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Conversion Within Islam: Becoming Shia in Majority Sunni in Indonesia

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Abstract

Since the Iranian Islamic Revolution in 1979, Shia and its community have been the subject of much research. This paper examines the phenomenon of conversion from Sunni to Shia in Indonesia. It seeks to identify the reasons people choose to convert to Shia, even though it can lead to psychological, economic, social, and political tensions. This is a qualitative research based on a fieldwork conducted in four cities in Indonesia, namely Jakarta, Bandung, Yogyakarta and Makassar. These cities are representative of Indonesia. The results of the study show that there are at least four 'gates' that are commonly cited as reasons for converting from Sunni to Shia. These gates are philosophy, history, irfan/sufism, and fiqh. The typology of encounters through the four gates is a strong typology that we found in our research. Most people who convert from Sunni to Shia usually pass through one or several gates that are key factors in their decision to accept Shia.

Keywords: *Religious Conversion, Sunni, Shia, Islam, Indonesia.*

INTRODUCTION

Religious communities in Indonesia are bound by a social contract called Pancasila, which is recognized by all communities. Pancasila, a national political consensus, guarantees freedom of religion and equal rights for all Indonesian people (Suseno, 2013). Indonesian Muslims believe that Pancasila does not conflict with Islam at all (Ismail, 1995). Indonesia has shown that Islam and

democracy could coexist (Hughes, 2010). Indonesian society is seen as inherently tolerant because of its history of experiencing and being accustomed to differences and pluralism in terms of culture, language, ethnicity, and religion. This positive image has led some academics to think that the future of Islam, especially in relation to democracy and religious tolerance, is in Indonesia, rather than in the Middle East (Adeney-Risakotta, 2017; Ramage, 1995).

The positive image of Islam in Indonesia, however, is currently under threat. Indonesia is in a phase of conservative resurgence. After the fall of the New Order regime, Indonesia experienced a rise in radicalism and terrorism (Abuza, 2006). Various terrorist bombings occurred in Indonesia, including the Christmas Eve bombings in 2000, which killed 16 people and injured 96 others. The bombings occurred in several cities, including Medan, Bandung, Ciamis, and Mataram. On October 12, 2002, a bombing in Bali killed 202 people, most of whom were foreign tourists. The most recent bombing was a series of attacks on three churches in Surabaya. The bombing of three churches in Surabaya occurred only six days after the riot at the Mako Brimob in East Jakarta, which resulted in the deaths of five police officers.

Intolerance is not limited to non-Muslim communities, but also extends to minority groups within Islam, particularly the Ahmadiyya and Shia sects (Sofjan, 2016 & 2016a). Suseno (2013) notes that intolerance and hatred towards minority Muslim groups is often more pronounced. The Shia and Ahmadiyah groups have become the most vulnerable minority Muslim groups to acts of intolerance and violence, both physical and verbal, since the reformation era. A few examples of violence against them include the attack by thousands of people on the al-Hadi Islamic Boarding School in Pekalongan in 2000, the attack on the YAPI Islamic boarding school in Pasuruan in mid-February 2011, the attack on the Shia community in Ternate in October 2012, a month later the Islamic Defenders Front (FPI) forcibly disbanded the Ashura commemoration in Makassar. The worst attack on the Shia community was probably the one that occurred in Sampang,

Madura on 26 August 2012 which left one person dead, dozens of them seriously injured, dozens of houses burned, and hundreds of Shia followers had to flee (Formichi, 2015: 20-21).

Although Shia Islam has existed in Indonesia for centuries, the tension between Sunni and Shia Muslims is a relatively new phenomenon. Perhaps it can be said that it only started in the early 1980s as a response to the Iranian Islamic revolution. The success of the Islamic revolution attracted a lot of attention, especially from young Indonesian intellectuals who wanted to find out more about the ideology behind the revolution. This interest was seen by the Suharto government and by some religious authorities as a potential threat to their social stability and status quo. As time went by, the tension continued to heat up. While during the New Order era only verbal intimidation occurred, during the reform era the intimidation went further to the level of physical intimidation (Formichi, 2015:22).

The Sunni-Shia tension phenomenon is not unique to Indonesia. Anti-Shia phenomena have also occurred in several Middle Eastern countries, including Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, and Pakistan, as well as in several Southeast Asian countries, including Malaysia and Brunei Darussalam. International political dynamics and the prolonged conflict in Syria also contributed to exacerbating relations between the two groups (Sharif, 2017:33). Sunni-Shia relations throughout its history have been very difficult to escape from political contestation in seizing the meaning of Islam. According to Terhalle, the propaganda about the so-called "Shia awakening" in various countries, especially in the Middle East (and maybe also in Southeast Asia), is only part of a political strategy to create anxiety and at the same time reaffirm state and religious authority through the creation of a common enemy. Terhalle sees that what is known as the 'Shia awakening' is actually not dominant, especially in relation to the image that the spread of Shia is a systematic part of Iran's foreign policy efforts to hegemonize the Islamic world (Terhalle, 2007:69).

