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THE TARIQAT AL- 'ALAWIYYAH AND THE EMERGENCE OF THE SHI'I SCHOOL IN INDONESIA AND MALAYSIA

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Introduction

The recent emergence and current development of the Imami Shi‘i school in Indonesia and Malaysia can only be understood against the backdrop of the early history of the Shi‘ah, as well as that of the history of the Islamization of the Malay-Indonesian Archipelago. The common factor that binds these three historical processes together in a remarkable case of “conversion” within Islam is the ‘alawiyyah sufi order (al-tariqah al-‘alawiyyah).

The tariqah al-‘alawiyyah is the path of the Sādat Banī ‘alawiyyah. The Sādah al-‘alawiyyah (sing. sayyid), of the Shafi‘i madhab (school of jurisprudence), originate from the Hadramawt, Yemen and played a major role in the Islamization of East Africa, Southern India, and the Malay-Indonesian Archipelago. The Sayyids of Hadramawt share a common history with the Shi‘i school and to some extent it is this commonality that caused Shi‘i elements and tendencies among the descendants of Hadrami Sādat émigrés in the Malay-Indonesian Archipelago to surface, particularly after the Iranian revolution of 1978. Today, the Hadrami Sayyids of the Malay-Indonesian world continue to play a role in the religious life of the region. With this in mind, it is important and interesting to observe that the ‘alawiyyah ‘ulamā‘ in particular and community in general is becoming differentiated into a number of orientations vis a vis the Shi‘i school. To date, the literature on Islam in Indonesia, Malaysia and the rest of the region has not taken note of this phenomenon, with the exception of a few journal articles and a handful of newspaper and magazine items. Even then, these works falsely labour under the assumption that the rise of the Shi‘i school in the region is symptomatic of the current wave of Islamic fundamentalism, being a result of the establishment of a Shi‘i republic in Iran in 1979. It would be more accurate to say that the Iranian revolution had resulted in whatever Shi‘i tendencies that had already existed among the ‘Alawiyyīn of the Malay world being articulated with greater clarity, fervour and sense of mission.

*—This essay on the Shi‘i school in Indonesia and Malaysia is merely a preface to a larger work and is based on materials gathered during an exploratory two weeks field trip in Indonesia during the summer of 1993. Funding for this trip was provided by the Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, Singapore.
The purpose of this study is to examine the emergence of the Shi'i school in the Malay-Indonesian archipelago, in the context of the origins and early history of Shi'i Islam as well as that of the Islamization of the Malay world.

The next section on the origins and development of Shi'i Islam touches upon various aspects of the political history of early Islam, the development of the five legal schools (madhhab), as well as the pendulum rise of the Shi'i state in Iran.

This is followed by a discussion on the question of the principle divergences between the Sunni and Shi'i schools, not only in terms of jurisprudence but the rational sciences (al-`ulum al-`aqliyyah) and political theory as well.

The discussion moves on to the tariqah al-`alawiyyah, tracing its origins in Hadramawt, and its spread to the Malay world by the Sayyids of Hadramawt. It is also here that I elaborate on the belief system ('aqidah) of the Hadrami Sayyids (i.e. the tariqah), and locate the `Alawiyyin historically and doctrinally vis-à-vis the Sunni-Shi'i divide.

The final section then shifts to a discussion on the rise of Imami Shi`ah among the `Alawiyyin of the Malay world both before and after the Iranian revolution of 1978.

This section illustrates the various orientations toward the Shi'i school among the `Alawiyyin. The question of adherence to the Sunni or Shi'i schools refers to more than schools of jurisprudence but to political theory, historical consciousness, philosophy, theology and sufism, but this argument is not developed in the present essay.

The Origins and Development of Shi`ah Islam

The division of the ummah into its Sunni and Shi'i branches emerged originally as a result of irreconcilable political differences over the succession of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon Him) and the leadership of the community. It is only much later that further differences in terms of belief systems, philosophy and jurisprudence emerged. These will be treated in the next section.

There are several theories on the rise and early development of Islam, their propounders being Muslims as well orientalists, historical materialists, and a number of other Western scholars.

The Muslim explanations of the origins of early Islam broadly fall into two groups, the standard Sunni and Shi'i versions. In addition, there are also critical accounts that are based on both Sunni and Shi'i sources.

