8. Sunni Responses to Shi’ism

As we have seen so far, there are influential individuals and institutions within the Shi’i community in Indonesia which have, despite their small numbers, created opportunities through which to propagate the teachings of their madhhab. However, there remain a number of obstacles to the growth and development of the community, the most significant being the reactions to this growth from the Sunni Muslim majority. They are complex and range from the extremely negative to the moderate. This chapter deals with those responses to Shi’ism and its development in Indonesia during the period after the Iranian revolution of 1979.

These responses to Shi’ism are a direct result of the nature of Islam in Indonesian society and the state. The majority Muslim population is Sunni, but within this group there are reformist and traditionalist factions with their several related organisations. The chapter begins with an examination of the attitude of such organisations towards Shi’ism. Secondly, it deals with a fatwa by Indonesian ‘ulama on Shi’ism. Thirdly, the chapter considers the response of the Indonesian government’s Department of Religious Affairs (DEPAG). Fourthly, it deals with the ways in which anti-Shi’i propagation is executed and examines the tensions between Shi’i and Sunni denominations. Finally, it examines the moderate attitude of Muslim intellectuals which has recently allowed room for the further spread of Shi’ism.

A. The General Attitude of Islamic Organisations

By and large, Indonesian Islam is characterised by the strong resistance of Muslim individuals, organisations and institutions to Shi’ism and the Shi’is. The most active and negative response to the development of Shi’ism comes from the reformist Muslim groups, such as Persis and Al-Irsyad and the individuals and institutions linked to them.

Persis was established in 1923 and claims to follow the ahl al-sunna wa al-jama’a, even though the intellectual works of its leading figures, including Ahmad Hassan (1887-1958) make little explicit mention of this. The main purpose of Persis is to implement, through propagation and instruction, the ‘pure’ teachings of Islam, based on the Qur’an and Sunna of the Prophet, in all aspects of Muslim life.1 Persis emphasises the need to abolish all beliefs and

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1 Federspiel (2001:87).
practices which it considers contrary to these two principal sources. The history of this reformist Islamic organisation is littered with its fierce attacks on the customs of the traditionalists who constitute the majority of the Indonesian Muslim population. Since its establishment, Persis has been “straightforward in its expression, and unrelenting and [has] denounced or condemned others quite readily.”

There is no mention of Shi’ism to be found in any Persis publications before Iranian revolution. This can be attributed first to a widespread ignorance about the existence of Shi’is in Indonesia at that time and second to Persis’ focus on its battles with traditionalist beliefs and practices, the developing ideologies of the state and with Christianity. However, within a matter of months after the victory of the Iranian revolution, we see Persis publications carrying articles related to Shi’ism. One of the initial responses to events was the inclusion of an article on mut’a or temporary marriage, in Al-Muslimun, the Persis magazine in Bangil. The article presents the classical arguments between the Sunni and Shi’i views on this topic and reiterates the validity of the Sunni perspective, which rejects the practice. More importantly, however, this article indicates the emerging awareness among Persis members of the spread of Shi’ism in the country. Over the years, Persis has induced intense resistance to Shi’ism and Shi’is in Indonesia, using a variety of methods. Quite simply, Persis believes that Shi’ism is a heretical sect and it sees itself as the frontline in the fight to protect Sunni Muslims. This resistance is most evident when we take into account Persis’s close links to the Dewan Dakwah Islamiyah Indonesia (Indonesian Islamic Missionary Council), commonly known as DDII.

DDII is closely associated with the reformist Muslim movement in Indonesia, and is well-known for its very negative response to the development of Shi’ism. The organisation’s co-founder and first leader was Mohammad Natsir (1908-1993), who had been a student of Ahmad Hassan, the leader of Persis and had been a former leader of the Masyumi party. Since its establishment on 26 February 1967 DDII has been one of the most, if not the most, active and progressive institution in the field of da’wa in Indonesia. It claims to be a rallying point for the umma and calls for cooperation among existing missionary institutions. DDII urges its missionaries to avoid khilafiya, or disputed matters, and instead to promote the basic principles of Islam which are common to all Muslim factions, reformist and traditionalist. It believes this will prevent confusion among the

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2 Noer (1973:95).
3 The title is Kauwin Mut’aah di Negeri Iran (Mut’a in Iran) written by Sulhawi Rubba (July 1979).
4 Abduh and Abu Huzaifah (1998: xiv-xviii). A. Ghozy, the head of Pesantren Persis in Bangil affirmed that only Persis has declared Shi’is to be unbelievers (A. Ghozy, interview, 4/10/2002). Shi’ism has become a sensitive issue for Persis members. This is illustrated by my experiences during an interview with A. Ghozy. Eight other members of Persis attended, misunderstanding the purpose of the interview. They had expected a debate on Shi’ism and seemed disappointed when I explained I was only gathering data on Persis’ official opinion of Shi’ism.
laity and reduce the burdens of the missionaries themselves. DDII’s anti-Shi‘i propagation is a manifestation of the concept of *difa’* or self-defence, which is directed towards Christianisation (seen as an external threat) and ‘*paham-paham dan aliran-aliran sesat*’, heterodox ideological currents and religious views such as secularism, *Islam Jamaah* (LDII), the *Ahmadiya* and Shi‘ism (which are seen as an internal threat). DDII deems Shi‘ism a heterodox sect even though the term *ahl al-sunna wa al-jama’a* is absent in its statutes. It is widely accepted that DDII, along with its leaders and institutions, is one of the great opponents to the propagation of the Shi‘i teachings in Indonesia.

DDII established connections with Saudi Arabia and specifically the Muslim World League, *Rabitat al-‘Alam al-Islami*, one of the vice-leaders of which was Natsir. From an international perspective, it is clear that the anti-Shi‘i movement in Indonesia receives strong support from Middle Eastern countries, Saudi Arabia in particular, whilst the Shi‘i movement is supported by Iran. In this context, competition and conflict between Sunnis and Shi‘is in Indonesia is fuelled by competition and tension over Muslim primacy between the two big powers. The relationship between these two countries was at its lowest ebb during the period of Khomeini’s leadership, in the first decade following the establishment of the Islamic Republic of Iran. Iran successfully established an Islamic state and claims to be the sole authority and representative of ‘genuine’ Islam. This, along with its attempts to propagate these beliefs to the whole Muslim world, was a direct challenge to the Saudi kingdom and its hold on Muslim primacy. Iran’s revolutionary message opposes the Saudi regime, which Khomeini depicts “as oppressive and the ally of other oppressive Muslim governments”. The strict Saudi brand of Islam, Wahhabism, is seen by many as a false sect which aims “to create factionalism and division between the world’s Muslims” and “to eliminate the history of Islam”. Aware of the growing influence of the Iranian revolutionary spirit, the Saudis responded by promoting the message that Iran is an exporter of terrorism and imperialism, determined to destabilise the Gulf States.

The dissemination of Saudi Wahhabism by the Muslim World League is a particular source of tension. The promotion of Wahhabism has direct connections to a worldwide anti-Shi‘i movement which is also active in Indonesia. The Muslim World League owns periodicals, publishing houses and agencies and

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6 Husin (1998:139-140).
7 This organisation was founded in Mecca in 1962.
8 Goldberg (1990:156).
9 Goldberg (1990:156).
has missionaries scattered all over the world. It has organised meetings and financed Islamic centres, education, publications and missionary activities in Indonesia.\textsuperscript{11}

The second Muslim reformist organisation known for its anti-Shi‘i stance is \textit{Al-Irsyad}, a non-Sayyid Arab organisation which was founded in 1914. Its anti-Shi‘i attitude appears to run parallel to its anti-Sayyid activities, carried out through \textit{Jami‘at Khair}, to which Ahmad Surkati was affiliated. A simple explanation is that Al-Irsyad’s anti-Shi‘i sentiments are to be expected, given that a large number of Sayyids, the organisation’s long-standing enemies, adhere to Shi‘i Islam. However, this explanation calls for refinement. Theological reasons also inform the anti-Shi‘i attitudes of Al-Irsyad, coupled with its strong ties to anti-Shi‘i groups in the Middle East. Its reformist religious doctrines have been influenced by Wahhabism and there are other historical and psychological factors which contribute to its prominent role in Indonesia’s anti-Shi‘i movement. It came as no surprise, then, that during Al-Irsyad’s 36\textsuperscript{th} National Conference, held in Pekalongan, Central Java on 23-26 October 1996, the organisation appealed to the government to prohibit the spread of Shi‘ism in Indonesia.\textsuperscript{12} The motion urged DEPAG and other government institutions to adopt a firmer attitude:

\begin{quote}
To prohibit Shi‘ism and other streams contrary to the teachings of the Qur‘an and Hadith of the Prophet (May God Grant Him Peace and Salvation) in the whole de jure region of Indonesia and also all their activities in any form, either ritual, printing or publication etc. because in the long term it is feared that these will result in conflict among the Muslims in Indonesia as adherents of the teachings of ahl al-sunna wa al-jama‘a.\textsuperscript{13}
\end{quote}

In contrast, the largest reformist Muslim organisation in Indonesia, Muhammadiyah appears to take a neutral stance to Shi‘ism. It does not involve itself in promoting anti-Shi‘i views to its members or to Muslims at large. This is particularly true of the central board of Muhammadiyah, although there is some evidence that local branches and members do conduct anti-Shi‘i activities. Like the above-mentioned reformist associations, Muhammadiyah claims to follow the ahl al-sunna wa al-jama‘a; however, its main concern, since its establishment in 1912, appears to have been with promoting the necessity of Islamic renewal in Indonesia.\textsuperscript{14} As Noer has pointed out, although the ideology of Muhammadiyah is similar to that of Persis, Muhammadiyah demonstrates a more patient attitude and shows more understanding towards others.\textsuperscript{15}

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\textsuperscript{11} Goldberg (1990:164).
\textsuperscript{12} Abduh and Abu Huzaifah (1998:xxi).
\textsuperscript{13} Pimpinan Pusat Al-Irsyad Al-Islamiyyah (1996:32).
\textsuperscript{14} Saleh (2001:75).
\textsuperscript{15} Noer (1973:94-95).
\end{flushright}
Muhammadiyah holds an influential position within Indonesian society, the fact that it refrains from participation in anti-Shi‘i propagation is an interesting phenomenon. Even during the most well-attended anti-Shi‘i seminar of 1997 (see Section below) the Muhammadiyah representative was notably absent among the speakers. Yet this should not be taken as meaning that there are no Muhammadiyah scholars willing to enter into discussions about Shi‘ism. One possible explanation is that the main priorities of Muhammadiyah are its social, educational and da‘wa activities, rather than theological debates. In a foreword to a book of papers from this 1997 seminar\(^{16}\) the Muhammadiyah leader, Amien Rais avoids mentioning the conclusions and recommendations of the seminar. Rather, the foreword emphasises that differences are unavoidable within the dynamics of Muslim society and that the Shi‘is constitute a valid section of the Muslim umma. Instead of judging Shi‘ism a false sect, as other reformist organisations might do, this important modernist organisation sympathetically calls on all Muslims to study Shi‘ism critically, using the Qur‘an and Hadith as the standard. Muhammadiyah is likely to maintain this moderate attitude towards Shi‘ism, given that its current chairman, Muhammad Din Syamsuddin, also has close relations with Shi‘i figures in Indonesia.

The largest traditionalist Islamic organisation in Indonesia, Nahdatul Ulama or NU displays conflicting attitudes towards Shi‘ism. Unlike the majority of the country’s reformist organisations, NU tends not to be involved in anti-Shi‘i activities, despite its claim to be an ardent follower and upholder of the ahl al-sunna wa al-jama‘a. NU holds to the principle that while Shi‘ism differs from Sunnism, it is still a part of the realm of Islam. Its priority is to strengthen the teachings of Sunnism among its members and the Indonesian Muslim population at large. However, there has been a noticeable split in the attitudes of NU leaders towards Shi‘ism. On the one side there is an extremely negative attitude taken by several ‘ulama who take part in anti-Shi‘i activities. On the other side, there is the moderate attitude of those such as Abdurrahman Wahid and Said Agiel Siradj. A number of anti-Shi‘i leaders and scholars point to these views, which they consider promote Shi‘i teachings to members of NU.\(^{17}\) The contrast between those holding very negative views of Shi‘ism and those with a more moderate opinion has led NU to abstain institutionally from opposing Shi‘i propagation in Indonesia. However, the complexities of this issue deepen further, given the fact that some anti-Shi‘i ‘ulama belonging to NU are opponents of Abdurrahman Wahid’s faction within the organisation. This group of ‘ulama has made Shi‘ism

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\(^{16}\) Abduh and Abu Huzaifah (1998:xii).

\(^{17}\) For Abdurrahman Wahid’s response to Shi‘ism, see the last section of this chapter. Regarding Said Agiel Siradj, polemics concerning his alleged adherence to Shi‘ism have appeared in a number of Indonesian national media. These polemics started when Said Agiel criticized the concept of Aswaja (ahl al-sunna wa al-jama‘a) as formulated by the founder of the NU, Hasyim Asyari. Several local NU ‘ulama considered him a heretic and as a result he was dismissed from his position as Vice-Secretary of the Religious Advisory Council on the national board of NU.
a weapon in their opposition to Abdurrahman Wahid’s leadership. Also relevant is NU’s view of religious tradition. Like the Shi’is, NU opposes Saudi Arabia’s Wahhabist stance, which wants to abolish all traditionalist Islamic practices. And since its establishment in 1926, NU has come to see the Wahhabism promoted by Saudi Arabia, along with reformist organisations such as Persis and Al-Irsyad, as the ‘great enemies’ of traditionalist Muslims.

