9. Conclusion

This study has shown the multi-faceted realities faced by Shi’is living amidst an overwhelming Sunni majority in Indonesia. It has described the chief tenets of the madhhab of the ahl al-bayt, revealed the different elements within this community, introduced their leaders and the methods they employ and strategies appropriate to the existing social, religious and political context. It is the single great hope of the Shi’is to gain recognition in their Sunni-dominated country.

We have considered the three main social groupings that constitute the Shi’i community in Indonesia, each arising from its own historical context. The first, oldest and most eminent are the people of Arab descent, chiefly the Sayyids who trace their family lines back to the Prophet Muhammad and who became the founders of the Shi’i community. In the latter part of the 19th century, Shi’ism attracted further followers among Arabs in the Indonesian archipelago, due to increasingly extensive contact between the Hadhramaut and the Malay-Indonesian world. This group quietly maintained their adherence to Shi’ism until the victory of the Iranian revolution in 1978-1979.

The second group consists of graduates from the hawza ‘ilmiyya, the Shi’i institutions of learning in Qum, Iran. Although a number of Indonesians had studied in Qum prior to the outbreak of the Iranian revolution, this number increased significantly following the establishment of the Islamic Republic of Iran and with an intensification of interaction between the Iranian government and Indonesian Shi’i ‘ulama.

The third is the campus group, mainly graduates from secular universities who engaged in Islamic gatherings at campus mosques and other religious venues. This group emerged in response to the victory of the Iranian revolution and can be seen as part of an ‘Islamic cultural revival’ which began on the campuses during the New Order’s de-politicisation of Muslim society.

These three main groups are interconnected and use various methods to spread Shi’i teachings and to attract followers to their madhhab. An ‘internal conversion’ of Muslims from Sunnism to Shi’ism has occurred slowly through a variety of ways, including education, links of kinship and friendship and the use of print publications.

Social divisions during the formation of the Shi’i community have contributed to a lack of a single leader to be recognised by all groups. Sociologically, the Shi’i leaders may be classified into ustadhs and intellectuals. The ustadhs have
been educated in the fields of religious knowledge gained in Islamic educational institutions, while the intellectuals have been formally trained in the secular sciences and possess a non-formal religious training.

Until 1994, the most influential Shi’i ustadh was Sayid Husein AL-Habsyi, a member of the traditional Arab Shi’i group. Al-Habsyi played an important role in the spread of Shi’i teachings in Indonesia through da’wa, education and his writings. Today, however, the position of Shi’i ustadh is more often filled by an alumnus of Qum. One of these prominent ustadhs is Husein Shahab, who devotes himself to the field of da’wa, takes part in the establishment of Shi’i foundations and produces scholarly works.

The most prominent intellectual is Jalaluddin Rakhmat who, besides lecturing at universities, has established and now heads an Islamic foundation, engages in da’wa activities and writes books. Important determinants of leadership in the Shi’i community in Indonesia are educational background and religious accomplishment, engagement in the field of da’wa, education and publication and close connections with Shi’i ‘ulama in Iran.

Turning to religious aspects of the Shi’i community, among the fundamental beliefs that set Ithna ‘Ashari, or ‘Twelver’ Shi’ism apart from Sunnism is that of the imamate, which colours all Shi’i teachings. This is the belief in the twelve Imams succeeding the Prophet Muhammad, from ‘Ali ibn Abi Talib, the first, to the Mahdi, the twelfth and current Imam, who went into occultation and whose open return is awaited by believers. The imams are regarded as secondary to the Prophet Muhammad, but also infallible nevertheless.

Shi’i belief is practised according to Ja’fari jurisprudence, which embraces codes of conduct concerning ‘ibadat, or religious duties and mu’amalat, or social relations. Additionally, there are rituals and ceremonies which form important components of Shi’i piety, such as the observance of ‘Ashura in commemoration of the martyrdom of Husein.

For Shi’is living in a hostile Sunni environment, another unique aspect of their teachings is taqiyya, which is the doctrinal basis for stigmatised Shi’is to implement strategies of dissimulating personal and social identity in their interaction with the Sunni majority. While their system of belief cannot be negotiated upon, its expression in terms of practice, particularly of fiqh, or jurisprudence may be performed according to the school upheld by the Sunni majority. Taqiyya is instrumental in the carrying out of Shi’i da’wa, education, publishing and the running of organizations.
In order to gain recognition of their madhhab and their identity the Shi‘is of Indonesia have utilised varied strategies - individually, institutionally and organisationally. This study has revealed the ways in which they hope to achieve the ultimate goal of official recognition.