This paper examines the phenomenon of conversion from Sunni to Shia in Indonesia. Until now there is no exact number of how big the population of the Shia community in Indonesia. Most of the Shia community in Indonesia today (perhaps 80-85%) are the result of conversions from various religious backgrounds (especially Sunnis). Very few members of the Shia Islamic group in Indonesia have been followers of the sect since their birth.

Academic research on Shia in Indonesia is still very limited (Sofjan, 2013). In Our opinion, these studies tend to view Shia Islam as a static category, rather than a dynamic process. We are not at all trying to build a negative argument against the classification of the research themes, but if the majority of followers of Shia are people who carry out religious conversions, then of course there is a long 'process' of identity formation and negotiation which is absent in the study of Shia, namely how and why people want to convert to Shia, especially in a country like Indonesia where the image of Shia tends to be very bad in the eyes of most Muslims in Indonesia. This condition presupposes that conversion to Shiism is often difficult both sociologically and psychologically. Why would someone want to trade their position as part of the majority to become part of the minority group? What kind of experience that changed their religious perception?

The study of Shia Islam in Indonesia has mostly focused on grand narratives, such as Shia as an institution, Shia as a political group, and Shia as a religious group, and so on. Studies on Shia still view Shia as 'Shia' (with a capital S) while studies on how shia (with a small s) is expressed in everyday life have not received much attention because they may be considered trivial, not bombastic. This absence is trying to be bridged in this study. This research was conducted in four cities in Indonesia, namely Jakarta, Bandung, Yogyakarta and Makassar. These cities are used to represent Indonesia. these cities were also chosen because of the large Shia population in urban areas. According to several studies most Shia followers come from the middle class with a good intellectual background and therefore have sufficient income (Halimatusa'diyah, 2013; Sindawi, 2011:211).

GATES OF CONVERSION

In an effort to describe the unique experiences of the informants, we have classified their personal experiences into several categories. This category will be referred to as the 'gate' of their introduction to Shia discourse, which is one of the main reasons why the informants accepted and believed in Shia as their new way of understanding Islam. We found at least four 'gates' which became the main argument in their decision to convert from Sunni to Shia. These gates are 'gate of philosophy', 'Islamic history', 'Irfan/Sufism', and *'fiqh'*. The typology of encounters through these gates is a strong typology that we encountered. Most people who convert from Sunni to Shia usually pass through one or several gates that become milestones for their acceptance of Shia.

Gate of Philosophy

Shiism and philosophy are often claimed to have an intimate affinity for one another. In fact, philosophy seems to have a more prominent place in Shia culture than in Sunni culture. The fact that most Islamic philosophers are Shia is often used as an argument in support of claims about the close relationship between Shia and philosophy. The introduction to a book published by *Ahlul bait* Indonesia (ABI) entitled 'Buku Putih Mazhab Syiah Menurut Para Ulamanya Yang Muktabar' implicitly states the intimacy of Shia with philosophy by mentioning the names of several Muslim philosophers such as Al-Farabi, Ibn Sina and several other Shia intellectuals (*Ahlul bait* Indonesia Team, 2012:3). According to Leaman (2016a:5), one of the most frequent arguments to explain claims of the closeness of Shia and philosophy is the fact that most of the earlier Islamic philosophers came from Persian backgrounds which is an area with Shia majority population since the Safavid dynasty who made Shia the official state religion around the sixteenth century.

The relationship between philosophy and Islam has been a hotly debated topic in the Sunni Muslim world for centuries, and the implications of this debate

are still felt today. Abu Hamid al-Ghazali was a Sunni intellectual who initiated a systematic critique of Islamic philosophical thought and philosophers in his book *Tahafut al-Falasifah* (The Incoherence of the Philosophers) (2015). Al-Ghazali's criticism of philosophy in *Tahafut al-Falsifah* was later criticized by Ibn Rushd (Averroes) in his book *Tahafut at-Tahafut* (The Incoherence of the Incoherence) (2004). In the course of the history of Islamic thought, it seems that al-Ghazali's criticism has gained more place and influence in the Islamic world than various objections regarding his accusations against philosophy. Some academics even say that philosophy in the Islamic (Sunni) world has never really risen after al-Ghazali's criticism (Leaman, 2016a).

Al-Ghazali's arguments and attacks on philosophy have become a discourse that continues to be reproduced by certain Muslim groups to show hostility towards philosophy which is considered a gate to disbelief through exaltation of reason which has the potential to violate the purity of Islamic teachings that the prophet brought. Some critics of philosophy have even gone further than al-Ghazali, claiming that it is forbidden. In Indonesia, propaganda about the prohibition of philosophy is very easy to find and has even gone viral on social media.