The above description only takes into account the general attitude of the central boards of these Muslim organisations. It appears that at the local level, branches of both NU and Muhammadiyah, and actually nearly all local offices of Muslim organisations, tend to hold a negative attitude towards Shi’ism. This can usually be explained by external factors such as local interest, when anti-Shi’i groups join forces to fight the spread of Shi’ism in their area. In East Java, for instance, some ‘ulama of NU, Muhammadiyah and Persis, in collaboration with the provincial branch of MUI, met in 1992 under the framework of preventing the dissemination of Shi’ism in the region.

B. The Response of MUI

*Majlis Ulama Indonesia* (Indonesian Council of ‘Ulama), commonly known as MUI, was established in 1975 on the initiative of President Suharto. The government regards it as an authoritative religious institution, particularly in respect of religious sects and variants other than the *ahl al-sunna wa al-jama’a*. As implied, the government depends heavily on the *fatwa* or legal opinions issued by MUI. Any analysis of the response of the Indonesian ‘ulama to Shi’ism should also consider the *fatwa* of MUI related to this matter, “because the *fatwa* is an important instrument through which the ‘ulama express their authority’.”

The position of Shi’ism in Indonesia is complicated by a number of intertwined political and religious factors. On 8 March 1984, MUI held an annual national meeting in which, among other things, the position of Shi’ism was discussed. The result of the meeting was a recommendation or *tawsiya* which reads as follows:

Shi’ism as a stream existing in the Islamic world has principal differences from the Sunni *madhhab* (*ahl al-sunna wa al-jama’a*) adhered to by Indonesian Muslims. The differences, among others, are

1. Shi’ism rejects the Hadith not narrated by the *ahl al-bayt* whereas the *ahl al-sunna wa al-jama’a* do not differentiate between them.

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provided they fulfil the requirements [recommended by] the sciences of Hadith.

2. Shi‘ism views that the Imams are infallible, whilst the *ahl al-sunna wa al-Jama‘a* views them as ordinary men who are not free from mistakes.

3. Shi‘ism does not recognise *ijma‘* without the role of the imams whereas the *ahl al-sunna wa al-jama‘a* recognise it without requiring the participation of imams.

4. Shi‘ism views the establishment of leadership/government (the imamate) as a pillar of religion whereas the Sunnis (*ahl al-sunna wa al-jama‘a*) view it as public welfare, with the goal of the imamate being to guarantee and protect *da‘wa* and the interest of the *umma*.


Considering the principal differences between Shi‘ism and the *ahl al-sunna wa al-jama‘a* as mentioned above, especially regarding the difference on imamate (government), MUI appeals to the Indonesian Muslims who uphold *ahl al-sunna wa al-jama‘a* to increase awareness of the possibility of the coming of streams based on the teachings of Shi‘ism.19

Even though its general content resembles that of the circular previously issued by DEPAG, a major point of interest in this recommendation is that it neither deals with the legal status of Shi‘ism in Islam nor defines the legal consequences for those who adhere to it and practice its teachings. Besides reiterating the usual arguments which illustrate the contrasts between the Sunni and Shi‘i doctrines, the text only goes so far as to recommend that Sunni Muslims in Indonesia should not follow the teachings of Shi‘i Islam. This issuance of a recommendation, not a *fatwa*, is unique and interesting. It is also of significance for Indonesia’s Shi‘is, because it does not judge Shi‘ism to be a false brand of Islam whose teachings deviate from orthodoxy. By implication then, existing Shi‘is can, *de jure*, practice their beliefs and carry out their activities. Furthermore, the recommendation means that no individual, group or institution can forbid the missionary efforts of Shi‘ism in the country.

Scrutinising the various recommendations issued by MUI from 1975 to 1988, Mudzhar suggests that the recommendation on the Shi‘i movement was

19 Adlani et al. (1997:90).
issued in support of New Order government policies. One may question why it was necessary for MUI to give a recommendation on Shi‘ism at that time. Mudzhar tried to explain the rationale behind it by examining socio-political developments during the early 1980s.

We know that 1979 was the year of the Iranian revolution, which toppled the secular government of the Shah and replaced it with an Islamic one. Apparently the echo of that resounded beyond Iranian territories and reached Indonesia. It was rumoured that some Muslim youths were to be targeted for the exportation of the ideas of the Iranian Islamic revolution. It was in this context that the government saw it necessary to take precautionary steps to prevent such Islamic revolutionary ideas from developing in the country, and it was also in this context that the MUI made its contribution to efforts to preserve the establishment by issuing the fatwa. Thus, while the arguments of the fatwa were classical and theological in nature, the goals were contemporary and political. It is too obvious to ignore the fact that the actual concern of the fatwa was with the doctrine of the imama and nothing else.

So the recommendation by MUI was designed to support government policy regarding its response to the export of revolutionary ideas. This is affirmed in a speech in 1984 given by the Minister of Religious Affairs, which reminded the ‘ulama of a growing interest in Shi‘ism in the country and of Iran’s efforts to spread its revolutionary ideas. At the same meeting, the Coordinating Minister for Politics and Security Affairs also emphasised these tendencies. However, to deny the religious goal of the recommendation completely is misleading. At that time, ‘ulama in Indonesia were aware of, or at least had heard of, a growing number of converts to Shi‘i Islam among the Muslim youth, a growing distribution and publication of Shi‘i works and an increasing number of students studying in Iran. The ‘ulama were motivated to formulate the fatwa in their concern with the situation. In other words, the recommendation by MUI served a dual purpose.

This significant recommendation was a catalyst for controversy regarding Shi‘ism in Indonesia. Both positive and negative reactions followed. The positive response was also the pragmatic response: the recommendation reflected the reality in the country following the success of the Iranian revolution. The step taken by MUI was considered important and appropriate. The more radical and indeed negative elements believed MUI’s recommendation to be ineffective, since it had no legal effect. The negative responses include regret that the recommendation

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was ever issued, the argument being that in fact it has achieved the opposite of what was intended, actually making Shi’ism more popular, because a growing number of people are now eager to learn about it.24

Reformist groups within Indonesia continue to urge MUI to issue a *fatwa* on the falsity of Shi’ism, even though MUI has so far resisted these calls. At the national meeting of 1996, for instance, there were fresh appeals to reaffirm the 1984 recommendation.25 For MUI, however, the 1984 recommendation remains its final and only statement on the matter. The position maintained by MUI’s council, as K.H. Ali Yafie affirms, is simply to stress the principal differences between Sunnism and Shi’ism, as outlined in the recommendation.26

A second religious judgement made by MUI concerns the practice of *muta*’, or temporary marriage, which is permitted in Shi’ism (refer to Chapter Three). On 11 October 1996 sent a letter to MUI with regard to the importance of issuing a *fatwa* on *mut’a*. The request was connected to the fear of *mut’a* spreading among the Muslims, particularly a controversial case of one Ali Hasan reported in the national mass media. MUI did not deliver the requested *fatwa* until the following year. On 25 October 1997, the *fatwa* commission of MUI held a meeting regarding the issue of the prohibition of *mut’a*. This followed a letter from the Secretary General of DEPAG on 11 October 1996 requesting a *fatwa* and a letter and decision from the chairman of the Muslim association, Ittihadul Muballighin (*Ittihad al-muballighin*, Union of Missionaries) on the prohibition of this type of marriage. The subsequent *fatwa* issued by MUI includes the classical arguments against *mut’a* and re-affirms the marriage laws of Indonesia. The *fatwa* goes on to state that first, *mut’a* is proscribed and second, any person engaged in *mut’a* must be brought before the courts, in accordance with the prevailing rule of law.27

MUI’s issuance of the *fatwa* cannot be dissociated from the course of the development of Shi’ism in Indonesia. First, MUI stated that the *fatwa* was a response to what it considered to be a growth in the practice of *mut’a* among Muslims in Indonesia, and in particular among youths and students. Second, according to MUI, there had been anxiety among parents, ‘ulama, leaders, educators and the wider Muslim community, that the practice of *mut’a* was being used as a means of Shi’i propagation in Indonesia. Third, MUI affirmed that the majority of Muslims in Indonesia were Sunnis who reject Shi’ism

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26 *Media Indonesia* (5/10/1997).
in general and its teaching of *mut’a* in particular.\(^{28}\) This clearly shows a link between the *fatwa* and the controversial seminar on the falsity of Shi’ism of 1997 described above.

Unlike the seminar, the *fatwa* issued by MUI did not attract a significant response from the Muslim community. There were a number of reasons: first, MUI’s judgement of the widespread practice of *mut’a* is questionable because some ‘ulama, including K.H. Ali Yafie doubt the relevance of the *fatwa*. The matter was already sufficiently dealt with in the Islamic law of the majority of Muslims in the country. In fact, moderate Muslim intellectuals, such as Abdurrahman Wahid and Nurcholish Madjid seemed to ignore both the practice of *mut’a* and the issuance of the *fatwa*. The question of *mut’a* also emerged at the National conference of NU in November 1997, about one month after the *fatwa*. Although the conference concluded that *mut’a* was forbidden, inauthentic and to be rejected, interestingly, as Barton and Feilard have shown, the Shi’i permissibility of *mut’a* “did not in itself provoke a major outcry at this national gathering… [and] did not seem to represent automatic grounds for its rejection.”\(^{29}\) Secondly, the focus on and rejection of *mut’a* may be regarded as a part of the anti-Shi’i movement promoted by certain circles of the reformist groups. Some of those active during the meeting of Ittihadul Muballighin suggested that MUI members are speakers for and proponents of the anti-Shi’i movement in general. Thus we see the issue of *mut’a* being used as a weapon to oppose the spread of Shi’ism in Indonesia.

The local branches of MUI also provided responses to Shi’ism; however, they were essentially in line with the views of the central institution. On 2 August 1993, for instance, MUI in East Java held a meeting in Surabaya, which invited ‘ulama from various Muslim organisations, including NU, Muhammadiyah and Persis, as well as the Al-Bayyinat Foundation (an anti-Shi’i organisation). The meeting was led by a well-known anti-Shi’i figure, K.H. Misbach, chairman of the provincial board of MUI and head of the DDII branch of East Java.\(^{30}\) Originally, the purpose of the meeting was to discuss a question relating to the Court of East Java and Husein Al-Habsyi’s book of Qur’anic commentary, in English, *Did the Prophet Frown?* The meeting developed into a forum for a judgement of Shi’ism.

At the meeting some of the participants presented their views on Shi’ism from theological perspectives, while others described the development of the *madhhab* in East Java and in particular in Bangil, where Husein Al-Habsyi lived and headed his famous pesantren. It is evident from the discussion at the

\(^{28}\) Adlani et. al (1997:123).
\(^{29}\) Barton and Feilard (1999:26).
meeting that the most negative views were expressed figures from Al-Bayyinat and Muhammadiyah. Muhammad Baabdullah of Al-Bayyinat of Bangil, for instance, stated that Shi‘i doctrines are more dangerous than Zionism and that Shi‘is do not have the right to live in Indonesia, a country whose state ideology is based on Pancasila (the Five National Principles). Similarly, Muammal Hamidy of Muhammadiyah was of the opinion that all Shi‘i activities should be outlawed as they were causing uneasiness within the community. Hamidy also proposed that the provincial branch of MUI should establish a team to scrutinise the characteristics of this false religion. K.H. Rochim Noer, the head of Muhammadiyah in East Java shared Baabdullah’s opinion that the Shi‘is were unbelievers, at the same time backing Hamidy’s proposal to form a team to them and the reasons for their going astray. The meeting approved this motion.31

Various responses to the MUI meeting followed. The editor of Aula, an NU magazine in East Java criticised the results of the meeting as non-progressive, given that on 9 January 1992 MUI in East Java had already reproduced and distributed the 1984 recommendation on Shi‘ism. The editor of Aula argued that rather than establish a team to scrutinise the perceived threat of Shi‘ism in the region, the provincial MUI should produce a plan of action because the national MUI had already formulated a clear recommendation on the matter.32

The issuance of the interrelated recommendation and fatwa showed a tolerance by the central board of MUI for the expression of religious sentiment in Indonesia. Its attitude reflects not only the different elements - reformist and traditionalist ‘ulama - within the council but also the different and contradictory responses of Islamic organisations and individuals to Shi‘ism. Generally speaking, the 1984 recommendation is a much clearer expression of MUI’s moderate attitude than the fatwa on the prohibition of mut‘a, which can be seen as accommodating the reformist elements of the organisation. It is pertinent to note that another controversial fatwa was issued by MUI in 2005, also dealing with mut‘a. However, this fatwa explicitly avoided any reference to Shi‘ism, most likely because of the influence of moderates within MUI.