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Apart from these standard Muslim perspectives, modern scholars of Islam have also attempted to account for the rise and early development of Islam. Many of these theories locate the rise of Islam around the theme of Mecca as a centre of caravan trade in the Arabian peninsula.4

Whatever the role of trade, ecology and various sociological factors in the rise and subsequent development of Islam, it is equally plausible to view these developments in Khaldunian terms, for which the concept of 'asabiyyah is of paramount importance.5

The eventual rise of the Umayyah dynasty left the Ši‘ah (party) of imám 'Ali, a group that gathered around 'Ali and his descendants, in the opposition. The revolt of Imám al-Ḥusayn against Mu‘awiyah’s successor, Yazid, and his tragic destruction in the battle of Karbalá (muḥarram 61/October 680) signified the end of anti-Umayyah activism of the Ši‘ah. The fourth, fifth and sixth Imãms, that is, 'Ali Zayn al-Abîdîn, Muḥammad al-Bâqîr and Ğa‘fûr al-Ṣâdiq retreated to Madîna and diverted their attention to the development and codification of the turâît (heritage). In fact, it is the last who elaborated on the doctrine of the imâmah, giving it its final form. The imâmah is an office bestowed by God upon a chosen person from among the descendants of the Prophet through ’Ali and Fâṭimah (Ahl al-Be'yît).6

Nevertheless, the Ši‘ah never controlled a state till the emergence of the Safavids in 907/1501 and it was only in 1979 that the arbâb-i 'amâ'im (religious institution) captured state power.

Sunni and Shi‘i: Principle Divergences

Many Muslim scholars and laymen alike are often quick to point out that the differences between the ahl al-sunnah wa 'l-gam‘â'ah and the Ši‘ah are minor and that both groups co-exist in Muslim brotherhood (uqūwat

3 - See, for example, Jafri, S.H.M., Origins and Early Development of Shi‘a Islam, Qum, Ansariyan Publications, nd.
5 - Ibn Haldûn, Muqaddimât ibn Haldûn, Bayrût, 1981.
6 - Jafri, Origins, cit., p. 290.
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While this form of brotherhood is true historically as well as at the present, this must not lead us to underestimate the differences in philosophy and outlook between the two.

More often than not, the Sunni-Shi'i divide is perceived in terms of jurisprudence and the principles of jurisprudence and in fact, this is the area where the differences between the two are the least. Thus, it is important not to reduce the Sunni and Shi'i to schools of jurisprudence (madhhab) as if they differ along only these lines.

In fact the principle divergences between the Sunni and Shi'i exist across the whole spectrum of the belief system. While the initial differences concerned notions of justice and the question of succession, the two groups that evolved separately as a result of these differences developed distinct traditions in political theory, philosophy, theology, mysticism, and jurisprudence.

The 'aqidah can be utilized as an organizing principle with which we may develop comparative dimensions to appreciate Sunni-Shi'i differences. In a more restricted sense, 'aqidah refers to article of faith, the formulation of doctrine or dogma, or even a formula that seeks to define the stance of a scholar or individual, usually with respect to theological issues. In a more general sense, 'aqidah refers to epistemological and other philosophical issues and, therefore, approximates the total outlook or belief system of an individual or school. This would of course, be in keeping with the modern rendition of 'aqidah as ideology, at least in the Arabic language.

The Sunni and Shi'i 'aqid, therefore, differ across the whole spectrum of doctrines, concepts, theories, and rulings.

Of paramount importance is the question of historical consciousness. The event of the Saqifah, the murder of Sayyidna 'Ali, and the tragedy of Karbala are historical events about which Muslims cannot be neutral. The average Sunni is unaware of these events and, therefore, lacks an historical dimension to the question of justice and truth in Islam. What has prevailed as the “truth” is that which is held by the majority (ahl al-gama'ah). The degree to which this historically early majority were ahl al-sunnah as well is a matter of contention from the Shi'i point of view. The proclamation of majority status by those claiming to adhere to the sunnah of the Prophet resulted in the definition of historical reality through silence and falsification, it has been claimed. As standard Sunni interpretations of early Muslim history took root, their legitimacy was boosted by the fact that these views were held by the majority. This reminds us of Alexis de Tocqueville’s theory of democracy where he spoke of the tyranny and degradation of the majority.

The different notions of justice and truth are also reflected in the political theories to which the Sunnis and Shi'i subscribe, that is, the theory of the caliphate (hilafah) on the one hand and the theories of imamate (imamah) and wilayat al-faqih on the other.
There are, of course, the well-known differences in the areas of jurisprudence and its principles, concerning the five schools as well as the question of madhab Ahl al-Bayt.

Concerning the rational and intellectual sciences (al-'ulūm al-‘aqliyyah), namely kalām (theology), falsafah (philosophy), and tasawwuf (sufism), the Sunni and Shi‘ah fall into different categories as well.

In philosophy, the Sunni tend to be maššā‘īn (Peripatetic, deductionist), whereas the Shi‘ah tend to be išrāqīs (illuminationists), combining rational deduction (istidāl) and demonstration (burḥān) with asceticism, mystical experience, purification of the soul, and experiential wisdom (hikmat al-dawql).