The opposition to philosophy is not limited to Sunni Muslims. Sunni is a community name that is too broad to be generalized into a single narrative in their attitude and assessment of a problem. There are also many Sunni intellectuals who defend philosophy. However, when compared to Shia, philosophy has received more space and better respect in the Shia world both in the Shia community in Persia and elsewhere in the past to the present (Leaman, 2001).

Philosophy is still used enthusiastically by many Shia intellectuals within the Shia tradition, and it is even still a common part of the Islamic studies learning curriculum in Shia institutions (Leaman, 2016a). Although there is some sort of connection between Shia and philosophy, according to Leaman (Leaman, 2016b) there is no essential connection between Shia and philosophy other than the fact

that most Islamic philosophers have a Shia or Persian background. Therefore, Leaman rejects the idea of a separate 'Shia philosophy'. He argues that Shia philosophers do not specialize in discussing Shia theology, nor are their works only devoted to Shia readers. Instead, they discuss Islamic themes in general, and their work is relevant to readers from all religious backgrounds.

Conversion through the gate of philosophy can be said to be a form of conversion that demands an active search for a 'potential convert' in finding strong and rational reasons before he arrives at an unstoppable desire to convert. One form of conversion from Sunni to Shia which I categorize as a form of conversion through the gate of philosophy is conversion caused by admiration for intellectual figures or Shia scholars and their works. We have encountered this kind of conversion pattern from the experiences and testimonies of several informants in this research.

Conversion through the gate of philosophy is usually experienced by 'potential converts' who are actively involved in various forums for the study of Islamic philosophy, study groups that discuss Shia intellectual thought, or have access to various books related to Shia. Therefore, it is not an exaggeration if the phenomenon of conversion to Shia is considered as a phenomenon of urban society. This claim has also been affirmed by various studies such as by Halimatusa'diyah in Indonesia (Halimatusa'diyah, 2013) and Leichtman's research on Shia conversions in Senegal (Leichtman, 2009).

Due to its use of academic narratives, one of the media that plays a role in one's conversion journey is various study groups. In addition to institutions that are affiliated with Shia, the introduction of discourse is also carried out by several institutions that do not have a direct affiliation with Shia. One of the organizations that has played an important role in converting people to Shia Islam in various cities is the Islamic Student Association (HMI). We need to emphasize that when mentioning the name of HMI, it does not mean that HMI institutionally promotes Shia theology, but rather that the organization's cadres are interested in Shia and

are personally active in introducing Shia ideas to other members. HMI is a student organization that focuses on social movements and intellectual movements. It does not promote any particular school of Islamic thought, and instead encourages discussion of all types of Islamic thought.

The role of HMI cadres in efforts to introduce Shia is not a new discourse. This was also mentioned by Zulkifli (2009) who said that there were several HMI members who tried to make HMI a forum for promoting Shia. This effort, according to Zulkifli, gave rise to pro and anti-Shia within HMI. The indirect role of HMI in introducing various discourses on Islamic thought, including Shia, was also confirmed by the statements of several informants who said that their initial encounter with Shia was when they were actively involved as members of HMI.

The gate of philosophy is the most important gate in the conversion process from Sunni to Shia without ignoring the significance of other conversion gates. The gate of philosophy becomes very fundamental because through the gate of philosophy the basis for rational argumentation is formed, formulated, and established. Through the gate of philosophy, ideological commitment and identity are instilled in the consciousness of the converts. Ideological commitment and awareness of Shia identity form an image of how a Muslim and Shia in particular should be.

Conversion through the gate of philosophy is a common pathway for people to convert from Sunni to Shia. Jalaluddin Rahmat agrees with this assessment. In Jalaluddin Rahmat's assumption, more than 80 percent of Shia conversions were conversions through the gate of philosophy, or in Jalaluddin Rahmat's terms, cognitive conversions. According to Jalaluddin, it is very rare for conversions to Shia to be caused by affective considerations.

The rational or philosophical basis for conversion is unique to Shia conversions, compared to most other religious conversions, especially in the context of internal conversion within one religion. The dominant conversion event found in this study is more of an active search for potential converts and is based

on the assumption that the religious teaching content offered is rational and meets intellectual standards. It is very rare that the conversion to Shia incidents found in this research depart from psychological problems due to certain problems that a person experiences in his life, or because of certain supernatural events. In short, the impression of dramatic events that are usually assumed to be attached to various narratives of religious conversions is not often found in cases of conversions from Sunni to Shia in Indonesia.

From a sociological perspective, the phenomenon of conversion to Shia is closer to the view of the contemporary paradigm than the way of the classical paradigm in viewing an event of religious conversion. In the classical paradigm, the event of religious conversion is considered to be emotional, passive, there is a dramatic self-transformation, and it takes place suddenly. Meanwhile, the contemporary paradigm views conversion as going through an intellectual or rational process, involving an active search for potential converts, occurring gradually, continuously, and everyone's experience is a unique and different (Hood et al., 2009:216).

