior High School with attribute Plus),\textsuperscript{96} which has attracted students from various parts of the country. Aside from participating in religious circles, Rakhmat regularly gives religious lectures at Sunday's \textit{pengajian} at the Al-Munawwarah Mosque. As previously mentioned, a number of students who have gone on to become Shi’i intellectuals once studied at these lectures and circles. The recorded sermons from the \textit{pengajian} form the main content of the missionary periodical \textit{Al-Tanwir}, published by the \textit{da’wa} division of the \textit{Muthahhari} Foundation. The foundation has a publishing wing which has produced a number of books, including titles by Jalaluddin Rakhmat and students of SMU Plus. All these activities have made the institution and its leader famous throughout Indonesia.

In 1997, with financial support from Sudharmono, Vice-President of Indonesia during the New Order era and his family, Rakhmat founded \textit{Tazkiya Sejati}, a centre for Sufi studies and training in Jakarta. He was its director until he left the institution in 2003, following conflict with Sudharmono's children, Yanti and Tantyo Sudharmono. From 1997 to 2003, \textit{Tazkiya Sejati} organised more than 20 courses on Sufism, attracting participants from Jakarta's upper-middle class, including businessmen, executives and retired functionaries.

Jalaluddin Rakhmat's status as a leader is supported by the fact that he pioneered the establishment of Indonesia’s national Shi’i organisation, IJABI (\textit{Ikatan Jamaah Ahlul Bait Indonesia}, Indonesian Association of \textit{Ahl al-Bayt} Congregations) in 2000. Since then, he has become the chairman of the advisory council and the most influential figure in the development of this organisation. In the beginning, Rakhmat and other intellectuals co-operated with Shi’i \textit{ustadhs} in establishing the organisation, but during the process the groups split. While the Shi’i intellectuals, under Rakhmat’s leadership, are generally associated with IJABI (which still claims to be the umbrella organisation for all Shi’is in

\textsuperscript{95} Rakhmat (1991:298).
\textsuperscript{96} The attribute ‘Plus’ is used because, aside from its concentration on the establishment of morality, the school teaches a number of subjects from the national curriculum of the Department of National Education. For more information about this school, see Chapter Five or http://smuth.net/Profile/03-sejarah.asp accessed 18/10/2005.
Indonesia), the *ustadhs* have rejected it as a social and religious organisation. However, IJABI has enjoyed a stable position because it is legally recognised by the Indonesian government through the Ministry of Home Affairs.

In the light of all the above, Jalaluddin Rakhmat has accumulated considerable cultural capital within the Shi‘i community in Indonesia but he lacks social capital. Although he has unquestioned national standing, he still lacks the support of the majority of the Shi‘i *ustadhs* of the Arab community and the Qum alumni. This is not yet powerful enough to promote him to the position of chief leader recognised by all of the Shi‘i community.