C. The Response of DEPAG

The position of DEPAG, the Ministry of Religious Affairs, as an Indonesian government body is important to our analysis. In general, DEPAG carries out research and investigation into controversial religious groups and subsequently produces a formal report or opinion. DEPAG is also responsible for maintaining harmony in Indonesian society and it does so by implementing the concept of the

31 Aula (September 1993:24-28).
32 Aula (October 1993:55).
‘trilogy of religious harmony’ pioneered by the former Minister Alamsjah Ratu Perwiranegara in the period of his ministry, 1978-1983. This concept promotes harmony between the adherents of different religions, harmony between adherents of the same religion and harmony between religious adherents and the government. It should follow then, that DEPAG should also view Shi’ism from the perspective of the trilogy of religious harmony. However, since the majority of Indonesian Muslims are Sunni, DEPAG is predominantly Sunni, with almost all its ministers, officials and staff adhering to Sunnism. Consequently, DEPAG categorises the presence of Shi’ism in Indonesia as a threat to religious harmony and a religious problem that needs to be solved. The matter is further complicated by the fact that Shi’ism is frequently associated with Iranian revolutionary ideology. Like many Muslim countries in the world, the attitude of the Indonesian government towards the Shi’is, particularly in 1980s, was interspersed with a fear of the export of revolutionary ideas.

There are a number of cases regarding Shi’ism that have attracted the attention and energies of DEPAG. However, two of them in particular warrant further examination. The first case from the year 1982, was that of Abdul Qadir Bafaqih, a Shi’i teacher in Bangsri, Central Java. Following reports that Bafaqih was a Shi’i ustadh propagating Shi’ism in the area, on 10 November 1982 DEPAG’s Body of Research and Development investigated and presented its findings to the Minister. The report detailed findings about the ustadh, his Shi’i teachings and missionary activities, as well as the reactions of local Islamic leaders. It also provided the Minister with advice regarding action to be taken. The report made three important recommendations which are crucial to our understanding of the attitude of the Indonesian government towards Shi’ism. First, from a religious point of view, Shi’ism could not be forbidden because it is widely recognised in the Islamic world. Second, action should be taken to withdraw and forbid further distribution of recordings of Bafaqih’s religious preaching among the followers of Sunnism. Third, the Provincial Office of Religious Affairs was advised to approach and guide members of this new Islamic group in order that they might adapt themselves to the religious life of the majority Sunni community.

The Inspectorate General of the same ministry was entrusted with the task of investigating the case further. In its report to the Minister on 27 December 1982 a similar description of Abdul Qadir Bafaqih’s religious teachings and activities was provided, however this time there was more emphasis on the social and political aspects of the case. First, there was no evidence of political inclination in the activities of the ustadh or the possibility for a ‘third party’ (Iran) to use them for its own political interest. Second, the report describes how the activities of the ustadh created tension between him and local ‘ulama, even

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though there was no evidence of this provoking a public reaction. However, the Inspectorate concluded that the situation had the potential to worsen and so it urged that special guidance, provided by the apparatus of the DEPAG, be carried out for the students of the ustadh, with a view to them being brought to live in harmony with other members of the Muslim community.

These two formal reports provide us with important information. First, religious opinion is avoided in the reports; in other words, they demonstrate a neutral attitude towards the newly emerged Islamic group. No judgement is made about whether Shi’ism is a true Islamic school. Second, they illustrate the primary concern of the authority - religious harmony among different Islamic groups in the country. The third point is emphasis in the reports on the possible political implications of this case, namely that somehow there was a connection between Shi’ism and the export of Islamic revolutionary ideas from Iran.

The second case is a textual study on Yaumul Quds, a magazine put out by the Iranian Embassy. During the mid-1980’s, at the request of the Attorney General, DEPAG’s Body of Research and Development conducted scrutiny of and provided a recommendation on the contents of this magazine. After a long summary of the magazine, the Body pointed out that only one article, on wilayat or sovereignty, had the potential to create problems in the religious life of Indonesian society and the state and it recommended that the article in question should be censored. In a formal letter to the Attorney General, on 15 January 1986, the Body gave more detailed reasons for its recommendation: first, that the article contained inappropriate terms; second, that it interpreted Qur’anic verses out of context, without connecting them to the asbab al-nuzul or known occasions of revelation; third, that its interpretation of these Qur’anic verses was at odds with the religious comprehension of majority of Indonesian Muslims; fourth, that the article was meant to spread the teachings of Shi’ism in Indonesia and therefore presented a risk of creating disorder in religious life and had the potential to become the religious basis for political activity; fifth, that the publication of the article in the Indonesian language could be seen as an attempt to disseminate Iranian revolutionary ideas in the country.34

These two cases demonstrate a clear concern by DEPAG for social order within Indonesian society and with the political implications of the spread of Shi’ism in the country. For DEPAG, the fact that the magazine was published by the Iranian Embassy which was well known for its desire to propagate its revolutionary ideas to other countries, served as confirmation that their judgement was correct.

Providing solutions to religious problems is not the only duty of DEPAG. As we will see below, the Department also took on a preventative role with regard to

the spread of Shi‘ism in Indonesia. This is demonstrated by the issuance of a specific *Surat Edaran* (Circular) reflecting of DEPAG’s official views on Shi‘ism. The circular, entitled *Hal Ihwal Mengenai Golongan Syi‘ah* (Particulars on the Shi‘i Groups) was issued on 5 December 1983 by the Director General of Community Guidance and Hajj Affairs, with the approval of the Minister, Munawir Sjadzali (1925-2004). It was intended for internal departmental distribution only. It stated that the department needed to provide its civil servants with information about Shi‘ism and its differences with Sunnism. The subtext was that the department wanted to protect all its civil servants from the influence of Shi‘ism. The circular, which was sent to all sections within the department, was meant to be a manual for civil servants in carrying out their duties. Moreover, there was a political rationale for issuing the circular, namely “in the framework of warding off every irresponsible negative effort through religious strife that might be able to upset national stability and steadfastness…”

In order to fully understand the official view of DEPAG it is necessary to examine the contents of this circular in further depth. Its introduction provides an historical description of the emergence of three groups within the Muslim *umma* following the death of the Prophet Muhammad, namely the majority Sunnis, the Shi‘is and the *khawarij* or seceders from the ranks of the partisans of Ali. It then provides an explanation of the four main divisions within Shi‘ism, namely the Zaydiyya (said to be the most moderate of the Shi‘i sects and the closest to Sunnism), the Isma‘iliyya (Sab‘iyya or ‘Seveners’), the *Imamiyya* and the *Ghulat* - the ‘extremists’ who deviate from the true teachings of Islam.

We need to pay particular attention to the DEPAG description of *Imamiyya* Shi‘ism, which is followed in Indonesia, Iran and by the majority of Shi‘is in the world. DEPAG suggest that this sect has several characteristics: first, its followers believe that Abu Bakr and ‘Umar usurped ‘Ali’s right to the caliphate, consequently *Imamiyya* Shi‘is frequently denounce these two caliphs in their religious teachings. Second, they place ‘Ali in a higher position than human beings in general, as a mediator between man and God. Third, some followers of this sect even believe that ‘Ali and other Imams have divine attributes. Fourth, they believe that the Imams are infallible in both major and minor sins. Fifth, they do not recognise the consensus of opinion among the ‘ulama (*ijma*) as a principle of Islamic law unless in a matter approved by the Imams; as a result, neither *ijtihad* nor the use of rational opinion is applied in their interpretation of Islamic law. Sixth, they permit the practice of *mut‘a* or temporary marriage. Seventh, they believe that the dead Imams will return to this world before Judgement Day to wipe out all evil and punish all of their opponents.

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35 *Surat Edaran* (5/12/1983).
The explanation indicates a poor understanding of the principal doctrines of Imamiyya Shi‘ism. Such misleading views may well contribute to a negative attitude among the civil servants of the department towards Shi‘ism and the Shi‘is. The circular goes on to state:

All those [mentioned above] are not in accord with and even contrary to the true teachings of Islam. In the teachings of Imamiyya Shi‘ism thought cannot develop, *ijtihad* is not permitted. All has to wait for and depends upon the Imam. Between the common people and the Imam there is a wide, gaping gap or distance, which becomes a fertile place for all kinds of *khurafat* [superstition] and *takhayul* [heresy] to deviate from the teachings of Islam.

There are two serious mistakes in the above explanation in so far as it contradicts the historical reality of the Shi‘is. First, it is generally accepted that Islamic thought in the Shi‘i world, particularly its philosophical dimension, continues to develop and in fact can be said to be more developed than Islamic thought in the Sunni world. Second, *ijtihad* is always open in Shi‘i Islam. As we have seen in the preceding chapters, there is a need for the continued existence of a *mujtahid*, the religious scholar who has achieved the level of competence necessary to practise *ijtihad*. It is also a given that the laity must follow a living *marja‘ al-taqlid* - a *mujtahid* - recognised as the source of emulation in matters of religious law. This has resulted in close ties between the ‘ulama and lay people in the Shi‘i world. All the misconceptions found in the circular clearly originate from a failure to understand the key concept of the imamate in Shi‘ism and from an ignorance of the historical reality of the Shi‘is.

The most significant part of DEP AG’s circular, however, is its statement that Muslims in Indonesia are recognised as the followers of *ahl al-sunna wa al-jama‘a* whose views differ from those of the Shi‘is. In the context of the response to the Shi‘is in Indonesia, the link between DEP AG’s circular and the previously described recommendation from MUI, issued some months after the circular, cannot be ignored.36

36 Despite the official anti-Shi‘i view of the department, Ministers of Religious Affairs have been accused by anti-Shi‘i groups of having paved the way for the development of Shi‘ism in Indonesia. The late Munawir Sjadzali, who was the Minister for two terms (1983-1993) is said to have shocked the religious authorities through his ‘re-actualisation’ of Islamic law project. Anti-Shi‘i groups saw the spread of Shi‘ism as a side effect of Munawir Sjadzali’s ‘re-actualisation’ of Islam, as the following quote shows: “In the mean time the ‘needle’ of Shi‘ism slowly but surely is stabbed into the bodies of our youth with the enticement of *mut‘a* that is allowed, whereas in all time this type of fornication under the label of religion was not known” (*Media Dakwah* November 1997:41). For the re-actualisation of Islam in Indonesia, see Van Dijk (1991). A different accusation was directed towards M. Quraish Shihab. When he became the Minister of Religious Affairs for some months at the end of Suharto’s presidency in early 1998, Shihab was accused of being a Shi‘i and was considered to have played a role in influencing MUI’s attitude to Shi‘ism (Jaiz 2002:114). LPPI has distributed a brochure entitled *Syiah dan Quraish Shihab* (Shi‘ism and Quraish Shihab) which includes a statement by a friend of Shihab in Cairo that he often defended Shi‘ism. This became a controversial issue in the Indonesian
We should bear in mind that DEP AG is not an institution of 'ulama and so it cannot produce fatwas or religious judgements binding to the community. The department carries out its duties by providing solutions to existing religious problems and in its prevention of the possible emergence of new religious problems in Indonesian society and the nation. DEP AG can only request that MUI make recommendations on Shi‘ism and issue a fatwa on mut‘a, for example. These requests must be based on considerations of the religious life of Muslim society and with a view to resolving problems between Sunnis and Shi‘is in order to promote religious harmony in the country.

D. Anti-Shi‘i Propagation

A large number of activities have been undertaken by anti-Shi‘i groups for the purpose of preventing or reducing the spread of the teachings of Shi‘ism in Indonesia. These activities include seminars, discussions, appeals to government authorities and preaching. They are chiefly carried out by the reformist Muslim movement, in particular by DDII and its missionaries and related institutions. The publication of anti-Shi‘i writings has also been of major importance. Coser affirms that, like its opponent, the anti Shi‘i group realises the great importance of books as “carriers and disseminators of ideas.” The publication of books in the vernacular is meant to provide Indonesian Muslims with Sunni views on Shi‘ism in the hope that they will be less susceptible to the teachings of Shi‘ism and thus less likely to convert to its madhhab. These publications are also intended to compete with the growing number of Shi‘i works in the market place, particularly those translated from Arabic, English and Persian originals. Mohammad Natsir and other Muslim leaders in the country were truly aware of the growing phenomenon of Shi‘i publishing. Natsir once wrote “… meanwhile, the publication of books and brochures on Shi‘ism in Indonesian has begun. Some are original works, others are translations from Arabic and English books. They are published in West Java, Central Java, and East Java etc. and find a wide market of readers, particularly among our youth.”

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Anti-Shi‘i literature offered a strong rejection of Shi‘ism and its teachings and drew upon both textual and rational proofs. However, it relied heavily on translations of famous Arabic originals works because no Indonesian ‘ulama were able to produce such works themselves. Through the international network established by the reformist leaders, the choice was made for the popular anti-Shi‘i works in the Middle East written by Muhibb al-Din al-Khatib (1886-1969) and Ihsan Ilahi Zahir (d. 1987). Al-Khatib was born in Damascus and from 1920 took up permanent residence in Cairo, where he became one of the most resolute advocates of Wahhabism. This was a direct result of the influence of the writings of Ibn Taymiyya (d. 1323) during his education. Al-Khatib was a journalist, commentator, editor and publisher of his own periodicals, al-Zahra (1924-1929) and al-Fath (1926-1948). He also produced editions of classical Arabic books and Wahhabi writings. He took a fiercely negative stance towards Shi‘ism and strongly opposed any attempts to reach rapprochement and conciliation between Sunnism and Shi‘ism. 