The significance of philosophical arguments in internal conversion, such as from Sunni to Shia Islam can be understood since in moving from one position of belief to another within the same religious identity, sufficiently strong arguments are needed to convince potential converts that the new belief is not just different but represents a 'correct', more authentic, and more rational interpretation compared to their previous theological position.

Because Shia da'wah is an intellectual conversion that is based on rational arguments, Shia da'wah typically targets certain circles in the middle class, especially those with high levels of education. This can be seen from the character of Shia preaching which is usually based on study group circles or through the translation of Shia books. Because it requires rational and deep arguments, the use of academic language is sometimes unavoidable in an effort to show differences in Shia and Sunni arguments both conceptually and practically, so many people

who convert usually only keep their conversion experiences for themselves or only those experiences with limited people/groups who are considered to be able to understand their conversion experience both psychologically and rationally. There are many informants who keep hiding the fact that they have converted to Shia from their parents, siblings or family in general because they feel that they are unable to convey what Shia is in simple language or think that these people do not have sufficient intellectual competence to understand their decision to convert.

Apart from being a basis for argumentation to build an ideological understanding of Shia theology, for many Shia adherents, philosophical discourse is also an effective da'wah strategy. Religious discourses that are based on philosophical arguments are considered more acceptable to various groups because they focus on the substance of the teachings, rather than the technical details of religious rites, which can vary from group to group. The emphasis on the area of the substance of religious teachings is considered as something that can lead various groups and schools of thought in Islam, especially Sunni and Shia, to achieve *'kalimatun sawa'* (meeting point) or what Laclau terms as a chain of equivalent (Laclau, 2005).

Conversion through the gate of philosophy can occur through self-study or through the introduction of certain people or groups who actively promote Shia to potential converts. Self-taught searches can be through books or getting information about Shia from various sources. Information about Shia can be positive or negative, and even negative information can lead someone to convert if they do further research and find that Shia is not what they have been led to believe. In self-taught conversion, potential converts do not need encouragement from other people to believe in Shia. If they then decide to seek a learning community, this is usually done in order to affirm their beliefs and learn more deeply about their new beliefs or it is done for technical purposes such as looking for a prayer community and so on.

Meanwhile, conversions initiated by people or communities usually occur through people affiliated with various organizations and foundations that focus on introducing Shia theology and thought, even though the decision to convert is a personal decision. One of the interesting things about conversions through community initiation is that they often have a distinctive narrative that reflects the particular community's focus on different dimensions of Shiism, such as philosophical aspects, jurisprudence, morality, culture, and so on.

Most of the informants involved in this research had no in-depth study of Islam in educational units such as traditional pesantren, and some even claimed to have no theological understanding. In other words, they can be categorized as lay people in terms of Islamic knowledge. The absence of an established theological understanding doctrine is quite helpful in the smooth process of their acceptance of Shia theology which they consider rational and philosophical.

This is in contrast to the conversion experience of people who have an established religious understanding such as the conversion to Shia by several pesantren alumni. According to the confessions of several informants from the pesantren tradition, they experience more intense psychological tension, especially with matters relating to Islamic jurisprudence. However, traces of the previously believed understanding and practice of the rites remained after their conversion. This tension made some respondents need more time between conceptually accepting Shia and practicing it in the rituals of worship. However, there are also some respondents who come from the pesantren tradition who do not experience psychological tension. For them, Shia rational arguments are sufficient, and differences in rites are considered normal as such differences are common in the Sunni tradition.

Gate of History

It is often perceived that that the problem of Islamic history, especially if it is related to historical defects in the phase of Islamic development involving

several central figures of the Prophet Muhammad's companions, is considered taboo to be discussed in Sunni intellectual circles and theology. This is because the companions of the prophet are generally considered to represent the so-called golden generation of Islam in the sunni faith. The idealization of the era of the Prophet and his companions which was often propagated by Sunni preachers gained its` theological legitimacy through the words of the prophet Muhammad who said that the best human generation is his era, then the following era, and the following era.

Construction and interpretation related to Islamic history, especially involving the figure of the Prophet's companions after the death of the Prophet Muhammad, may be said to be the most dramatic episode in the conversion process from Sunni to Shia or even in Sunni-Shia relations in general. Because it involves figures who are considered special (not to say sacred), historical events are very difficult to simply be interpreted as past events. Some events in Islamic history are very thick with ideologically charged interpretations or contain sect sentiment.

Similarly, while the Shia consider their imams as postulates and sources of post-prophet religious authority, the Sunnis also seem to consider the companions of the prophet a religious postulate, although not to the same degree as the Shia's understanding of their imams. So, apart from things that are conceptual theology, the difference between Sunni and Shia also lies in the source of post-prophet religious authority. This difference is often failed to be understood by many Shia critics who criticize Shia but within the standards of Sunnism. Although the Sunnis do not consider the companions of the Prophet to be infallible as the Shias perceive their Imams, the Sunni defense, especially in the theme of the wisdom of the Prophet's Companions, is part of the religious symbol of the Sunni group. Criticism of certain companions of the Prophet is often seen as an attack on Islam itself, especially if those who are criticized are directed at the main companions such as Abu Bakr, Umar, Usman, or Aisha.