In theology, the Sunnis tend to be either mu‘tazilah or followers of al-‘Aš’ari. The Shi‘ah belong to their own school of theology, while borrowing from the mu‘tazilah.

In tasawwuf, the tariqah is seen by the Sunnis as ‘irfān, involving a near total rejection of rational deduction while the Shi‘ah combine rational deduction and the Sufi spiritual path (tariqah).

From Imām to Sayyid: The Ṭarīqah al-‘Alawīyyah, the Shi‘ah, and the Islamization of the Malay-Indonesian Archipelago

Having observed the differences between the Sunni and Shi‘ah in terms ‘aqīdah, we are now in a better position to locate the ṭarīqah al-‘alawīyyah in Shi‘i history and in the history of Islam in the Malay world.

The persecution of the descendants of the Prophet during Umayyah and Abbasiyyah times led to their retreat from political activism. One of the members of the House of the Prophet (Ahl al-Bayt), Imām Ahmad ibn ‘Īsā ibn Muhammad ibn ‘Alī al-Tāraydi ibn Ga‘far al-Dādi, also known as Ahmad al-Muhāġir, left Basra as a result of persecution by the Qārinātah in 317 h., with the aim of performing the ḥaqq in Mecca.7 He was finally able to perform the ḥaqq in 318/930, after which he went to Yemen with his second son ‘Ubaydallāh and two descendants of Imām Mūsā al-Kāzim, Sālim ibn ‘Abdallāh and Muḥammad ibn Sulaymān.8
Finally, in 340/952, Imam Ahmad al-Muhagir settled in Hadramawt which at that time, according to Hadrami accounts, was dominated by the Ibadi. Imam Ahmad, with the support of the inhabitants of Wadi Daw'an, sympathizers of the Ahl al-Bayt, began the process of conversion of Hadramawt to the Shafi'i school.9 Most Hadrami Sadat 'ulamâ' maintain that Imam Ahmad belonged to the Shafi'i school.10 Nevertheless, there had been some debate in this century between 'Alawi ibn Tahir al-Haddad, the Hadrami mufti of Johor and various historians of Saiwîn, Hadramawt, in which it was suggested that Ahmad al-Muhagir was an Imamî Si'ah.11 The fact that Imam Ahmad was of the 8th generation from Imam 'Ali and the 4th generation from Imam Ïafar al-Sadiq lends credence to this view. Since it was dangerous to hold Shi'i views in an Ibadi-dominated area such as Hadramawt, it is possible that Shi'i views were held under conditions of taqiyyah (disimulation) while the Shafi'i views were openly propagated. According to this reading, Imam Ahmad disseminated the Shafi'i school but had the historical consciousness of the Si'ah.

The grandson of Imam Ahmad, 'Alawi ibn 'Ubaydallah was the only one among his brothers Basri and Gadîd to leave male issue and it is he who gave his name to the clan of the Hadrami Sâdah, variously known as Banû 'Alawi, Bî 'Alawi, or Banû Sâdah 'alawiyyah.12 'Alawiyyûn 'ulamâ' divide the historical development of the 'Alawiyyûn into four stages.13 During the first stage, which lasted from the third century to the seventh century h., 'Alawiyyûn leaders such as Ahmad al-Muhagir and his grandson, 'Alawi ibn 'Ubaydallah were muqthôhidât and carried the title of Imam. They were not followers of any particular madhab or ūriqah. While it is true that a great deal of their iGHâd was in line with Imam Sâfî, this may have been partly due to the circumstances in Hadramawt at that time.

Having decided to lay down their arms and give up political struggle, the 'Alawiyyûn became the carriers of a Sufi ūriqah when al-Ustâd al-'Azam Muhammâd al-Faqûl Muqaddam of the thirteenth generation from Imam 'Ali obtained the īGâzat al-ūriqah from Sayîh Abî Madîyan 'Umayb ibn al-Imâm 'Umar ibn Sâdiq, in 632/1041. In the opinion of several historians of Saiwîn, Hadramawt, Imam al-'Umar ibn Sâdiq was a descendant of Imam al-Hasan and Imam al-Hasan of the Seintîs. This is the period of the 11th century. The worldly views of the 'Alawiyyûn are predominantly sectarian and quite different from those of the 'Umayyûn. Many of the officials and governors of the two rival parties of Hajj, the Abî Sâlih and the Abî Talib, were of the 'Umayyûn family. The Worldly views of the 'Alawiyyûn were more conservative and adhered to the concept of êmîmân, the term for a supreme religious authority.