Zahir has been described as “the most prolific Sunni polemicist in recent years.” He was the editor of the Islamic journal Tarjuman al-Hadith (Hadith Interpretations) published in Lahore and the Secretary-General of Jam‘iyyat ahl al-hadith (Society of People of the Hadith), a Wahhabi movement. When a bomb exploded during a rally by that movement in Lahore on March 1987 he was fatally wounded and died a few days later in Riyadh. He was buried in Medina. Regarding the translation and publication of his books, on March 1986 Zahir visited Indonesia, including Surabaya, where he became acquainted with the translator of his books, Bey Arifin and the director of Bina Ilmu Publishers, which published his works in Indonesian. Like his predecessor, Muhibb al-Din al-Khatib, Zahir was strongly anti-Shi‘i and an opponent of all Sunni sympathisers who promoted ideas of rapprochement, in particular the Jam‘iyyat al-taqrib bayn al-madhahib al-islamiyya (the Society of Rapprochement between Islamic Denominations), established in Cairo in 1947.

The most influential of the anti-Shi‘i works translated into Indonesian are those by Zahir. His books include Salah Faham Sunnah Syi‘ah (‘Sunni Shi‘i Misunderstanding’, 1983), Syiah dan Sunnah (Shi‘ism and Sunnism, 1984) and Syi‘ah Berbohong atas nama Ahlul Bait (The Shi‘is Lie in the Name of Ahl al-Bayt, 1987). These are followed in popularity by al-Khatib’s al-Khutut al-Arida (The Broad Outlines) which was translated into Indonesian under the title Mengenal Pokok-pokok Ajaran Syiah Al-Imamiyah dan Perbedaannya dengan

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43 The English version, The Shi‘ites and the Sunna, was printed at Lahore in 1984.
Ahlussunnah\textsuperscript{44} (‘Introducing the Principal Teachings of Imamiyya Shi’ism and their Differences from Sunnism’, 1985). The foreword of this book was written by Muhammad Nasif, the then Secretary General of the Muslim World League. It is important to note that al-Khatib regards Shi’ism as a religion outside Islam rather than a madhhab within it. These books are distributed widely in Islamic institutions, organisations and libraries throughout Indonesia and this has made them widely read among large segments of Indonesian Muslim society. Their popularity is indicated by the fact that they are frequently, if not always, referred to when Sunni Muslims in the country discuss Shi’ism. The front cover of Zahir’s \textit{Syiah dan Sunnah} states: “Buku ini Dibagikan dengan Cuma-Cuma Tidak Untuk Diperjualbelikan” (This Book is Distributed Free of Charge, Not for Sale) indicating an absence of commercial interest in its publication. In fact, an introductory note by the translator Bey Arifin to his book \textit{Shi’ism and Sunnism} (1984) announces that the Muslim World League, which is a Saudi-based organisation, promoted and financed the translation and publication of such books “The Muslim World League Centre in Mecca al-Mukarrama with its letter no.1/6/16 on 23 Safar 1404H through the Muslim World League Office in Jakarta with its letter no.133/VII/1404 on 8 December 1983 requested me to translate the book \textit{al-Shi’a wa al-Sunna} into Indonesian.”\textsuperscript{45}

Even though there is as yet no quantitative data on the Indonesian versions of Arabic anti-Shi’i works, we can assume that the number has increased since the 1980s. (Yet they are still no equal to the plethora of Shi’i works on offer.) To mention but a few of the most popular in Indonesia: Muhammad Malullah’s \textit{Syiah dan Pemalsuan Al-Qur’an} (‘Shi’ism and Falsification of the Qur’an’) published in 1982 by Pustaka Mantik in Jakarta, Muhammad al-Tunsawi’s \textit{Beberapa Kekeliruan Akidah Syi’ah} (‘Several Mistakes of Shi’i Doctrine’) and Abu al-Hasan al-Nadwi’s \textit{Dua Wajah Saling Menentang antara Ahlu Sunnah dan Syi’ah} (‘Two Opposing Faces between Sunnism and Shi’ism’), both published by Bina Ilmu, Surabaya in 1984 and 1987 respectively. The tendency continues today with different types of publications, ranging from pamphlets to voluminous works, and with tones from provocative to more moderate. The most important of these might be As-Salus’s \textit{Ensiklopedi Sunnah-Syiah} (‘Sunni-Shi’i Encyclopaedia’) originally consisting of four volumes in Arabic. This encyclopaedia was praised in an introductory note by Muhammad Hidayat Nurwahid, the current spokesman of the Indonesian People’s Consultative Assembly and prominent

\textsuperscript{44} Its English translation is entitled \textit{Al-Khutoot Al-‘Areedah: Exposition and Refutation of the Sources upon which the Shiite Religion is Based}, printed by the Islam Information Centre, South Netherlands, 1983. This indicates a spread of anti-Shi’i propagation in Europe. Takim also notes intense anti-Shi’i propagation via publications in America (Takim 2000:470).

\textsuperscript{45} Arifin (1984:11).
leader of PKS. Nurwahid, who is known to have a negative attitude towards Shi’ism, claims that it is a “serious and scientific work, which can amplify the scarcity of authoritative literature on Shi’ism.”

A recently translated work, Al-Buhairi’s *Gen Syi’ah* (The Genie of Shi’ism, 2001) is probably the most provocative of the anti-Shi’i works published in Indonesia. The author, who is motivated by his strong anti-Shi’i attitude, came to Indonesia from Mecca looking for a translator for his work. Al-Buhairi has good connections with the reformist organisation Al-Irsyad. Furthermore, as he admits, his motivation for writing the book arose from his personal experience among Shi’is in India and Indonesia. Al-Buhairi invites, or even challenges Sunni scholars to engage in dialogue or debate with their Shi’i counterparts and he has even offered to cover any expenses that such an event might incur. Significantly, the translation of Al-Buhairi’s book is the only publication to have been criticised by Indonesian Shi’is; for example, on the website of the Fatimah Foundation. Thus its contents warrant further review. The contents are summarised by the translator in his introductory note as follows:

Shi’ism was bred by Jews, raised by Zoroastrians, supported by Christians and Hindus, contributed to by Romans and Greeks and financed by colonisers. It is led by liars and ignoramuses. Metaphorically, Shi’ism is the name of a cake of which the ingredients consist of Islam, Judaism, Christianity, Hinduism, Zoroastrianism and Roman and Greek religion.

Another finding is that Shi’ism and lies are inseparable like twins. Lying is compulsory for Shi’is, paradise can only be gained by lies whilst hell is gained by a frank, just and honest attitude.

The Shi’is are a collection of stupid people, seen from the spectacles of the Qur’an and Traditions of the Messenger of God (May God grant him peace and salvation). They, says Ustadh Mamduh, are *Baqarun bila Qurun* (cows without horns) meaning a man’s head but a cow’s brain.

None of such works contain positive or even moderate views on Shi’ism. Two general, but related, points can be drawn from their contents. Firstly, emphasis is placed on controversies between the two madhhabs, but with no intention...
of providing rapprochement. Secondly, the main issues of these controversies remain the same as those of past disputes. Ende has correctly summarised the interrelated topics on which Sunni interpretations disagree with Shi‘ism: 1) the Qur’an, Shi‘i interpretations and alleged distortion (tahrif) of its text, 2) the authenticity and Shi‘i view of Hadith, 3) the Shi‘i view of the Prophet’s companions, 4) the history and Shi‘i concept of the imamate, 5) Shi‘i legal norms, in particular regarding mut‘a, 6) the Shi‘i teaching of taqiyya and 7) certain Shi‘i religious rituals. The same points of controversy have also coloured books by Indonesian anti-Shi‘i authors, whose interpretations rely heavily on the Sunni polemical works in Arabic.

The reformist Muslim groups not only publish translated works but also produce their own anti-Shi‘i writings. Apart from being greatly influenced by the above-mentioned works, these writings too can be considered superficial. By and large, they are articles published in the reformist periodicals and booklets. A large number of articles are to be found in Al-Muslimun of Bangil; from September 1979 to January 1998 there were 32 titles of anti-Shi‘i articles published in this reformist magazine, which is the largest number to appear in the existing Islamic periodicals. In addition, polemical works in the national media indicate a dynamic opposition to the Shi‘is in the country.

The works can be classified into two sections: a general category, covering the rejection of Shi‘ism as a valid madhhab by Islamic orthodoxy and a specific category, dealing with particular aspects of Sunni-Shi‘i controversies. Indonesian anti-Shi‘i publications began to appear in 1984, the same year in which DDII put out two booklets, the institution’s Soal Syi‘ah (On Shi‘ism) and M. Rasjidi’s Apa Itu Syi‘ah (What is Shi‘ism?) both of which claim to point out the false teachings of Shi‘ism. It should be noted that Rasjidi, a former Minister of Religious Affairs (12 March 1946 – 2 October 1946), Professor of Islamic law at the University of Indonesia, Muhammadiyah activist, Masyumi figure and a Vice-Chairman of DDII is one of Indonesia’s Muslim leaders most concerned with the propagation of anti-Shi‘i material. To borrow Azra’s words, Rasjidi was also a guardian of the faith of the umma against Christianity and heterodox currents. In the years following the Iranian revolution, he became an active speaker at Sunni-Shi‘i discussions held around the country and produced several polemical works on the subject. Rasjidi’s booklet, which carries the circular by DEP AG as its appendix, generally deals with those topics which are sources of past Sunni-Shi‘i controversies, so it is not necessary to describe the content here. However, his conclusion is of importance as it directly relates to Islam in its Indonesian social context. Rasjidi writes:

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54 Ende (1990:221-222).
55 Azra (1994).
We the Indonesians are given great blessings and true guidance with Islam by God, the Creator of the sky. We thank God that the Islam we adhere to is Sunni Islam, which is based on the existing, and the only Qur’an and the Hadith which have been scrutinised, selected and specified in detail by Hadith scholars from Bukhari [d.870], Muslim [d.815], Abu Daud [d.889], Nasa’i [d.915], Turmudhi [d.892] until Ibn Majah [d.886].

The late M. Rasjidi, was a polemicist, educated in Cairo, at the Sorbonne and in Canada. During the 1970s he became involved in polemics with Nurcholish Madjid on the question of secularisation. Following the MUI 1984 recommendation on Shi’ism, Rasjidi wrote a short article entitled “a mere contribution on Shi’ism”, which was published in Tempo and in a slightly different version in Al-Muslimun. It was intended to expand on Ahmad Ghazali’s criticism of the MUI recommendation. In it Rasjidi restated the classical Sunni descriptions of Shi’ism, chiefly based on Zahir’s polemical works, and stressed the influence of Persian political culture on the religious doctrines of Shi’ism. Rasjidi - reflecting the attitudes of DDII and of Sunni Muslims in general - confused the topics of Shi’ism and war in the article, blaming Iran for the Iran-Iraq conflict. He concluded: “This is what I want to contribute to Indonesian Muslims. We do not hate the Shi’is but we do not accept their doctrine that is contrary to the pure Islamic doctrine, the Sunni doctrine.”

Criticism from Shi’is, many anonymously, followed. One of the fiercest attacks on Rasjidi came from Agus Abubakar Arsal Al-Habsyi, who offered arguments to suggest that Rasjidi made a number of fatal mistakes in his analysis of Shi’i doctrines, teachings and history. Let me take one example

In paragraph seven it is written: “Imam in Shi’ism means political leader …” and so on. In all the Shi’i literature that I have read, never once did I find such a definition. Or maybe Mr. Rasjidi has other references. In the Imamiyya Shi’i understanding, an Imam has the task of carrying out the same duty as a prophet. Like prophets, Imams are the people chosen by God through His Prophet’s appointment. The only difference is that prophets receive revelation and Imams, through a special gift, receive the prophets’ commands. Thus a prophet is God’s messenger and an Imam is prophet’s messenger.

56 Rasjidi (1984:45). These scholars produced the classical Hadith collections, al-Sahih, al-Sahih, al-Sunan, al-Sunan, al-Jami’ al-Sahih, and al-Sunan respectively. They are commonly called al-kutub al-sitta (the Six Books).
57 Tempo (12/5/1984).
58 Al-Muslimun (July 1984).
60 Rasjidi (1984a:50).
Other critics include Ali Muchsin and Ibrahim Abdullah Assegaf, who use their writings to demonstrate a number of errors and misconceptions by Rasjidi\(^\text{62}\) (although their arguments are perhaps not as compelling as Al-Habsyi’s). Interestingly, Rasjidi only refuted the writings of Ali Muchsin and Ibrahim Assegaf, ignoring Al-Habsyi’s arguments. In his refutation, published in *Al-Muslimun*, Rasjidi suggests that Ali Muchsin has in fact made mistakes. Reiterating a common misunderstanding on certain teachings of Shi’ism, Rasjidi claims that both Assegaf and Muchsin appear not to comprehend the principal differences between Shi’ism and Sunnism. However, Rasjidi agrees with his critics on the importance of Islamic brotherhood. He concludes by accusing the Iranian Embassy of propagating Shi’i teachings to the Muslim youth of Indonesia in an unacceptable way.\(^\text{63}\)

The second writer of polemical anti-Shi’i works is A. Latief Muchtar (1931-1997) the General Chairman of Persis for 14 years (1983-1997) who, like other reformist Muslim leaders, took a very negative stance on Shi’ism. He had his primary and secondary education in Persis schools. He completed his undergraduate degree in Islamic Studies in Cairo and gained both a Masters degree and a doctorate in the same field from the IAIN of Jakarta. Muchtar had a reputation as a well-qualified reformist scholar. His anti-Shi’i stance is indicated by his membership of DDII and the Muslim World League. In 1986, responding to the development of Shi’ism in Indonesia, Muchtar - under the penname Abu Irfan (his first son being Irfan Setiawan) - wrote a controversial article, provocatively titled “*Awas Akidah Syiah*” (Beware of Shi’i Doctrine) which was published in *Risalah*, the Persis magazine in Bandung.\(^\text{64}\) (Between 1986-1987 *Risalah* published a dialogue on Shi’ism between its proponents and opponents). Muchtar admitted that his writing was intentionally provocative because he wanted Indonesian Muslims to be aware of the spread of Shi’ism in their country. He emphasised that his writing should be understood in the framework of Islamic *da’wa* - that is, to ‘enjoin to do good and to desist from evil’ (*amr ma’ruf, nahy munkar*). Muchtar began his polemic by mentioning the triumph of Iranian revolution and its impact on the Shi’is in other places in the world, such as Lebanon, as well as on Indonesia’s Sunnis. He writes: “the extreme and radical Shi’i movement has attracted some of the Muslim youth in Indonesia with its concept of the imamate….”\(^\text{65}\) He goes on to explain the origin of Shi’ism as a consequence of political matters


\(^{63}\) Rasjidi (1984b:9-10).