One of the criticisms often levelled against the Shia community is that they go too far in glorifying the *Ahlul bait* with their belief that the *Ahlul bait imams* infallible and a source of post-prophetic divine authority. Such criticism was countered by some research informants who argued that although Sunnis do not believe that companions are infallible, their blind glorification and anti-criticism attitude towards the companions is also the same as the Shias' attitude towards *Ahlul bait*, while the divine legitimacy and superiority of *Ahlul bait* are clearer mentioned in the sacred texts of both the Qur'an and the hadith of the Prophet.

The understanding of Islamic history, especially as it relates to the Prophet's companions in the Sunni world, is generally idealized and romanticized. This idealistic construction may be carried out in order to fulfil the tendency that the era of the Companions is the golden era as stated in the hadith. In fact, if we want to be more honest and objective, the era of the companions of the Prophet was not only an era of brilliant achievements, but it was also an era of history filled with bloodshed, intrigue, and power struggles, in which religious narratives were often used as a tool to achieve worldly power.

Because the companions are considered, the main source of 'true' Islamic understanding, there is a perception that the companions of the Prophet should not be criticized, even though the prophet's companions and history itself are not sacred things that cannot be criticized. If the prophet alone can be considered to have made a mistake, then his companions have a greater potential to make mistakes. If the companions of the Prophet are generally defined as people who have met the Prophet, then it is clear that they would have had a wide range of personal qualities, and it is therefore difficult to generalize about them. Arguments like this are not unique to Shia, this kind of impression is also often found from Muslim researchers who want to be objective and not get caught up in the sentiments of schools of thought such as Faraq Fouda and Hasan Bin Farhan Al-Maliky. But taking a critical position on Islamic history can easily be accused of being Shia, Mu'tazilite, orientalist, infidel and many other labels.

In the context of Sunni-Shia differences, it is also very difficult to discuss them without involving their interpretation of Islamic history. In fact, the difference between the two is largely due to their different political positions in interpreting Islamic history, especially events involving the prophet's *Ahlul bait* and the prophet's companions. Therefore, it may be important for us to know what events can be considered as the historical roots of the differences between the two groups and also become the main consideration for potential converts in their decision to convert to Shia.

Some of these events include the Ghadir Khum incident, the tragedy of Thursday, when the Prophet asked for pen and ink to write his last will, but the Companions did not give it to him, the attack on the house of Ali and Fatimah to force the Prophet's family to acknowledge and pledge allegiance to the caliphate of Abu Bakr, the events of the Land of Fadaq, and its culmination was the massacre of Husain bin Ali and his family in the fields of Karbala by the forces of Yazid bin Muawiyah.

The interpretation of the Shia related to several historical events, especially those that occurred after the death of the Prophet Muhammad and involving the *Ahlul bait* by many of the research informants, became an important marker in changing their theological understanding and impacted on the decision to perform a religious conversion. The Shia's distinctive interpretation of Islamic history has shaken their minds and faith. The Shia perspective on Islamic history undermines the historical dogma that has been established in their beliefs. The Shia perspective on Islamic history gives potential converts a different fact about Islamic history that they rarely find in historical education taught in schools, not even in recitations, or if mentioned, these facts seem to be refined to maintain the authority of the Prophet's companions.

In general, the most shocking historical fact is the assumption that the *Ahlul bait* were oppressed after the death of the prophet. Starting from the struggle for the right to caliphate which according to the Shia should be handed over to Ali

bin Abi Talib, based on clear arguments contained in the hadith traditions of both Sunni and Shia. Then after the rights to the caliphate were taken, the houses of Ali and Fatimah were surrounded to force them to pledge allegiance to the caliphate of Abu Bakr. This incident caused the miscarriage of the baby Fatimah was carrying and according to the Shia this incident was one of the causes of Fatimah's death just a few months after the Prophet's death. During the reign of the Umayyads, hatred of the Ahlul bayt was constantly reproduced, with the dynasty ordering Ali to be disparaged in the Friday sermon.

The most dramatic of the episodes of tyranny against the prophet's *Ahlul bait* is of course the episode of the Karbala massacre where Imam al-Husain was accompanied only by women and children and no more than 72 adult men to face thousands of Yazid bin Muawiyah's army. al-Husayn and his followers were left to thirst before being brutally massacred, and they were massacred by those who professed to believe in the religion brought by his grandfather, the Prophet Muhammad. Throughout human history, the event of Karbala is one of the most ironic crimes against humanity.