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10 - al-Sâti'î, Adwâr, cit., p. 160.
It is interesting to note that during this first stage the names Abū Bakr, ‘Umar and ‘Uṭmān were not given to the ‘Alawīyyīn. In the silsila of ‘Alī al-‘Attās, for example, the first time that any of these names appear is in 992h, when the first al-‘Attās, of the 27th generation from Imām ‘Alī, was named ‘Umar (‘Umar ibn ‘Abd al-‘Rahmān ibn ‘Aqīl ibn ‘Abdallāh ibn ‘Abd al-‘Rahmān ibn ‘Abdallāh ibn ‘Abd al-‘Rahmān al-Saqqāf). This had led some to suggest that the ‘Alawīyyīn, up until this time, were Shī‘ī. In the opinion of Sayyid al-Hasan al-‘Attās, however, the reason for the absence of such names in some of the genealogies of the ‘Alawīyyīn has to do with the preference for names that occur earlier on in the silsila resulting in other names not appearing for several generations. Among the descendants of Sayyidnā al-‘Husayn ibn Abī Ṭalib one of the most frequently occurring names is ‘Alī. Sayyidnā al-‘Husayn himself named three of his sons ‘Alī, that is, ‘Alī al-Akbar, ‘Alī Zayn al-‘Abidīn and ‘Alī al-Aṣghar. As a result, for several generations since the time of Sayyidnā al-‘Husayn ibn Abī Ṭalib, the names such as Muhammad, ‘Alī, al-‘Husayn, al-‘Hasan, and ‘Alawi appear more frequently in some houses (buyūt) than others due to precedence established by a father or grandfather.

The second stage, then, is that of the development and consolidation of the tariqah al-‘alawiyyah. This stage lasted from the seventh century to the eleventh century h.

The tariqah is a simple one which does not stress ḥalwah but rather worldly activities while at the same time denouncing materialism. It may be referred to as a this-worldly tariqah and is based on the simple formula of ‘ilm, ‘amal, taḥāalli, taḥāalli. It is the only order in which nasab and jariqah come together, and this is where the importance of the Kalāmian concept of taṣabiyyah is evident.

The third stage in the development of the ‘Alawīyyīn lasted from the 11th century to the 14th century h. During this period, the ‘Alawīyyīn ‘ulamā‘ and awliyā‘ came to be known by the title of habīb. This was the period of emigration to India and Southeast Asia.
For more than fifty years various theories have been presented as attempts at delineating the causes and modes of conversion to Islam as well as the consequences of the coming of Islam to the Malay-Indonesian archipelago. Many authors stressed the fact that Islam was brought to the region by traders from Arabia, Persia, India and China. Although it was clearly through trade that Islam was initially introduced into the archipelago it is extremely doubtful that the large-scale conversions to Islam can be explained simply in terms of these early trading contacts. Theories that suggest other modes of conversion to Islam need to be considered. These theories explain large-scale conversion in terms of economic and political motives, rivalry between the Muslims and Portuguese, inter-marriages, and Sufi proselytization.

It was van Leur, among others, who stressed the significance of political factors in the islamization of Indonesia. His reading was that Islam was adopted as a political instrument against Indian trade, Siam, China, and the Hindu Majapahit regime in Java. Several objections can be made to this view. One is that even if it was established that rulers in general converted to Islam for political and economic reasons, one cannot leap to the conclusion that the whole archipelago did so for the same reasons. Also, if the logic of conversion for economic and political reasons was operating, why were there no conversions to Chinese religion during the thirteenth to the sixteenth centuries when China was a regional power in the archipelago?

Schrieke had discussed the conversion to Islam in terms of Muslim-Portuguese antagonism in the archipelago. Although he was fully aware that the large-scale conversions to Islam began in the thirteenth century, that is, before Portuguese dominance, he nevertheless insisted that it is “impossible to understand the spread of Islam in the archipelago unless one takes into account the antagonism between the Moslem traders and the Portuguese”.

The theory that the conversion of the archipelago resulted from inter-marriages between members of royal and merchant families received special attention by Harrison who referred to the ability of the marriage institution to spread Islam from Malakka to the north in Pahang and Kedah.
and to the south in Sumatra. Before Harrison, Veth had referred to the marriage factor in the advent of Islam in the archipelago. This view of islamization seems rather unconvincing as there were only a relatively small number of foreign Muslim merchants who had settled in the Malay-Indonesian archipelago during the period under consideration. They were sporadically settled along coastal areas and mostly transient. While inter-marriage was probably a means of islamization, it would only explain conversions in the coastal areas.