\(^{64}\) The article and its response are added as an appendix to the collection of Muchtar’s writings, *Gerakan Kembali ke Islam: Warisan Terakhir A. Latief Muchtar, Ketua Umum Persis 1983-1997* (The Movement of Return to Islam: the Last Legacy of A. Latief Muchtar, General Chairman of Persis 1983-1997) published in 1998 by Rosda in Bandung. It is interesting to note that Jalaluddin Rakhmat wrote an introductory note to the book, even though he was one of the polemicists writing in *Risalah*.

following the death of the Prophet Muhammad and then describes the divisions within Shi’ism itself. His sources were the (aforementioned) Indonesian versions of books by al-Khatib (published in 1985), Zahir (published in 1984) and al-Tunsawi’s (published in 1984), as well as Rasjidi’s booklet (published in 1984). Muchtar reiterates the common issues and arguments which reject what he considers to be Shi’i doctrines, including the imamate, the infallibility of the Imams, mahdism, raj’a (return) and taqiyya. However, I believe his uncritical method of reading the sources meant that the mistakes and misunderstandings about Shi’ism which litter his work were inevitable. One of his critics, Abdi Mahaestyo Soeherman, in a no less provocatively titled article, “Syiah bukan Sampar” (Shi’ism is not a Contagious Disease) published in the same magazine, identifies the weaknesses and misconceptions contained in Muchtar’s article and his sources. Soeherman then provides a version of Shi’i teachings and history mainly based on contemporary Shi’i sources. We do not have personal information on Soehermand, but his writing and sources suggest that he is a Shi’i. To refute this criticism, Muchtar produced yet another long article, praising al-Khatib and Zahir and their works and re-iterating the need to fight against the Shi’i doctrine.66

The polemics continued. Saeful Abdullah, M. Syaifullah and Muhammad Khalid were among those who lined up to advise Muchtar to check his sources, to discuss his thoughts with Shi’i ‘ulama or to read Shi’i sources. Ikhwatu Iman and Ika Tanumaja, criticising the critics, offered their support to Muchtar. Jalaluddin Rakhmat also became embroiled in the controversy by delivering an Indonesian translation of Mahmud Shaltut’s famous fatwa and of the view of Muhammad al-Ghazali (the leader of Egypt’s Ikhwan al-Muslimun) on the validity of observing Islamic worship according to the Twelver Shi’ism.67 Rakhmat was clearly seeking authoritative legal religious recognition from international Sunni scholars, including Shaltut, who was the first to recognise Shi’ism as a completely equal denomination. Rakhmat responded to Muchtar’s opinions on Shi’ism in his introductory note to the publication of the collected works of Muchtar (1998). One of the most important elements in the controversy was the involvement of the Iranian Embassy in Jakarta, which issued an official statement signed by Alireza Motevali Alamoti, the Embassy’s Second Secretary. The essential part of the text reads

66 The title is “Sekali Lagi, Awas Akidah Syiah” (Once More, Beware of Shi’i Doctrine) (Muchtar 1998:359-399).
67 Rakmat (1998:400:413). Mahmud Shaltut’s fatwa is frequently used by Shi’is to support their opinions in Sunni-Shi’i dialogues. The main part of the fatwa (I follow Brunner’s translation [2004:289-290]) reads: “1. Islam does not oblige any of its adherents to be affiliated with a specific madhhab. Rather, we say: every Muslim has the right to follow any of the legal schools that have been properly handed down and whose rules in their specific (legal) effects are laid down in writing. A person who follows one of these schools is entitled to turn to any other without being subjected to reproach. 2. In the sense of the religious law of Islam (shar’ah), it is permitted to perform the divine service (ta’abbud) in accordance with the rite of the Ja’fariyya, which is known as Shi’a imamiyya, in the same way as in accordance with all schools of the Sunnis.”
Abu Irfan's description of Shi’ism is his own personal belief and ideas which have completely no relevance to the reality of Shi’ism.

We believe that his description of Shi’ism mentioned above is based only on his imagination; it even appears that he has no information or basic knowledge about the broad and deep Shi’i ideology.68

Included in the general category of works rejecting the validity of Shi’ism is a compilation of papers originating from an LPPI seminar in 1997. The book, *Mengapa Kita Menolak Syi’ah* (Why We Reject Shi’ism) contains a collection of the seminar papers, a conclusion and a recommendation, clippings from the media and several forewords from Islamic organisations and institutions.69 The fact that the book is endorsed by the MUI, Muhammadiyah, NU, Persis, Al-Irsyad, Al-Khairat of Palu, DDII, Ikatan Masjid Indonesia (the Association of Indonesian Mosques) and Al-Bayyinat of Surabaya illustrates its widespread support by Islamic organisations - with certain exceptions - for the prevention of the spread of Shi’ism in Indonesia.

In addition, two booklets, written by M.O. Baabdullah70 and Fuad M. Fakhruddin are worthy of mention.71 Baabdullah’s bi-lingual booklet in Indonesian and Arabic regarding the *fatwa* and the stance of Sunni ‘ulama on Shi’i doctrine is probably the more important of the two, not least because of its harsh contents regarding the Shi’is as infidels. The late Baabdullah was a famous anti-Shi’i figure in East Java. He lived in Bangil and was affiliated to the Manarul Islam Mosque of Bangil, Al-Irsyad and also had strong ties with Saudi Arabia. Baabdullah was known to be a harsh opponent of the late Husein Al-Habsyi. Both he and Al-Habsyi were of Arab descent, but Al-Habsyi was a Sayyid and M.O. Baabdullah non-Sayyid. Baabdullah believed that Shi’is were kafirs, even though they pronounce the confession of faith (“There is no God but Allah and Muhammad is His messenger”). He based his views on the *fatwa* and opinions of great Sunni ‘ulama such as Imam Malik (d. 795), Ahmad bin Hanbal (d. 855), Bukhari (d. 870), Imam Abu Hamid al-Ghazali (d. 1111), Ibn Taymiyya (d. 1328) and Muhammad bin ‘Abd al-Wahhab (d. 1787). Baabdullah emphasised that the infidelity of the Shi’is was demonstrated in their thoughts, which run contrary to the true teachings of the Prophet Muhammad. His booklet examines the recent development of the Shi’is, and in this regard makes two important points to support his view that Shi’ism is a religious sect outside Islam: first, he writes that the Shi’i theological distortions of the Qur’an and a number of other false

70 Baabdullah (1990).
doctrines show that the Shi’is of today are more evil than their predecessors. Second, he writes that the contemporary Shi’is have let in various evil and dangerous currents and follow a polytheistic way of life.\textsuperscript{72}

In the category of books dealing with specific issues in the Sunni-Shi’i controversies, there are a number of pamphlets which should be mentioned: There are at least two dealing with the prohibition of mut’a, one by the previously mentioned Fakhruddin\textsuperscript{73} and the other by Muhammad Sufyan Raji Abdullah.\textsuperscript{74} Mut’a appears to be the most popular topic of discussion, with at least five articles on the subject in Persis’\textit{Al-Muslimun}. Aside from religious texts quoted and used to reject the Shi’i permissibility of mut’a, the writings frequently warn of dangerous consequences of the practice, including the high rate of babies born without paternal acknowledgement and the spread of sexually transmitted diseases, such as HIV-Aids. In addition, there are other pamphlets concerning the imamate, the history of the Prophet’s companions, \textit{tafsir} or Qur’anic commentary and Hadith. Most of these anti-Shi’i tracts criticise the growing number of works by Indonesian Shi’i intellectuals. In the field of Islamic history, Saleh Nahdi criticises Hashem’s \textit{Saqifah}, re-iterating the Sunni idea that the event of \textit{saqifa} - the designation of Abu Bakr as the first caliph succeeding the Prophet Muhammad - was the origin of unity in the \textit{umma}, not its disunity. In the field of \textit{tafsir}, Ja’far Umar Thalib\textsuperscript{75} criticises Husein Al-Habsyi\textsuperscript{76} re-assertion that the Prophet did frown; and in the field of Hadith, Husnan responds to a chapter of Jalaluddin Rakhmat’s \textit{Islam Aktual}. A number of articles published in \textit{Al-Muslimun} carried responses to the works of the Shi’i writers: Abu Hanifah’s critique of Hashem’s \textit{Saqifah},\textsuperscript{77} Ibnu Mursyid’s critique of Husein Al-Habsyi’s \textit{tafsir}\textsuperscript{78} and Hasyim Manan’s criticique of Rakhmat’s \textit{Islam Aktual}.\textsuperscript{79} In general, these polemical writings all use the same arguments on the falsity of the teachings of Shi’ism, while citing textual and rational proofs from Middle Eastern anti-Shi’i works. Once more, we should reiterate that publishing is a popular way for anti-Shi’i groups to defend their religious ideology and to demonstrate what they believe to be the falsity of Shi’ism.

The second way in which anti-Shi’i propagation takes place is through the holding of seminars, discussions and debates concerning Shi’ism and Sunni-Shi’i relations. These activities are carried out in a framework of Islamic \textit{da’wa} rather

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item Baabdullah (1990:83-84).
\item Fakhruddin (1992).
\item The titles include \textit{Kawin Mut’ah dalam Pandangan Islam} (Mut’a in the View of Islam) published in 1992 by Pedoman Ilmu Jaya, Jakarta and \textit{Mengapa Aku Menolak Dikawin Kontrak} (Why I Reject being Married ‘in Contract’) published in 2000 by Pustaka AlRiyadl, Jakarta.
\item Thalib (1993).
\item Al-Habsyi (1991a).
\item \textit{Al-Muslimun} (December 1987, January-December 1988).
\item \textit{Al-Muslimun} (1992:67-74).
\item \textit{Al-Muslimun} (1992:47-57).
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
than intellectual discussion. It is no exaggeration to say that Sunni-Shi‘i seminars and similar activities regarding Islamic doctrine, history and development have become the hottest and most controversial events in Indonesia. It is perhaps unsurprising, then, that some of the seminars - such as that organised in 1994 in the Pesantren Darunnajah, Jakarta, in which M. Rasjidi and Jalaluddin Rakhmat were speakers - descended into chaos because of the high tension between the opposed groups of participants.

Two of the most popular seminars should be examined in detail: one of the first of its kind in Indonesia, and which attracted considerable media interest, was the “Seminar on Islamic Doctrine” organised in Jakarta’s Hotel Indonesia on 14 January 1988 by the Middle East Alumni of Jakarta. It can be seen as a counter-action to a similar activity held in Jakarta about a month earlier, on 8 December 1987, at which all the speakers were famous liberal thinkers and ‘enemies’ of the reformist groups and of DDII in particular. The speakers event included Harun Nasution, Nurcholish Madjid, and Abdurrahman Wahid. In the eyes of the anti-Shi‘i group, this seminar was intended to contribute to the spread of Shi‘ism in the country. The controversial anti-Shi‘i seminar in question involved three main speakers, M. Rasjidi, Ibrahim Hosen and Fuad M. Fakhruddin, who all agreed that Shi‘ism was the main cause of the Iran-Iraq war. They also agreed on the danger of Shi‘ism for the Indonesian nation. The goal of the seminar was to confirm Shi‘ism as a heterodox sect, and in the framework of da‘wa the participants were each given four anti-Shi‘i books, consisting of Indonesian translations of Middle Eastern works by Said Hawa, al-Tunsawi, al-Khatib and Zahir. Abdul Malik M. Aliun, Chairman of the seminar’s organising committee said that “the Middle East alumni think it necessary to correct Islamic doctrine from false streams, one of which is Shi‘ism, and we the Muslim umma need to know Shi‘ism in order not to be plunged into sin.”