Encountering a different perspective on Islamic history can be a completely new experience for some potential converts, and it can lead them to question their theological position. In a Focus Group Discussion conducted with several converts at the Islamic Cultural Center (ICC) Jakarta, a participant said that when he was faced with historical facts that showed the oppression of the prophet's *Ahlul bait*, especially the Karbala tragedy, he felt he had no other choice, for him, there were only two choices in the tragedy of Karbala: to side with al-Husayn or with the killers of al-Husayn.

Like conversion through the gate of philosophy, conversion to Shia through the gate of history is something unique to the Shia. The view that Islamic leadership is something that is the absolute right of *Ahlul bait* and a critical view of the companions of the prophet is something that distinguishes the Shia from most Islamic groups, especially with the Sunnis as the majority group embraced

by most Muslims around the world. Acceptance of these two things is an important sign that someone has converted and accepted Shia as their new Islamic identity. The argument about the important role of Islamic philosophy and history in conversion to Shia was also shared by Jalaluddin in an interview we conducted with him.

In our opinion, what turns people into Shia a lot is if the discourse reaches unique Shia characteristics, for example regarding the concept that the recipient of the mandate as the successor of the prophet is Imam Ali. That's uniquely Shia. Most access to it is through history, therefore the Sunnis try to prevent history from being studied. History books should be shunned (interview with Jalaluddin Rahmat).

However, the gate of history usually cannot be separated from the gate of philosophy, the two gates presuppose each other. The door of history is usually used to spark awareness of potential converts that something is not in line with 'the idealistic conceptions' of the Qur'an and Sunnah in historical dialectics and the way Islam 'should' be constructed. However, the gate of history is not enough to convince someone to convert, it must be accompanied by rational explanations, distinctive theological concepts, and the formation of ideologies which are usually formulated through the gate of philosophy.

Gate of Irfan/Sufism

The term Irfan's gate is used to describe the unique experiences of informants that may not be rational, but opens the way for them to learn more about Shia. Inside Irfan's door, encounters with Shias occur through limited subjective experiences. It can be in the form of supernatural experiences with things leading to early awareness of Shia as something different from the religious understanding that they knows. In this study, informants reported various forms of supernatural

experiences, such as dreams of meeting certain figures, sixth sense abilities, certain mystical experiences with spiritual teachers, or even certain feelings that arise when reading Shia prayers, such as the Kumail prayer.

Indeed, there are some studies and researchers who claim the closeness or similarity of religious style between Sufism and Shia as if the two are identical and interrelated especially because Shia imams are also glorified by Sufists (Al-Shaibi, 1991; Halim, 2015; Nasr, 1970). In fact, sometimes Sufism is considered as a potential meeting point that can overcome or transcend the sectarian identity of Sunni and Shia without negating the distinctive identity of the two groups. This potential is mainly based on the fact that both Sunnis and Shias respect the prophet's *Ahlul bait* even though they have different levels of ideological understanding in interpreting the position of *Ahlul bait* in their religion. Respect for *Ahlul bait* or what Formichi termed "Alid Piety' is manifest in many Muslim traditions, especially in Southeast Asia, where the majority of the population is Sunni Islam (Zulkifli, 2016).

Although considered to have a close relationship, the comparison between Shiism and Sufism is a complex and complicated relationship because 'we are not dealing with the same level or dimension of Islam'. According to Nasr, Islam has exoteric (*dhahir*) and esoteric (*bathin*) dimensions that represent what he calls the 'vertical structure of revelation'. On the other hand, Islam is also divided into at least Sunni and Shia which can be said to represent the 'horizontal structure of Islam' (Nasr, 1970).

Sufism is an inner and esoteric dimension of Islam that has its roots in the Qur'an and the Prophet's practice. According to Nasr, Sufism or *tariqah* is a subtle aspect and sometimes difficult to understand in depth from the outside, but the understanding of Sufism is manifested in many traditions and civilizations of Islamic societies throughout the world (Nasr, 2000). Furthermore, Nasr said that the thick esoteric dimension in Sufism is also manifested in Shia theology both aesthetically and exoteric. Due to the similarities between several religious

conceptions, Sufism is often accused of adopting or assimilating some Shia concepts into its religious understanding (Nasr, 1970). Certain Islamic groups especially those affiliated with Wahhabism theology are not happy with the adoption or assimilation of Sufism with some Shia concepts because Sufism usually claims that they are Sunnis, especially in the orientation of the school of *fiqh* they adhere (Al-Shaibi, 1991).

One of the concepts of Sufism that is closely related to Shia theology is the concept of *walayah*. The concept of *walayah* is a fundamental principle in the religious understanding of the two groups although there are differences in ideological and functional understanding of what they call as *walayah* (Halim, 2015). In simple terms, *walayah* is the idea of the continuation of divine authority after the death of the prophet Muhammad. According to Al-Shaibi, the Sufism concept of *walayah* has similarities with the Shia concept of *imamah*, and their reference to divine authority after Muhammad is also closely related to the figure of Ali ibn Abi Talib. Al-Shaibi argues that because Shia theology existed before Sufism, it is likely that Sufism borrowed the theological concept of *imamah* from Shia theology and formulated it into a new concept that is unique to Sufis (Al-Shaibi, 1991).