Shi‘ism has to be spread by means of da’wa, or outreach in the broadest sense of the term. The missionary character of Shi‘ism is as inherent as it is in Islam in general. Da’wa can be carried out at both an individual and institutional level and are closely interrelated. Every Shi‘i has the obligation to undertake da’wa activities, and the prominent Shi‘i figures portrayed in this thesis have played an important role as a da‘i, or practitioners of da’wa.

Da’wa becomes more intensive and carefully programmed through Shi‘i institutions, which are scattered throughout Indonesia. The institutions (a few are big, but most are small) are mainly centred in towns where sizeable Shi‘i communities reside. The name of Shi‘ism is never mentioned in their publicly stated aims, owing to its negative connotations among the Sunni majority. The neutral and generally recognised term of ahl al-bayt is preferred. As far as their ideals are concerned, the Shi‘i institutions share a common missionary objective, namely to realise an Islamic society.

The established Shi‘i institutions generally possess these components: a leader, usually an ustadh, the jama‘a, or the body of students and followers, educational activity and a physical centre of activity. Da’wa includes tabligh, or preaching, ta’lim, or teaching, and social work. Da’wa training is also carried out for the purpose of enhancing the knowledge and skills of the da‘is, as well as motivating and affirming their missionary zeal.

In addition to da’wa, education is an important area of struggle towards the recognition of Shi‘ism in Indonesia. Differing from da’wa, education is directed towards the training of children of school age to become the next qualified Shi‘i generation. The Shi‘is run a number of educational institutions; these can be divided under the traditional pesantren system and the modern school system. Renowned pesantren include YAPI in Bangil, East Java and Al-Hadi in Pekalongan, Central Java, while the currently most famous school is SMU Muthahhari in Bandung, West Java. Each institution has its own system of education, discussed in Chapter Five. With regard to religious orientation, each establishment may implement either direct or indirect strategies in the promulgation of the madhhab.

Al-Hadi is known for its direct strategy, affirming its Shi‘i character in the curriculum, books and in the daily life of teachers and students. Al-Hadi expects
to inculcate in all its students the knowledge of the teachings of Shi’ism and its traditions. Students are expected to have a comprehensive understanding of the Shi’i teachings and to put them into practice in their daily lives.

The other two educational institutions, however, apply an indirect strategy, in the sense that they follow the national school curriculum supplemented with basic branches of Islamic knowledge. Their students come from both Sunni and Shi’i families. It is through the Islamic subjects that certain aspects of Shi’i teachings, in comparison with Sunni teachings, are introduced.

The dissemination of Shi’i teachings and traditions is also carried out through print publishing, which has been instrumental in the growth and development of the madhab in the country. Besides a number of Shi’i-owned publishing houses participating in the production of Shi’i books, many Shi’i institutions operate in the field of cultural production in addition to their activities in the field of da’wa and education. Regardless of differences in their institutional character, they publish Indonesian translations of foreign Shi’i works written by prominent Shi’i ‘ulama and intellectuals, mainly from Iran, Iraq and Lebanon. These translated works encompass all fields of Islamic knowledge and all aspects of Shi’i Islam and they continue to enjoy a significant position in meeting the demands of the religious and intellectual dimensions of the Shi’i individual, group and community alike.

The works of Indonesian Shi’i ustads and intellectuals, covering various branches of Islamic knowledge have also been published. Periodicals, scientific journals, magazines and bulletins are all produced by Shi’i institutions. Unlike da’wa and education, such publications may have an extensive impact through their potential to reach an unlimited audience, be it Shi’i or Sunni. This impact may also be greater in the lack of a single religious authority in Indonesia, a country which encourages religious pluralism and a situation from which Shi’ism has been able to benefit.

Shi’ism and its adherents have gained recognition in the eyes of moderate Muslims in Indonesia; however, the Shi’is continue to struggle for recognition from wider segments of society.

An attempt to gain official government recognition was undertaken through the establishment of the mass organisation IJABI, or the Indonesian Council of Ahli Bait Associations. IJABI, as the national organisation of Shi’is in Indonesia has achieved legal recognition from the state. This achievement results from three strategic factors: the utilisation of the term ahl al-bayt to hide Shi’i identity; the use of the opportunity to establish a national organisation in the Reformasi era since 1998 (a time marked by the emergence of popular movements - social, religious or ethnic) and thirdly, the political regime under the moderate President
Abdurrahman Wahid, a man known for his belief in openness and pluralism. Recognition means that IJABI accumulates symbolic capital so that it can carry out its programmes to achieve its vision and mission.