His opinion provoked angry reactions from the more moderate participants at the seminar, including Muslim intellectuals such as Nurcholish Madjid and Alwi Shihab. Following the seminar, no less than six critics wrote articles that were published in the national magazine, Tempo responding in particular to

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80 The seminar was organised in Jakarta by the West Java branch of KOMPPAQ (Korps Mahasiswa Penghafal dan Pengkaji Al-Qur’an).
81 One of the critics was Muhammad Hidayat Nur Wahid, who was at the time a student in Saudi Arabia. In Tempo (23/1/1988:14-15), he fiercely criticised Madjid’s opinion on the fictive figure of Abdullah bin Saba’.
82 Rasjidi’s paper is without a title, whilst the papers of Fakhruddin and Hosen are “Hakikat Syiah dalam Segala Pandangan Hidupnya” (The Nature of Shi‘ism and its all Worldviews) and “Syi‘ah Sebagai Gerakan Yang Membahayakan Eksistensi Islam” (Shi‘ism as a Movement Dangerous to the Existence of Islam) respectively. Hosen’s was published in Mimbar Ulama (126/XII/1988).
83 They include, respectively, Khomenisme (Khomenism), Beberapa Kekeliruan Akidah Syiah (Several Mistakes of Shi‘i Doctrine), Mengenal Pokok-pokok Ajaran Syiah al-Imamiyah dan Perbedaannya dengan Ahlussunnah (Introducing Principal teachings of Imamiyya Shi‘ism and their Differences from Sunnism) and Syiah dan Sunnah (Shi‘ism and Sunnism) (Tempo 23/1/1988).
84 Tempo (6/2/1988).
Fakhruddin’s statement that “Ali bin Abi Talib tried to satisfy his personal ambition for the caliphate and therefore he was not Islamic”. These critics, including Alwi Shihab, could see that this would be provocative to both Sunnis and Shi’is because of the undoubted personal quality of ‘Ali and the prohibition on discrediting one of the four rightly guided caliphs.\footnote{They were Chehab Rukni Hilmy, Zulkifli (\textit{Tempo} 6/2/1988), Doni Darmawan (13/2/1988), Alwi Shihab (20/2/1988), Abdul Kadir and Bismar Siregar (27/2/1988). The organiser of the seminar has clarified the missionary goal of the seminar (\textit{Tempo} 6/2/1988). Fakhruddin’s response was published in the same magazine (20/2/1988).} In his response to Alwi Shihab, Fakhruddin maintained his stand.

The most impressive anti-Shi’i seminar took place in the hall of the Istiqlal Mosque in Jakarta on 21 September 1997. It was organised by LPPI (\textit{Lembaga Penelitian dan Pengkajian Islam}, Institute of Islamic Studies and Research) in collaboration with \textit{Gema}, a bulletin of the reformist Al-Irsyad. LPPI is led by Amin Djamaluddin, who claims to have been a student of Natsir. As a DDII activist receiving a monthly allowance from that organisation, Djamaluddin has a vested interest in blocking the development of religious currents considered false. It also demonstrates the link between LPPI and DDII and their collaboration in the organisation of \textit{da’wa} activities.\footnote{Husin (1998:285).} The importance of this 1997 anti-Shi’i seminar lies in its success, not only in having as its speakers several Muslim leaders representing great Islamic organisations and institutions in the country. Among them was K.H. Hasan Basri (1920-1998) the then General Chairman of MUI, who delivered the opening speech to the seminar. The large number of participants included state officials, military personnel, ‘ulama, Muslim leaders, leaders of Islamic organisations and ‘ordinary’ people. The seminar was widely reported and became the source of a long-running controversy in the Indonesian media.

Amin Djamaluddin, chief of the seminar’s organising committee, stated that the seminar was conducted so that authoritative Islamic scholars could provide an explanation of the nature of Shi’ism to the government, security authorities and other related groups, in order that they may “formulate steps to stop the action of the Shi’i people working the land of the Sunnis in Indonesia.”\footnote{Abduh and Abu Huzaifah (1998:xxv-xxvi).} The speakers invited were known anti-Shi’i figures, including Moh. Dawam Anwar (a Secretary of the Religious Advisory Council of NU), Irfan Zidny (Head of the Astronomy Board of NU), Thohir Al-Kaff (Al-Bayyinat Foundation of Surabaya), A. Latief Muchtar (the then General Chairman of Persis), Nabhan Husein (the Chairman of Jakarta DDII), Muhammad Hidayat Nurwahid (the Head of Al-Haramain Foundation of Jakarta and later Partai Keadilan Sejahtera) and Syu’bah Asa (Vice-Editor of \textit{Panji Masyarakat}). None of the speakers voiced a positive view on Shi’ism. Insofar as we understand the contents of the papers presented, no new interpretations or arguments regarding the sources of Sunni-
Shi’i controversies were presented. It is evident however that all the speakers had an interest in efforts to prohibit the growth of Shi’ism in Indonesia. For example, K.H. Irfan Zidny expressed his regret over the number of Indonesian Muslim students and intellectuals supporting or even adhering to the teachings of Shi’ism, in spite of the fact that they had only learned these teachings in a short period of time and from Indonesian Shi’i figures who do not have a thorough knowledge of Islam. Zidny suggested that it was the duty of the ‘ulama and leaders of Islamic organisations and institutions to cooperate with state authorities and address the phenomenon of Shi’ism, which he believed to be dangerous to the unity of umma.88

Ten of the twelve points formulated by the committee at the conclusion of the seminar repeated the well-worn arguments of the Sunni polemical works, including the Shi’i view that the Qur’an was corrupted by the companions of the Prophet, the acceptance of Hadith only through the ahl al-bayt of the Prophet, the rejection of the caliphate of Abu Bakr, ‘Umar and ‘Uthman, the practice of taqiya and mut’a and the belief in Imams and their infallibility.89 But two particularly significant points that were made in the conclusion need to be noted: The first is a statement that reads “Indonesian Muslims have the responsibility and obligation to prevent various efforts of falsification and destruction of Sunni doctrines adhered to by Muslims in Indonesia.”90 This invitation was formulated to meet the goal of the seminar to defend the Sunni land from the presence and spread of Shi’ism. The second and highly provocative point made was that throughout history Shi’is have proved to be criminals, traitors and terrorists.91 This could be considered as a libellous accusation, unless, of course, the committee could prove it.

Regardless of the teachings and the reality of the Shi’is in Indonesia, the conclusion supports the ten points of recommendation drawn up by the seminar’s committee. The recommendation read as follows

Based on the conclusions and to protect the stability, safety and the unity of society, the Indonesian nation and state, this seminar makes the recommendation:

1. To urge the Indonesian government, in this case the Indonesian Attorney General to immediately prohibit Shi’ism in the whole of Indonesia because, besides having caused uneasiness in society, [it] is a source of destabilisation of the life of the Indonesian nation and state because it is impossible that the Shi’i have a loyal attitude to

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the Indonesian government. In their teachings of Islam there is no concept of consensus but only the absolute decision of the Imam.

2. To request the Indonesian Attorney General and all related government institutions to cooperate with the MUI and the Board of Research and Development of the Department of Religious Affairs to scrutinise books containing Shi‘i views and to prohibit their distribution throughout Indonesia.

3. To urge the government, cq the Minister of Justice to withdraw the licenses of all Shi‘i foundations or those spreading the teachings of Shi‘ism in Indonesia, such as Muthahhari in Bandung, Al-Muntazar in Jakarta, Al-Jawad in Bandung, Mulla Sadra in Bogor, YAPI in Bangil, Al-Muhibbin in Probolinggo, and Al-Hadi in Pekalongan.

4. To request the government, in this case the Minister of Information to require all publishers to report and deposit examples of all their published books to the MUI to be scrutinised.

5. To remind all Islamic organisations and educational institutions (school, pesantren and university) throughout Indonesia to remain on guard against Shi‘ism that can influence their members and students.

6. To invite the whole of Indonesian Muslim society to be alert to Shi‘ism because Shi‘ism is an infidel, false and falsifying sect.

7. To appeal to all women to avoid entering mut‘a (‘contract marriage’) that is practised and propagated by the followers of Shi‘ism.

8. To appeal to all mass media (print, electronic and audio-visual) and book publishers not to spread Shi‘ism in Indonesia.

9. To appeal to the Indonesian government to prohibit the activities of spreading Shi‘ism by the Iranian Embassy.

10. Specifically, to expect that LPPI immediately cooperate with MUI and the Department of Religious Affairs to publish a short manual on the falsity of Shi‘ism and its principal differences from Sunnism.\(^\text{92}\)

There were huge responses - both positive and negative - to this anti-Shi‘i seminar and its conclusion and recommendations. Many can be found in the letters to the editors of national newspapers and magazines. Those reacting positively to the seminar, and thus negatively to Shi‘ism, expressed their appreciation of the seminar, with its emphasis on the impossibility of unity between Sunnis and Shi‘is and doubts about the capability of Shi‘is to prove the

truth of their madhhab.\textsuperscript{93} In contrast, those reacting negatively to the seminar offer various opinions, including that the seminar discussed questions of Shi‘ism while ignoring the contribution made by the Shi‘is to Islam. They also point to the inaccuracy of seminar’s decision, its non-proportionality and even its non-scientific character.\textsuperscript{94} One Shi‘i, ustadh Alwi Husein al-Muhdar, an alumnus of Al-Azhar University, provided the readers with views of contemporary Middle Eastern ‘ulama, including Sayyid Tantawy and Yusuf Qardawi, who suggest that there are only minor differences between Sunnism and Shi‘ism.\textsuperscript{95} Several more serious articles were published in the Indonesian media in response to the seminar. The writers, generally proponents of the Islamic Brotherhood, include Muhammad Amin Sadik, Islah Gusmian, Masyhuri and Sihbudi. They wrote articles questioning the relevance of the seminar, suggesting it made a subjective judgement on Shi‘ism, regarded as an in absentia judgement.\textsuperscript{96} It should not automatically be assumed that all the proponents of this view are Shi‘is, although clearly some of them are, including Alwi Husein. The negative responses to the seminar can be subsumed into two categories: first, those stating the irrelevance of the Seminar’s decision because it did not involve prominent Muslim intellectuals in the country, such as Nurcholish Madjid, Abdurrahman Wahid and Amien Rais. Second, those propagating the idea of unity or rapprochement between Sunnis and Shi‘is, believing there to be only minor, surmountable differences between the two madhhabs.

Among the Shi‘is themselves, O. Hashem gave the most comprehensive and emotional response to the seminar in his article “Jawaban Lengkap…” which was then extended to become the book entitled Syi‘ah Ditolak Syi‘ah Dicari (Shi‘ism is Rejected, Shi‘ism is Sought).\textsuperscript{97} In his response, Hashem declared his strong

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{93} Among others, the writings include “Terimakasih Adanya Berita Seminar Syi’ah” (Thanks for News on Shi‘i Seminar) by Abdullah Ali (Pelita 7/10/1997), “Siyah dan Suni Tidak Menunggkan Bisa Berasatu” (Shi‘ism and Sunnism Cannot be United) by Unang D. Mintareja (Pelita 31/10/1997) and “Buktikan Bahwa Syiah Tidak Sesat” (Prove that Shi‘ism is not False) by Tontowy Djuhadi Hamzah (Panji Masyarakat 17/11/1997).
  \item \textsuperscript{94} Among others, the views are included in such writings as Saefudin’s “Mengapa Syiah Diperkosa?” (Why is Shi‘ism questioned?) (Pelita 3/10/1997), Sobar Awanto Habsyi’s “Seminar Syiah: Sebuah Keputusan Yang Menyesatkan” (Seminar on Shi‘ism: A Misleading Decision) (Republika 28/9/1997), Achmad Al-Attas’s “Seminar Soal Syiah Yang Tidak Proporsional” (An Unproportional Seminar concerning Shi‘ism) (Panji Masyarakat 20/10/1997), Abdullah Husin’s “Seminar Tentang Syiah Tidak Ilmiah” (Seminar on Shi‘ism is Unscientific) (Panji Masyarakat 20/10/1997), and B.I. Yakup’s “Mengapa Syiah Ditolak?” (Why is Shi‘ism Rejected?) (Tiras 20/10/1997).
  \item \textsuperscript{95} Tiras (24/11/1997).
  \item \textsuperscript{96} The articles are entitled “Seminar atau Pengadilan In Absentia” (Seminar or Sentencing In Absentia) (Pelita 10/10/1997), “Mengadili Syi‘ah, Tak Relevan” (Judging Shi‘ism, Irrelevant) (Media Indonesia 14/11/1997), “Titik Temu Sunni-Syiah dan Kerukunan Umat Beragama” (the Sunni-Shi‘i Meeting Point and Religious Harmony) (Pelita 17/10/1997), and “Polemik Suni-Syiah” (Suni-Shi‘i Polemics) (Tiras 17/11/1997), respectively.
  \item \textsuperscript{97} The full title is “Jawaban Lengkap terhadap Seminar Nasional Sehari tentang Syi‘ah 21 September 1997 di Masjid Istiqlal Jakarta” (A Complete Answer to One day National Seminar on Shi‘ism 21 September 1997 in Istiqlal Mosque, Jakarta), which was republished under another title “Mengapa Kami Bela Syi‘ah” (Why we Defend Shi‘ism). The book Syi‘ah Ditolak Syi‘ah Dicari (Shi‘ism is Rejected, Shi‘ism is Sought) is published by ICC of Al-Huda, Jakarta, firstly in 2000 and reprinted in 2002.
\end{itemize}
8. Sunni Responses to Shi’ism

opposition to the seminar, its conclusion and recommendations and restated Shi’i views on classical topics that are the sources of Sunni-Shi’i controversy. One of O. Hashem’s statements is particularly interesting: “Do not think that the Minister of Religious Affairs will join the crazy [action] to prohibit Shi’ism. Our Minister of Religious Affairs is not a stupid person…” In response to Hashem, Djamaluddin and Hidayat Nurwahid wrote to demonstrate from the Sunni perspective what they saw as the weakness of Hashem’s arguments. Djamaluddin wrote: “… according to us, it is not that the person who prohibits Shi’ism is crazy but it is exactly the person who defends Shi’ism who is crazy.” Djamaluddin ends by emphasising that “Shi’ism is false, falsifying and a sect of infidels.”