Although they have similarities, the concepts of *walayah* and *imamah* have differences that show their ideological differences and ultimately differ in the construction of their identities, especially in terms of the image of who can achieve the function as a post-prophet divine authority. In the Sufi concept, what is called *wali qutub* is an open position that can be achieved by everyone in certain ways. Meanwhile, the position of the Imam in the Shia concept of *imamah* is not something that is open to everyone or can be achieved by undergoing certain personal training.

This difference has certain consequences when it comes to converting to Shia, although We previously mentioned that people with a background in understanding Sufism can usually undergo a smoother conversion process

because the cult tradition of *Ahlul bait* imams is not something strange to them, however, because Sufism's understanding of the Shia *Ahlul bayt* imams is ideologically different from Shia understanding, involvement in Sufism is not enough to lead someone to Shia conversion. There must be other factors explanation is needed that can lead to be able to accept Shia ideology. Usually, conversion through the Irfan gate is complemented by argumentative explanation through the 'gates of philosophy and history'.

The experience of converting to Shia initiated by a 'supernatural' experience is not unique to the phenomenon of Shia conversion in Indonesia. Even in general, in many conversion testimonies in various religious communities, spiritual enlightenment is often used as the main narrative in religious conversion testimonials. Even though it is highly subjective, the use of narratives related to supernatural experiences implicitly gives the impression, at least for people who experience or believe in such supernatural spiritual experiences, that the truth of the religion one converts chooses is confirmed by 'god' or His representative.

Gate of Islamic Jurisprudence

The interest of most respondents in Shia *fiqh* only increased after they had resolved the theological and ideological issues of Shia Islam or had complete faith in it. Thus, in many cases, the interest in Shia *fiqh* is a result of the Shia faith they currently adhere to. Many people who converted to Shia Islam continued to use Sunni *fiqh* in the early stages of their conversion journey, for various reasons. In Indonesia, the dominant Sunni *fiqh* is Syafi'i *fiqh*.

These reasons are usually related to issues of comfort and safety, both regarding the security of themselves and their communities. This is because the shia *fiqh*, especially in the practice of daily worship such as the five daily prayers, is quite different from the practice of the Syafi'i *fiqh* which is commonly known in Indonesia, thus allowing the potential for hostile responses to emerge against them, both from people who do not know Shia deeply or from groups of

intolerance to Shia due to the negative image of Shia that is constantly being created and propagated by several intolerant groups in Indonesia. Hence, as most of the followers of Shia usually hide their Islamic identity or commonly known as *taqiyah* (dissimulation), it will be very difficult to find Shia followers practicing their *fiqh* openly in public spaces. Their *fiqh* practice is only carried out in their private space, or in their community in a limited and exclusive manner.

Another reason why the gate of *fiqh* is not the main argument in the conversion process to Shia is because most of the Shia *fiqh* can be found in its equivalent in the four schools of *fiqh* (Hanafi, Maliki, Shafi'i and Hanbali schools) that are recognized in the Sunni world. The similarities and differences between shia and sunni *fiqh* are something that is normal, as in the four of Sunni schools of thought often agree or disagree in viewing a particular product of Islamic law.

Fiqh is a subjective dicipline. Most of *fiqh* rulings are something that is *dhanni* (conjecture) not *qath'i* (definite), because *fiqh* is the result of ijtihad or the earnest and careful efforts of a *mujtahid* in interpreting in detail God's commands that were conveyed through the prophet Muhammad. As a product of the interpretation of a mujtahid, a *fiqh* product cannot be separated from the values of subjectivity. The fact that *fiqh* is *dhanni* and subjective means that it is not the main factor that people consider when deciding to convert to Shia.

Another argument about why *fiqh* is not dominant as a gateway for conversion is due to the limited access of potential converts to figures who are considered to understand and master the field. This limitation is especially experienced by people who convert to Shia during the early 1980s to early 2000s. This can be overcome as many Qum alumni or other Shia hauzah have returned to Indonesia and created community nodes for *Ahlul bait* lovers in various cities in Indonesia. These hauzah alumni are usually one of the sources for Shia followers to access knowledge about Shia *fiqh*.

With the advent of the internet, Shia da'wah is also experiencing development by utilizing digital platforms. Unlike in the early 1980s to 2000s

where Shia da'wah was more focused on the circle of community studies and publishing of Shia books, nowadays, Shia da'wah, like da'wah carried out by various religious communities, has begun to use social media to reach its followers in various places. For example, there are many YouTube channels that are dedicated to Shia da'wah. These media include a YouTube channel called Kupas Tuntas, Safinah TV, Kautsar Media, al Hurr TV, Ahlulbait Indonesia TV, Abbaz TV, SyiahIndonesiadotnet, Anshoru Sunnah, Karimah *Ahlul bait*, ICC Jakarta, Al Qurba TV, Itrah Institute official, Coffee TV, JRTV, Misykat TV, Sahara TV, Majulah Ijabi, Maula TV, Al Kisa Channel and many more.