The view that Sufism was responsible for the conversion of Indonesia to Islam was propounded by Johns. He pointed out that the Sufi “interpretation of Islam was certainly suited to the background of the Indonesians...” and that the “conversion of Indonesia to Islam was very largely the work of the tarikas even though they are ungratefully spurned at the present day.” While it is very true that Sufis were involved in the proselytization of Islam in the archipelago, there is little mention of the tariqah al-'alawiyyah in this respect, although the role of the Hadrami Arabs in the islamization of the region is well-known. Works that discuss islamization had generally neglected the contribution of this community in the conversion of Southeast Asia to Islam. The view that Islam had spread in the archipelago largely as a result of marriages between royal and merchant families, or as a consequence of Sufi missionary activities, is mere speculation or, at best, incomplete unless supported by empirical studies on the histories and genealogies of the various Hadrami Arab as well as Indian Muslim families, many of which were assimilated into the indigenous societies in the archipelago. Hadrami Arab and Indian Muslim traders had been engaging in trade and missionary activities in the region for centuries and constituted an integral part of the Muslim trade diaspora which stretched from Egypt to the Malay world.

In the last century, European scholars had held that islamization was brought about as a result of direct contact with Arab traders, a thesis which was first rejected by the Dutch scholar Pijnappel. Pijnappel ascribed the spread of Islam in the region to the work of Arabs from Gujerat and Mala- bar. After Pijnappel, it was Snouck Hurgronje who developed the view of islamization from India.

24 – Veth, P.J., Java, Geografisch, Etнологisch, Historisch, Harlem, 1896-1907.
25 – Schrieke, Indonesian, II, cit., p. 231.
In a lecture on Arabia and the Netherlands Indies delivered at Leiden University in 1907, Snouck asserted that the view that colonies of Arab traders were established in Java and Sumatra before the 16th century was incorrect. Here Snouck suggests that all things of Arab origin that made their way to the Malay archipelago passed through India and that Islam was introduced to the region through the intermediation of India. Decisive Arab influence as far as the spread of Islam in the Malay world is concerned was only after the 16th century and this came out of Hadramawt in South Arabia and Mecca. The Hadrami influence in Southeast Asia is, of course, evident from the large numbers of Hadrami settlers who have become permanent additions to the demographic landscape of the Malay world.

Earlier, in 1883, Snouck proposed the thesis of the South Indian origins of Indonesian Islam but, as Drewes pointed out, fails to identify the region of South India from where these proselytizers came. In addition to this, Snouck did not specify the region in Arabia that the Arabs, coming via India, originated from.

The large-scale islamization of the Malay-Indonesian archipelago which began in the 14th century was carried out by Indians as well as by Indians of Arab origin and Arabs who came to the region via India. The Indo-Arab origins of Islam in Southeast Asia must be understood in the context of the modes of conversion such as trade, marriage, and the role of the Sufi tariqahs. What has been conspicuously absent in the literature on the history of Islam in Southeast Asia, especially with regard to the period in question, is recognition of the role of the Hadrami tariqah al-'alawiyyah in the process of conversion. In other words, the question of who were the Arabs who traded, intermarried, and established tariqahs in the region comes to mind. A prominent case in point is that of the so-called legend of the nine saints (Jav. wali songo) of Java.

The Babad Tana' Jawi, a generic title referring to several Javanese manuscripts, attributes the conversion of Java to the work of the wali

songo. These manuscripts contain some historical records but are, for the most part, legendary accounts on the islamization of Java. The accounts of the nine saints are usually couched in fantastic terms with descriptions of their magical powers. This had led many scholars to regard the legends more as insights into how the Indonesians viewed the process of islamization rather than as historical records of conversion to Islam.

In some cases, the specific Hadrami origins appear to be unknown to some authors. For example, Raffles refers to some of the walis as originating from Arabia but does not refer to their Hadrami origins nor to the fact that they were settled in India prior to coming to Southeast Asia. Arnold refers to one of the walis, Malik Ibrahim, as a descendant of a grandson of the Prophet, Zayn al-'Abidin and a cousin of the Raja of Chermen. According to Veth, Chermen is located in India while Rouffaer places it in Sumatra. Majul refers to these walis as being Indians or Arabs originating from Arab settlements in India. Indonesian works, however, know these walis to be historical personalities. Furthermore, Hadrami sources contain the genealogies of these walis who lived in Java during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. It is from these genealogies that it is known that many were Hadrami Arabs who had come to the Malay archipelago via India. The names of the walis of whom there were more than nine can be listed as follows:

33 - Ramlan M. (trans.), Babad Tanah Jawi, Kuala Lumpur, 1975. This is a Malay translation of the original Javanese text.
39 - Indonesian local names are given in parenthesis.
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3. Ibrahim Zayn al-Din al-Akbar' (Sunan Ampe1 of Surabaya).