Once again it is significant to note the involvement of the Iranian Embassy in Jakarta in the discussions of the anti-Shi’i seminar. The Embassy issued a statement through its Social Relations Division making the point that the accusations were not based on the truth about Shi’ism. Of nine points the Embassy then presented, three need mentioning: first, it states that it was the intention of the committee and speakers at the seminar to destroy national stability and unity, as well as the international image of Indonesia as a pluralistic and tolerant society. Second, regarding a point in the seminar’s conclusion which states that “the Constitution of Iran decides that the official religion of Iran is Islam which is the Ja’fari Ithna ‘ashariyya school of Islam…” the Embassy points out “the choice of ideology is a legal right of each nation. For us, such a statement has the same meaning as interference in internal affairs of other nations”. Third, the Embassy statement deals with the accusation that Shi’is are terrorists and criminals (Point 12 of the seminar’s conclusion). The Embassy suggests that this is simply repeating the propaganda of Zionists and certain arrogant countries.

Amin Djamaluddin was not afraid to speak out. As the chief organiser of the seminar and head of LPPI, he gave both emphasis and explanation in his refutation to the Iranian Embassy’s statement. He affirmed that the seminar was offered as Islamic da’wa to Indonesian Muslims, and that involving Iran in any discussions and/or a move to prohibit the presence of Shi’is in Indonesia was unavoidable simply because the majority of Iranians are Shi’is. He denied that this amounted to interference in Iran’s internal affairs. What is more, he even accused Iran, through its Embassy, of interfering in the pluralistic religious

98 Cited in Djamaluddin (n.d:40). These sentences are omitted in Hashem (2002).
101 The title is “Tudingan Soal Syiah Tidak Berdasar” (Accusations Concerning Shi’ism have no Base) published in Panji Masyarakat (3/11/1997).
103 The title is “Manuver Politik Kedubes Iran” (Political Manoeuvres of the Iranian Embassy) published in Panji Masyarakat (8/12/1997).
life of the Indonesian nation which was “to be destroyed through the Shi’i religion, strategically and systematically”. Some of Djamaluddin’s explanations simply restate hackneyed topics and should not be reproduced here. The public controversy was never solved, but did eventually die down over time. Suffice it to say that seminar was used as a vehicle of anti-Shi’i propagation in Indonesia.

The third method of anti-Shi’i propagation is to make an appeal to the Indonesian government. A clear-cut example is the anti-Shi’i group’s approach to the government, asking for the activation of the LPPI seminar recommendations. About a month after the seminar had taken place, LPPI wrote a letter, signed on 17 October 1997, requesting that the government - in this case the Attorney General, the Minister of Justice, the Minister of Education and Culture and the Minister of Religious Affairs - forbid the existence of Shi’ism in Indonesia. The group also called a press conference, after which 15 Islamic leaders, including the LPPI director, Amin Djamaluddin and speakers from the seminar went to the office of the Attorney General and the Department of Religious Affairs to present the same request. In the previous year, LPPI had also sent the Minister of Religious Affairs, the Attorney General and the Chairman of MUI a similar appeal for the prohibition of Shi’i Islam in the country. The Indonesian government failed to respond to either request. As previously mentioned, Al-Irsyad had also made a similar approach to government in 1996.

The campaign for the banning of Shi’ism in Indonesia continued. It became particularly strong following MUI’s issuance of the fatwa prohibiting the practice of mut’a. Working towards its goal of ridding Indonesia of Shi’ism, LPPI distributed a leaflet, and urged MUI to issue a fatwa, on the falsity of Shi’ism and to endorse the prohibition of its spread in the country. Despite this request, MUI did not issue a fatwa, stating that its 1984 recommendation had been sufficient.

Similar actions took place in other parts of the country, particularly in the areas where major Shi’i institutions are located. The Association of Middle East Alumni of Madura copied the steps of LPPI in its own attempts to prohibit Shi’ism. In 1992, in Pekalongan, Central Java, where the Pesantren Al-Hadi is situated, Sunni groups made a resolution on Shi’ism containing four demands: first, for the Pesantren Al-Hadi to cease all activities; second, to bring Ahmad Baragbah, the leader of Al-Hadi, before the court as he had organised unlawful marriages; third, to keep a watch on and to prohibit all Shi’i activities in Pekalongan; fourth, to call on the central government to declare, via its GBHN

104 Pelita (28/10/1997).
106 “The Principles of the Falsity of Shi’ism” is published by LPPI in accordance with the recommendations of the mentioned seminar.
(Garis-garis Besar Haluan Negara, Broad Outlines of the Nation’s Direction) that the only form of Islam recognised by the state was  
ahl al-sunna wa al-jama’a.
The resolution was delivered to the mayor of Pekalongan and the district People’s Representative Council.\(^{108}\)

The fourth method used by the anti-Shi’i movement to protect Indonesian Muslims from the influence of Shi’ism is conventional preaching, *tabligh* in religious gatherings, *pengajian*. In this regard, we find, or we are told, that anti-Shi’i figures throughout the country include the charge of the falsity of Shi’ism as a topic in their sermons at mosques and other venues. Wisananingrum reported her experience in 1991, when she witnessed a leader of MUI give a sermon on the falsity of Shi’ism at the Al-Muslimun Mosque in Bandung. She believes such actions to be a part of the anti-Shi’i propagation aimed at persuading the Sunni Muslim community to reject the teachings of Shi’ism.\(^{109}\) A number of anti-Shi’i sermons were also delivered at the DDII mosque in Jakarta. Furthermore, similar sermons were broadcast through radio stations such as At-Thohiriyah FM in Jakarta, which produced a programme about ‘false currents’. These were presented by the journalist, Hartono Ahmad Jaiz, who is also an activist for DDII and LPPI.\(^{110}\) There are many other examples, too numerous to mention. However, a Sunni religious gathering in Bangil in 1993 is worthy of note. This is also an important case in so far as it reveals the high religious tensions running between Sunni and Shi’i groups in Indonesia. It was called the gathering of *Ahl al-Sunna* and combined elements of NU, Persis, Muhammadiyah and the Al-Bayyinat Foundation. Hundreds of participants attended. In this forum, the audience not only learned the teachings of Sunnism but also criticised the teachings of Shi’ism. The gathering was undertaken as a response to the gathering of *Ahl al-Bayt*, which was headed by Zahir Yahya (Husein Al-Habsyi’s son-in-law) and Ali Al-Habsyi (his son).\(^{111}\) It is important for us to bear in mind that religious preaching is the most common and widespread means of propagating anti-Shi’i sentiment in the country.

All four of the abovementioned ways of anti-Shi’i propagation are directed at all segments of the community and state, the laity and the elite. They include both cultural and structural approaches. In the eyes of the anti-Shi’i movement, not only are the Sunni community members to be protected from the influence of Shi’i teachings, but the Indonesian government is expected to take a decision on the prohibition of Shi’ism in the country. So far it has not been possible to

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110 A compilation of his journalistic reports is published as a book entitled *Aliran dan Paham Sesat di Indonesia* (False Streams and Teachings in Indonesia) in which he includes “Gerakan Syiah di Indonesia” (the Shi’i Movement in Indonesia) (Jaiz 2002:114-144), mainly derived from his report to Media Dakwah (October and November 1997).
111 Aula (September 1993:12-13).
The Struggle of the Shi‘is in Indonesia

examine the effectiveness of anti-Shi‘i propagation by means of publications, seminars or religious preaching, but clearly the structural approach to the government has so far failed. There is one notable exception: the city of Mataram in West Nusa Tenggara. In June 2003, the mayor of Mataram issued an instruction for the prohibition of Shi‘ism in the city. The instruction stated that Shi‘ism could not be distributed to Sunni groups.\(^{112}\) This prohibition led not only to disappointment from the Shi‘is in Mataram but also negative reactions from some members of Mataram’s society.\(^{113}\)

The attempts by the Sunni reformist group to protect their community from the influence of Shi‘ism and to prohibit the madhhab has inevitably led to high tension between the two groupings. Shi‘i figures in Indonesia recount many bitter experiences from negative reactions from the anti-Shi‘i group. These reactions were directed not only to individuals but also to institutions and they varied in their severity. One example of an individual experience occurred in 1996. Ali Hasan, a teacher at a junior high school and a religious teacher working from his own house in Sragen, Central Java was imprisoned for three and a half years after being accused of having illegal sexual relations with three girls. The relations were said to have been based on mut‘a.\(^{114}\) Ali, supported by a number of his students, denied the accusations and stated that his trial had been ‘a farce’, ‘dagelan’. He believed that his arrest had been simply a way stop the religious gatherings he held at his house, which had become increasingly popular.\(^{115}\)

There are also examples of more destructive anti-Shi‘i actions, which have badly coloured Sunni-Shi‘i relations. The burning down of the branch of Pesantren Al-Hadi in Batang, Central Java, in April 2000 is an extreme case in point. It is said that the building and facilities of the pesantren were set fire to and destroyed by a large number of people intent on putting a stop to its activities. In fact, before the tragedy occurred the Regent of Batang and the apparatus of the District Attorney had issued instructions to stop the teaching activities at the pesantren. In the eyes of the pesantren, this was a result of efforts by the anti-Shi‘i group to influence the authorities. The pesantren had plans to bring the case to the court, but during the judicial process the tragedy took place.\(^{116}\) This case is evidence that anti-Shi‘i action in response to the spread of Shi‘ism has also involved the destruction of Shi‘i institutions in the name of religious belief and Islamic da‘wa.

\(^{112}\) Koran Tempo (4/6/2003).
\(^{113}\) Koran Tempo (5/6/2003). The report on the prohibition of Shi‘ism issued by the Mayor of Mataram, Moh. Ruslan and the controversies was also covered by Lombok Post (3-9/6/2003).
\(^{114}\) Gatra (25/5/1996).
E. The Moderate Response by Muslim Intellectuals

Amidst the growing efforts of the anti-Shi‘i movement in Indonesia, the Shi‘is in the country can count on a number of leading Muslim intellectuals inclined to protect them as a minority religious group. They include Nurcholish Madjid, Abdurrahman Wahid and Amien Rais, all of whom are known for their moderate or sympathetic views towards Shi‘ism and its adherents. They have been criticised by the anti-Shi‘i faction, who accuse them of providing a space for Shi‘is to propagate their teachings and at least indirectly contributing to the development of Shi‘ism in Indonesia. This idea that the intellectuals have made an indirect contribution is perhaps correct. They are also accused of creating the many barriers that are faced by the anti-Shi‘i group in their struggle to prohibit Shi‘ism in the country. Given these suggestions, it is important to try to pinpoint the alleged attempts by prominent Muslim intellectuals to provide a space for the Shi‘is and Shi‘ism in the country.

It is not without reason that a number of Muslim intellectuals were invited to become discussants at a seminar on the religious and political thought of Jalaluddin Rakhmat on 30 October 1997. This event was held in conjunction with the distribution of Jalaluddin Rakhmat’s collection of essays, Catatan Kang Jalal: Visi Media, Politik, dan Pendidikan (Kang Jalal’s Notes: Vision of Media, Politics and Education). The seminar is interesting in the context of Sunni-Shi‘i relations because many people saw it as a counter-seminar, based on the fact that Jalaluddin Rakhmat is a prominent Shi‘i leader in Indonesia. The speakers were the above-mentioned prominent intellectuals, Nurcholish Madjid, Amien Rais and Said Agiel Siradj, who substituted for Abdurrahman Wahid. Discussions on Sunni-Shi‘i relations did arise during the seminar and Rais, for one, suggested that followers of both Sunnism and Shi‘ism should respect and cooperate with one another.¹¹⁷

Amien Rais, the former Chairman of Muhammadiyah, does not currently express any extensive views on Shi‘ism in his writings or public comments, but rather his general attitude likely corresponds to his positive attitude towards the Iranian revolution. When questioned about his opinion on the LPPI seminar, he was apprehensive. He suggested that the Sunnis should avoid cynicism when discussing Shi‘ism, and vice versa, and that both parties should show mutual respect.¹¹⁸ He seems to avoid giving his opinions about Shi‘ism; as a result, neither the Shi‘i nor the anti-Shi‘i groups can claim that Rais is among their supporters or, indeed, a supporter of the other. That said, Rais strongly rejects Shi‘ism on

¹¹⁸ Kompas (31/10/1997:15).
the question of doctrine, in particular the immunity of the Imams and Mahdism. It appears to be the worldly political aspects of Shi‘ism, particularly the Iranian revolution, that have attracted Rais’s sympathy. Iran’s strong opposition to the West meets with his approval. His moderate stance on Shi‘ism has, in a way, to be understood in the framework of his political attitudes. This stance is also explained by his links to the Muhammadiyah, an organisation more concerned with its educational, social and missionary programmes than theological debate.