However, despite its legal recognition, IJABI has lacked support from the internal Shi‘i community, mainly the ustadhs, for a variety of reasons, ideological, political and even personal. Several efforts have also been made to reject the position of IJABI as the single national Shi‘i organisation. As a result, IJABI has not managed to exert an extensive influence in the life of the Shi‘i community.

With regard to Sunni response to Shi‘ism, complex reactions, ranging from extremely negative to moderate are revealed in the discussion in Chapter Eight. Negative responses come from reformist groups, in particular from Persis, Al-Irsyad and individuals and institutions linked to them. The reformist movement strives to abolish all beliefs and practices considered contrary to the two principal sources of Islam, the Qur‘an and Sunnah. However, this is not always the case if moderate leaders within the reformist movement, such as those of Muhammadiyah, have good relations with Shi‘i figures.

Traditionalist Muslim groups, such as the organisation NU, tend to be accommodative and moderate and more involved in efforts to strengthen the practice of Sunnism among their own members than participating in anti-Shi‘i activity. MUI, the Indonesian Council of ‘Ulama, is regarded as an authoritative institution by the government. It generally never issues fatwas on Shi‘ism, but in 1984 it put forth a recommendation to protect Sunni Muslims from the influence of Shi‘i teachings.

In terms of outright negative responses to Shi‘ism, a large number of activities have been carried out to prevent or reduce its spread. These include the publication of anti-Shi‘i works, the holding of seminars and discussions, appeals to the government for action, and general preaching. This has led to high tensions between Shi‘is and anti-Shi‘i individuals, tensions which spilled over in April 2000 with the burning down of the Batang branch of Pesantren Al-Hadi in Central Java.

In spite of these activities, a number of leading Muslim public intellectuals have adopted a moderate stance towards Shi‘ism. Among them are Nurcholish Madjid, Abdurrahman Wahid and M. Amien Rais, all of whom are considered to have made room for the development of Shi‘ism in Indonesia. The government’s official and legal recognition of the national Shi‘i organisation, IJABI in 2000 can be seen as a direct result of Abdurrahman Wahid’s moderate attitude.

In their relations with the Sunni majority the stigmatised Shi‘is apply strategies appropriate to the social, religious and political conditions under which they find themselves. In this, they uphold the teaching of taqiyya, which has
sound textual and rational bases. Comparing Goffman's sociological view, we see that common strategies include information management and adaptation, implemented through da’wa, education, publication, organisation and even in the ritual life of the community. Information management deals with the concealment of personal and social identity, institutions and Shi‘i terminology, signs and symbols from the Sunnis. The concealment of real goals and interests are inherent in these strategies.

Information management is also implemented in their interaction with Sunnis: in formal contacts, such as seminars, discussions and interviews and in informal daily encounters. Ambiguous answers to questions regarding Shi‘i identity, using religious terms generally recognised by the Sunni majority and prioritising textual reasons from Sunni sources are common techniques implemented by the Shi‘is in most of their da’wa, education, publishing and organisational life, particularly during those activities in which members of the Sunni majority also participate.

Adaptation is another way in which the Shi‘is adjust to the norms and rules of the Sunni majority. They may perform religious rituals according to the Shafi‘i fiqh of the majority in Indonesia, particularly when in public congregation. This practice is even seen as significant to the maintenance of Islamic fraternity - an Islamic value that is promoted at all times and places. In this way, Shi‘i identity often remains hidden from the majority, which is crucial to the preservation and consolidation of their position in the Sunni-dominated country.

The strategies implemented can be seen within a framework of reconversion and reproduction. Reconversion strategies are the transferring of accumulated capital into another type of capital, the most sought after being symbolic capital. By implementing information management and adaptation, the Shi‘i ustadhs, intellectuals and lay adherents may accumulate a particular type of capital and transform it into another type. For example, the cultural and social capital gained from the prestige of the ustadhs and intellectuals may be transformed into economic capital, enabling them to gain higher social and economic positions in society.

Reproduction strategies are “sets of practices designed (and mediated) to maintain and improve (one's) position.” The ultimate aim of the Shi‘i struggle in Indonesia is to obtain recognition of Shi‘ism and its followers by the Sunni majority, both the laity and the religious class. The legal recognition of IJABI by the government boosts the position of Shi‘ism and its adherents. This is only one aspect of recognition and the struggle for the social and religious recognition of Shi‘ism is a continuing process.

1 Goffman (1986).
2 Mahar (1990: 18).
In short, the Shi’is in Indonesia, as a stigmatised group, have implemented various strategies depending on existing political, social and religious situations, in order to gain recognition and to occupy a legitimate position and to exercise legitimate power in society. Throughout their entire history they have struggled for recognition - that fundamental dimension of social life - the achievement of which is an unending duty.