4. 'All Murtada ibn Ibrahim Zayn al-Din al-Akbar' (Raden Santri of Gresik).


6. Ahmad Rahmat Allah Sahib Ampel ibn Ibrahim Zayn al-Din al-Akbar (Sunan Bonang of Tuban).

7. Ahmad Rahmat Allah Sahib Ampel (Sunan Kudus).


9. Hasan al-Din ibn Hidayat Allah. 54


11. Hasan al-Din ibn Hidayat Allah.$5

42 - al-Saqqaf, Hidmat. The link to Ahmad al-Muhagir confirms the Hadrami origins of Gamal al-Din al-Husayn, from whom many of the “legendary” walis of Indonesia originate.

43 - al-Saqqaf, Hidmat.

44 - Ibid.

45 - Ibid.

46 - al-Saqqaf, Hidmat, Lembaga Research Islam, Sejarah, p. 64.

47 - al-Saqqaf, Hidmat.

48 - Ibid.

49 - Ibid.

50 - Ibid.

51 - al-Saqqaf, Hidmat. Chehab [Shahib] in Asal-usul has Zayn al-'Abidin as the son of Ahmad Hisam (p. 16), which is incorrect as far the Hidmat al-'asirah is concerned.

52 - al-Saqqaf, Hidmat.

53 - Ibid. ‘Abdallah and his father, ‘Ali Nur al-'Alam established themselves in Cambodia and Siam, respectively.

In addition to the above, Chehab lists Bāb Allāh ibn ‘Abdallāh ibn ‘Alī Nūr al-‘Ālam ibn al-Imām Ǧamāl al-Dīn al-Ḥusayn but the Ḥidmat al-‘Aṣīrah does not list Bāb Allāh in this genealogy.

The link of the wali songo to Ahmad al-Muhāġir confirms their Hadrami origins. Nevertheless, some would claim that the Hadrami sayyid origin of the wali songo is a fabricated reconstruction. Such a position is probably due to a lack of familiarity with earlier Hadrami sources, that is, those that are more or less contemporaneous with the wali songo themselves. The Ḥidmat al-‘Aṣīrah itself is a twentieth century document but is based on a variety of earlier sources such as the Šams al-zahirah (1307/1889-1890) of ‘Abd al-Rahmān ibn Muḥammad ibn al-Ḥusayn al-Masāhūr; ‘Umdat al-fāṭīḥ fi ansāb Āl Abī Ṭālib of Ahmad ibn ‘Alī ibn al-Ḥusayn; al-Gurar of Muḥammad ibn ‘Alī ibn Ǧīrīd al-Ḥusaynī al-’Ālwa al-Tārimi (d. 960h.).

The question of Hadrami origins is important not merely for the sake of historical accuracy but because it laid the foundations for the tariqah which was firmly established by Hadramis later and partly explains the Shi‘i tendencies to be found in Indonesia today.

There are a number of derivatives of the tariqah al-‘alawiyyah such as the ‘aydrusiyyah /a‘ifah founded by Abū Bakr ibn ‘Abdallāh al-‘Aydrūs (d. 914/1509) in Tarim which spread to East Africa, India and Indonesia. There is also the tariqah al-‘attasiyyah which established itself in the Indian sub-continent and Burma.

Elements of Shi‘i Culture in Indonesia

Any discussion on the presence of Shi‘i Islam in Southeast Asia must distinguish between the Shi‘i school of jurisprudence on the one hand and Shi‘i culture on the other. To be sure, both are found although there are differences in their genesis and development. While the vast majority of Indonesian Muslims belong to the Ṣafī‘i madhab aspects of Shi‘ah Islam can be found in their culture and mores, these having been implanted in the region centuries ago. It is only in this century, particularly after the Iranian revolution of 1978, that there has been a consciousness and awareness of the Shi‘ah and their history, which was sometimes accompanied by “conversion” to the Shi‘i school, but more often resulted in the study and

54 - Ibid.
55 - Ibid.
56 - Chehab, Asal-usul, cit., p. 15.
spread of Shi'i teachings without necessarily involving a change in madhab. The rise of the Shi'i madhab in Indonesia and Malaysia will be taken up in the next section. For now, I wish to enumerate the aspects of Shi'i culture to be found in Indonesia. In this connection two points should be noted.

One, the vast majority of Indonesians are unaware of the presence of Shi'i customs and norms in their practice of Islam.

Two, the Shi'i influences in Indonesian Islam are both the result of direct contact with Shi'i communities in India and West Asia as well as the 'Alawiyun factor in the Islamization of the Malay world.