Amien Rais’s contribution to the development of Shi‘ism in the country could be counted from his translation of one of Iranian Ali Shari‘ati’s books into Indonesian, although it should be noted that he denies any intention to promote Shi‘i thought in Indonesia or to expose the classical political conflict between the Sunnis and Shi‘is. In his introduction to Shari‘ati’s work, Tugas Cendekiawan Muslim (The Duties of the Muslim Intellectual, Yogyakarta, Shalahuddin Press, 1984) Rais writes:

Dr. Ali Shari‘ati is a Shi‘i whereas the translator is a Sunni Muslim. The motif to translate this book is not to offer fragments of Shi‘i thought in Indonesia. For the translator, the Sunni-Shi‘i difference is an old-fashioned historical legacy that has resulted in the weakness of Islamic umma as a whole. What we need to do is not to expose past political conflicts that will clearly be of no use.\textsuperscript{119}

Amien Rais’s sympathetic and moderate attitude to Shi‘ism has provoked challenges, particularly from the reformist Muslim group. When Rais proposed the levying of the portion of one fifth of income as the religious alms of professionals, or zakat profesi,\textsuperscript{120} he was seen to have been influenced by the Shi‘i teaching of khums, ‘the fifth’. He was judged by many to be an unbeliever. In response, Jalaluddin Rakhat, with whom Rais shares a very close relationship, defended him from a Shi‘i perspective.\textsuperscript{121} Another criticism of Rais, this time by Mudzakkir Husein, has been directed at his frequent praise of Iran while disparaging other Muslim countries such as Saudi Arabia.\textsuperscript{122}

Rais’s attitude can also be viewed in the context of his close relations with Muslim intellectuals and students, some of whom happen to be adherents of Shi‘ism. What is more, many prominent Shi‘i figures in Indonesia have close relations with Rais and when he established his political party, the National Mandate Party, he instantly gained support from this segment of Muslim

\textsuperscript{119} Rais (1984:ix).
\textsuperscript{120} Rais (1988).
\textsuperscript{122} Al-Muslimun (266/1992:6-7).
society. A number of his party members successfully fought for membership of the national or regional People’s Representative Council. From this perspective, then, Rais’s attitude to Shi’ism can be seen as socially and politically motivated.

Another of the most persistent defenders of Shi’ism is the intellectual Nurcholish Madjid, who had once advised a gathering of youth at the Al-Azhar Mosque in Jakarta to learn about Shi’ism - an act that is said to have created unease with the mosque’s organisers. In the above-mentioned seminar of 1988, when Ibrahim Hosen claimed that the Shi’is have their own Qur’an, Nurcholish Madjid produced a Qur’an printed in Iran, containing an introductory note by the Ayatollah Khomeini, showing it to the audience and stating that it was no different from the Sunni one. He emphasised that an objective and scientific attitude is required when looking at Shi’ism. In one of his articles, Madjid affirmed that by reading the Qur’ans published by the Shi’is, the opinion, or even accusation that theirs was different from that of the Sunnis was invalidated. Commenting further on the seminar, he said he had been upset when the three main speakers denounced the Shi’is, creating dissension rather than peace within Muslim society. Madjid also strongly rejected the view of the speakers at the event that Shi’ism was the main factor in the Iran-Iraq war, adding that the Sunni-Shi’i divide has existed since the early history of Islam.

Madjid’s moderate view of Shi’ism can be identified in the paper that he presented. In Madjid’s view, the existence of Shi’ism should not be considered as a religious or political problem but instead as a reality which enriches Islamic history and society. According to Madjid, the Sunnis will gain great benefits if their intellectual interaction with Shi’ism is open and receptive. One example is to be found in the field of philosophy, because the philosophical tradition of Shi’ism continues to develop, while in Sunnism it has tended to stagnate. Madjid emphasises that Shi’ism appears to be better than Sunnism in inheriting and advancing its philosophical and intellectual tradition.

On Sunni-Shi’i relations, Madjid points out that each should have a mutual understanding and respect of the other. Each should learn to recognise the other’s existence in the framework of equality and fraternity. He writes

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123 He died in August 2005.
125 Tempo (23/1/1988).
So once again, the division of human being into groups, like Sunni and Shi‘i, is genuine, natural and unavoidable because [it] is a product of a historical process that may not be erased. What is not natural, not genuine and not in accordance with basic human character, fitra is when someone or a group claims their own as absolute truth, then immediately forces his or her will and view on others. This is shirk, polytheism, which is unforgivable to God.\footnote{Madjid (1989:19).}

Madjid also reiterates his view on the need to develop a non-sectarian attitude, one of the basic teachings given by the Prophet Muhammad. A non-sectarian spirit is in accordance with the Qur‘anic concept of hanif, referring to Abraham’s monotheistic religion\footnote{QS (6:161).} as the \textit{hanif} religion.\footnote{Madjid (1995:687-688).} Thus, Madjid’s moderate attitude towards Shi‘ism has a strong theological basis in Islamic tradition. The fact that he provides theological legitimacy for the need for a pluralistic attitude is an important religious and intellectual advancement and has contributed to the religious life and development of Indonesia, a contribution that has not been equalled by Rais or Wahid.

It is not surprising that Madjid’s moderate stance has been criticised by anti-Shi‘i activists such as Syu‘bah Asa, who accuses him of contributing to the spread of Shi‘ism in Indonesia. Madjid too had close relations with a number of Shi‘i figures, including Jalaluddin Rakhmat. Rakhmat was given the opportunity to present Shi‘i teachings during a religious course in Madjid’s foundation, Paramadina. Asa cynically describes how Rakhmat’s religious lecture was well prepared in terms of fulfilling Madjid’s ideals of offering his audience views different from those held by the majority in the country. “With all pleasure he spread doubt about all established Islamic teachings and historical interpretationa, grew \textit{su‘ al-zan} (the specific character of the Shi‘is) in order to divide the umma’s image of the Prophet’s companions perceived by the Muslims (Sunni) as an integrated totality….\fi The presence of Jalaluddin Rakhmat was said to have resulted in an anti-Shi‘i element of the foundation withdrawing its support. In addition, ICAS (the Islamic College for Advanced Studies), the Jakarta branch of a London-based Shi‘i institution of higher learning organised a Masters programme in the field of Islamic philosophy and Sufism in cooperation with the Paramadina University.

Former Indonesian President, Abdurrahman Wahid’s moderate attitude towards Shi‘ism was integral to his tolerance of all minority groups in the country. He used many ways to protect the position of the Shi‘is, who were opposed by the majority of Muslim leaders, including some of his own organisation, NU.

\footnote{Asa (1998:147).}
Wahid focused more on the sustainability of the Sunni community itself than on the accusations and attacks on the Shi‘i community. In July 1993, for instance, Wahid gave a speech at a thanksgiving of the Tijaniyya Sufi Order, mentioning and praising the last two Sufi saints of the 20th century, Muhammad Alawi al-Jaza‘iri and Ayatollah Ruhullah Khomeini. This provoked harsh reactions from certain members of the participants who opposed Wahid’s views and was followed by a dialogue between two representatives of the Al-Bayyinat Foundation, a famous anti-Shi‘i institution, and Abdurrahman Wahid. In the dialogue Wahid answered questions related to Sunni-Shi‘i controversies and responded to rumours that he was Shi‘i and propagated Shi‘ism in Indonesia. Wahid advised the Al-Bayyinat representative to adopt an objective attitude and engage in dialogue with Shi‘i leaders such as Jalaluddin Rakhmat. In turn, Al-Bayyinat told him of their concerns about the spread of Shi‘ism in particular areas of East Java and about the tensions between Sunni and Shi‘i groups there. The Al-Bayyinat representative said “there is going to be a war between the Shi‘i and the Sunni.” Al-Bayyinat also requested Wahid’s support for its action against the propagation of Shi‘ism by Husein Al-Habsyi in Bangil, East Java. The following transcript shows how Wahid coped with the not insignificant pressure (even threats) applied to support their cause:

AB: Indeed, we have already reacted in a positive manner. But they (Ustadz Husein and his son-in law) do not care for our call [not to spread Shi‘ism]. Therefore, there still are religious gatherings of ahl al-bayt and ahl al-sunna wa al-jama‘a. We have even cooperated with the military authorities. We have given them the data on them. We obtained the data because we smuggled our people into their places. They pretended to study there. We cooperated with the military in order that they (the Shi‘is) might be afraid.

(Listening to this explanation Gus Dur looked sad and shed tears.)

GD: Abki akhi, abki akhi, abki akhi! (I weep, my brother; I weep, my brother; I weep, my brother). To solve religious problems, why did you cooperate with the military authorities? You have even given the data to the authorities. This is the same as if you want to kill our own brothers. It is like in the Dutch colonial era when many ‘ulama died because of actions by their own brothers.

AB: Well, what else can we do? Once [faced] with the military authorities they will be afraid.

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135 Aula (September 1993:18).
136 AB is an abbreviation of Al-Bayyinat and GD is Gus Dur, the popular nickname for Abdurrahman Wahid.
GD: Do you think that using the military authorities will solve the problem? Solve it well, internally. I think it can [be solved]. As well, we can, for example, publish books. We can list the teachings of Shi’ism that we consider deviating. Then, below, we write the true teachings. And in writing this down a scientific and simple language should be used.

AB: If just through writings it cannot [work], Abuna [our father]…

GD: Who says so? In the era of Imam al-Ghazali the development of Shi’ism was even greater but with only one book the Shi’is were confounded. Coping with Shi’ism in your way is like killing cockroaches by bombardment. It will not reach the target. Therefore, it needs a good strategy.137

Abdurrahman Wahid, in his attempt to protect the Shi’is, believes that some cultural aspects of Shi’ism are actually already practiced by NU. For example, referring to a prayer of adoration widely practiced among NU members, he pointed out that NU shows loving devotion to the ahl al-bayt comprising the five people: the Prophet Muhammad, ‘Ali, Fatima, Hassan and Husayn. This is similar to the concept among the Shi’is. The supplication reads li khamsatun utfi biha har al-waba’ al-hatima, al-Mustafa wa al-Murtada wa ibnahuma wa Fatima (I have five persons with whom I extinguish the ‘heat’ of crushing disease, the Prophet, ‘Ali, Hasan, Husayn, and Fatima). For Wahid, it is not unnatural to take on this Shi’i view, just as the Shi’is have also adopted many aspects of Sunni tradition.138 However, it is important to make it clear that NU does not take on Shi’i doctrine.139

Another indication of Abdurrahman Wahid’s sympathetic attitude towards Shi’ism is his providing the opportunity for Shi’i representatives to present their views before NU figures. Jalaluddin Rakhmat, for instance, became one of the speakers in a training programme for young ‘ulama, the Programme for the Development of ‘Ulama Vision (Program Pengembangan Wawasan Keulamaan, abbreviated to PPWK) which lasted for one year (1995-1996). Moreover, in 1993 he not only allowed the Shi’i group, Forum Silaturrahmi Ahlul Bait, to commemorate the ritual of ‘Ashura in the Al-Munawwarah Mosque in Ciganjur next to his house but also delivered the opening speech at the commemoration.140 He stated that “Frankly, the Sunni has even to learn much from brothers from the Shi’i madhhab. Why? Because the Shi’i madhhab has never been interrupted

137 Aula (September 1993:18-19).
138 An example is the adoption of the consensus (ijma’) of Muslim jurists as an authoritative argument in the Shi’i legal theory (Stewart 1998:57).
140 The full transcription of the speech is published in Aula (October 1993:40-49).
in its philosophical tradition.”

Consequently, Wahid has been accused of promoting Shi’ism. In response to his critics, Wahid reiterates that the Shi’is should not be regarded as an enemy. Greg Barton gives four reasons for Abdurrahman Wahid’s support of the Shi’is: first, by nature Wahid tends to help wronged and oppressed minorities; second, he opposes anything that impinges upon the freedom of faith and principle; third, for Wahid, all Muslim intellectuals can profit from delving into Shi’i scholarship and its ongoing tradition of *ijtihad* and metaphysical philosophy; fourth, he argues that many NU rituals and approaches to Sufism are actually historically rooted in Persian Shi’ism, and therefore NU scholars are advised to understand Shi’i Islam in order that they can understand the nature of Sunni Indonesian traditionalism.

The moderate attitude of the Muslim intellectuals can also be seen in their criticism of the anti-Shi’i seminar of 1997. Abdurrahman Wahid regarded the seminar as ‘*kurang kerjaan*’ (*not enough preparation, peremptory*). He said that it produced subjective judgements without intellectual honesty, judging Shi’ism in absentia. He called for Muslims to unite in order to solve crucial problems. He went on “The Shi’is are Muslims as well. They have the right to live. If the government prohibits [Shi’ism] I will demonstrate.” This was a powerful statement and one through which the Shi’is become more aware of Abdurrahman Wahid’s protection. In this regard, even though Wahid did not have the same close relations with Shi’i figures as Rais and Madjid, his position as a charismatic leader of the largest Islamic organisation is considered strategically important for the existence and development of the Shi’is in Indonesia.

The most significant impact of Abdurrahman Wahid’s moderate attitude with respect to the struggle of the Shi’is came in 2000, during his presidency, in the form of the government’s recognition of the national Shi’i organisation, IJABI. The Shi’i leaders recognised and exploited this moment in history as the best opportunity for them to strive for national recognition. Legal recognition is extremely important for the existence of the Shi’is, allowing them to better carry out their social, educational, and missionary activities under the auspices of IJABI. Not only Wahid but also Rais and Madjid supported the establishment of the national Shi’i organisation, and Madjid was a speaker at the second national conference of IJABI on 27-29 February 2004, before an audience of hundreds of Shi’is from all over Indonesia.

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141 Aula (October 1993:47).
142 Mastuki (1999:63-64).
144 Media Indonesia (5/10/1997).