These channels cover various themes ranging from discussions of aqidah and philosophy, discussions of *fiqh*, to discussions related to the dynamics of social issues and political views of several Shia groups. Some of these channels are also usually used as a means of carrying out various online celebration rites or commemorations of major holidays in the Shia faith especially during the COVID-19 pandemic (such as commemorations for Ashura, Wiladah, and Shahadah). Apart from being a means of education for internal members, due to the nature of social media that is open to anyone, some channels also focus on explaining the Shia faith to outsiders and responding to various accusations or negative images attached to Shia.

However, there are also some people in this study who convert through *fiqh* issues even though they are not as dominant as conversions through the doors of philosophy and history. This is understandable because the concept of *fiqh* and its practice can be said to be the second layer of faith. *Fiqh* is a form of proof of faith. It is impossible for a person to perform prayers, pay zakat, or other shari'a orders if he/she does not believe in Islam. It is the same with Shia *fiqh*, why practice Shia *fiqh* if you don't believe its theological concepts?

According to the study, most of the informants who converted to Shia Islam, the practice of *fiqh* is a consequence of their Shia faith and the feeling that their conversion is only perfect by also practicing Shia *fiqh*, it is not enough to just

agree on the theological concept. However, apart from being a theological consequence, there are also some people who are converted due to *fiqh* arguments or problems, but the number is very limited. This is because *fiqh* can be considered as a complex and specialized field of study that not all Muslims have the opportunity to learn about.

To be able to understand in depth the complexity of a *fiqh* discourse, one is required to master many traditional Islamic sciences such as Arabic and its grammar, *ushul fiqh* and so on. Usually, people who convert purely for reasons of *fiqh* in this study are people who have studied at an Islamic boarding school or hauzah, so they have at least a basic knowledge of traditional Islamic sciences. Once again, not many Shia converts in this study or even Indonesian Shia adherents in general have sufficient competence to simply understand the complexities of *fiqh*.

Although there are not many conversion events that make *fiqh* the main consideration, it does not mean that *fiqh* does not have an important role. Even for some people, the urgency of *fiqh* is the same as the urgency of theology itself, and that the two things are like two sides of the same coin that cannot be separated. For many converts, practicing Shia *fiqh* is one of the main indicators of seriousness in undergoing the conversion process and is a sign of their loyalty to the Shia faith. One of the conversion events due to *fiqh* arguments was carried out by a person named Ahmad Marzuki Amin. Marzuki's conversion journey is recorded on the https://aqaed.com/ site. Marzuqi is an alumnus of the Bangil Islamic Boarding School, an Islamic educational institution affiliated with Shia. After completing his studies in Bangil, he continued his education in Syria and Iran.

In his conversion argument, Marzuki claims that Shia *fiqh* is more rational, authentic, and has a stronger foundation from authoritative sources, based on his personal investigations. One of the *fiqh* themes raised by Marzuqi is the question of whether prostration in prayer should be performed on the ground or a prayer

mat/carpet. According to Marzuki, prostration in prayer is better done on the ground than otherwise, and the practice is what the Prophet and his *Ahlul bait* exemplified, the evidence that shows the command to prostrate on the ground can even be found in the Sunni hadith, although the practice of prostration on the ground is not common practice in Sunni *fiqh*.

Although arguments about speculative *fiqh* construction are views commonly accepted by most Muslims, immaturity in accepting the differences in their respective *fiqh* practices is often found in various Muslim communities. This immaturity does not only occur among ordinary Muslims, but also even by some of its scholars. Differences in *fiqh* understanding of a certain rite practice are often the cause of acts of intolerance such as accusing a certain practice of being heretical (religious innovation) or even disbelieving a different *fiqh* practice or understanding.

CONCLUSION

The typology of conversion gates is not intended to generalize the potential encounters with Shias that a Shia convert might experience outside of the four conversion triggers mentioned in the research. There are many things that might trigger people's interest in something, as well as the discourse on conversion, there are many possible conversion doors other than conversion through the doors of philosophy, history, Sufism, or *fiqh*. Likewise, this typology is not intended to oversimplify the complexity of the experience that converts may experience. Conversion is a big narrative that cannot be simplified in a single narrative.

The experience of conversion is a complex and ongoing journey that involves the formation of a new identity. For many Sunnis who converted to Shia, their conversion experience was not just a spiritual moment, but also a moment of intellectual enlightenment. This writing is hoped to enable us to learn the perspectives and arguments of other people regarding the theological choices they make, so that we can better understand each other and create a more tolerant and

harmonious world. The relationship between Sunnis and Shias, no matter how it develops, will likely have a major impact on the future of Islam.

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