The Shi'i customs to be found in Indonesia can be listed as follows:

1. The commemoration of 'āshūrā' (Ind. perayaan asyura), on the anniversary of the martyrdom of Imam al-Husayn at Karbala. This takes place in Aceh, Palembang, Minangkabau, Bengkulu and includes a procession of the tabut of al-Husayn, drawn in procession by an ornately designed catafalque. This ceremony resembles that of the ta'ziyah of Iran and the subcontinent.

2. 'Āshūrā' porridge. Known as bubur suran in Java and kanji acura in Sunda, this porridge is made from rice and other cereals with coconut milk and is offered to neighbours during the month of muharram.

3. Various literary works give a special place to Imam 'Ali and his family. For example, in the Hikayat Raja Khandaq, 'Ali is aided in battle by the angel Ġibril. In the Hikayat Mohammad Hanafiyah, Muḥammad Ibn al-Ḥanafiyyah dreams that the Prophet orders him to revenge the deaths of al-Hasan and al-Husayn.

4. The lavishly decorated tombs (maqām) and the practice of ziyārah is seen as more as an element of Shi'ah Islam that found it way into Indonesia.

These Shi'i elements in Indonesia are possibly a result of Shi'i influence from West Asia as well as India. They are also a result of the influence of the 'Alawiyūn in Indonesia. The madhab of the 'Alawiyūn, though formally Shafi'i, is also referred to as madhab Ahl al-Bayt because of the genealogical link of the practitioners of the tariqah al-'alawiyyah with the Prophet (peace be upon Him). Nevertheless, it is incor-


60 – Baried, “Le Shi‘isme”, cit., p. 76-77.

61 – For more examples and details see Baried, “Le Shi‘isme”, cit., p. 77-79.


63 – Ibid.
rect to say that the ‘Alawiyiyn, including the wali songo, introduced Sl'ah Islam to Indonesia, as suggested by some, because the ‘Alawiyiyn have always been strict Shafi’is, regardless of their Shi'i scent (Indo. bau Syi‘ah).

The Rise of the Imami Shi‘i Among the ‘Alawiyiyn

It has already been mentioned that there are Shi‘i tendencies among the ‘Alawiyiyn, the main reason for this being the genealogical convergence between the ‘Alawiyiyn and the Sl'ah.

So far we have said nothing of the actual practices of the Imami or Ga‘fari madhab among the ‘Alawiyiyn. This is something that took place in the fourth stage of the development of the ‘Alawiyiyn which began in the 14th century h., that is, the period of acculturation and assimilation in the Malay world of Southeast Asia.

The actual “conversion” to Sl'ah Islam took place generally after the Iranian revolution of 1979. Nevertheless, throughout the history of the ‘Alawiyiyn there have been instances of practitioners of Sl'ah Islam both among the wilayat and the muwalladun.

One ‘alawi scholar, about whom it is uncertain as to what extent he was a Sl'ah, was Mu‘ammad ibn ‘Aqil al-'Alawi (1863-1931) of the al-Yahya house.

Mu‘ammad ibn ‘Aqil was born in Hadrarnawt in Maslah ‘Ali Sayh, lived part of his life in Singapore where he did some writing, and finally settled in al-Judaydah, Yemen. He had written a number of historical works on the early history of the Sl'ah, some of which were published in Iran and some in Jakarta.

Worth mentioning in this connection is Sayyid Abü Bakr ibn ‘Abd al-Rahman ibn Sayh of Ta’rim, Hadrarnawt whose writings were in defense of Mu‘ammad ibn ‘Aqil’s views and of Sl'ah Islam in general.

Nevertheless, it has been mainly among the muwalladun, particularly in Malaysia and Indonesia, that we have a renewed interest in Sl'ah Islam. There are three major reasons for which this happened.

One is the self-perceived general lack of development among the ‘Alawiyiyn with respect to the other religious and ethnic communities of Southeast Asia.
Another was the Iranian revolution of 1979 and the heightened awareness of neo-colonialism, and cultural dependency that it brought. Thirdly, and just as crucial was the fact that the leader who emerged in the revolution, Imām Khumaynī, was a Sayyid himself. It was at this time that the genealogical convergence between the Ḥanafī Ṣī‘ah madhūb and the ‘Alawiyīn became apparent to the ‘Alawiyīn of Indonesia and Malaysia. It was therefore in the 1980s that interest in Ṣī‘ah fiqh and usūl al-fiqh, falsafah, ʿilm al-kalam, and social thought developed. This is reflected in religious education in the madrasah, as well as in informal education (maglis al-taʿlim, Malay/Indo. pengajian) and in the range of books translated from Arabic and Persian as well as original works written in Malay and Indonesian.

Nevertheless, the renewed interest in Ṣī‘ah Islam does not necessarily take the form of “conversion” to the Ṣī‘ah madhūb. In fact five different orientations among the ‘Alawiyīn to Ṣī‘ah Islam can be discerned: 1. Anti-Ṣī‘ah. These are a minority who are not only strict Shi‘is by conviction and practice, but who regard the Ṣī‘ah as having strayed from the True Path and are not considered as being on an equal footing with the four Sunni madhūb. These are views that are held by quite a number of non-‘Alawiyīn in Southeast Asia as well and have attracted some attention in the media. A case in point is the work of Ustaz Ashaari Muhammad of the now banned Arqam organization in Malaysia. He referred to the Iranian revolution as not a revolution of Islam, but a revolution of the Ṣī‘ah and holds the view that the Ṣī‘ah are politically strong in Iran because they “sell the name of Islam”. The book discusses various aspects of the “deviations” of the Ṣī‘ah. There are also statements in the media expressing concern over the “Ṣī‘ah threat” and questioning the ʿaqidah of the Ṣī‘ah.

2. The Ja‘fari school as the fifth madhūb. The majority of the ‘Alawiyīn see the Imāmī Ṣī‘ah as belonging to a fifth madhūb which is seen to be on an equal footing with the four Sunni schools.

3. Shi‘is with Shi‘i sympathies. This group is very interesting in that they believe in following the Shi‘i school as far as the ʿibādah is concerned, but that the events of the Ṣī‘ah and the events of the Shi‘a in the Ṣī‘ah’s approach to Shi‘ah Islam. The ʿAlawiyīn of Indonesia and Malaysia take a different approach. They believe that the Ṣī‘ah Islam is different from the Shi‘a Islam and that the Shi‘a are divided into different groups, each with its own ʿaqidah.

4. The buttress of Shi‘a Islam. This is the ʿAlawiyīn’s approach to the ʿaqidah of the ʿAlawiyīn. They believe that the ʿAlawiyīn are a separate group from the Shi‘a and that their ʿaqidah is different from that of the Shi‘a. They believe that the Shi‘a are divided into different groups, each with its own ʿaqidah, and that the ʿAlawiyīn are a separate group from the Shi‘a.

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The following is a rather sketchy account as no printed material is available on the topic. Participant observation and interviews are currently being carried out to elaborate on the discussion presented here.

68 - Ashaari, M., Bahaya Siyah (The Siyah Danger), Kuala Lumpur, 1987, p. 5-6 [in Malay].
cerned, in line with the teachings and practice of the aġdād (ancestors), but they are one with the Șt’ah with regards to historical consciousness, especially when it comes to the interpretation of early Muslim history, the events of the Saqāfah, the tragedy of Karbala’, and so on. They also approach the question of the validity of hadīt with the same caution that the Șt’ah do. In fact, they regard the tariqah al-’alawiyyah to be the way of the Ahl al-Bayt as much as the Ja’fari school is. The fact that the one follows Imām Șafi’i and the other Imām Ga’far al-Șādiq is not an issue of consequence as far as ımān and ıhsān are concerned.

4. ’Alawiyyin Șt’ah. These are the ’Alawiyyin who have made the total switch to the Shi’i school in term of ’ibādah as well as worldview. They take the position that the madhab of the Ahl al-Bayt can only be the Ja’fari school and no other and that it is better (afdal) for the ’Alawiyyin as descendants of the Prophet, to be direct followers of Imām Ga’far al-Șādiq. Nevertheless, these “converts” retain the customs and mores of the Hadrami ’Alawiyyin for the most part.

5. Anti-’Alawiyyin Șt’ah. This is a minority who no longer maintain the appearance of the being ’Alawiyyin in terms of the acts of worship and culture. For example, they do not attend the Friday noon prayer, they do not participate in the weekly ṛāṭib sessions and read, instead, the du ’a kumayl, and they consider zafin (a Hadrami dance) as a prohibited (ḥarām) practice in Islam. It was even reported that members of this group were of the opinion that those ’Alawiyyin ‘ulama’ who did not pass out of Shi’i centres of learning, should not be given the respect that is normally accorded to the ’Alawiyyin, such as the kissing of the hands.

As far as the development of Șt’ah Islam in Indonesia is concerned, it is the third and fourth groups that are the most important. Each group operates according to a different logic of argumentation in their debates with each other. The third group is more concerned with the social consequences of school switching while the fourth group is preoccupied with the juridical question of following the “right” madhab. For the Shafi’i with Shi’i sympathies, while all the schools of jurisprudence are equal and legitimate, the social consequences of switching from one to another may be adverse in the sense that it results in highlighting differences in daily religious practices that were previously not there. In fact, many ’Alawiyyin families are split between Shafi’i and Shi’i “factions” characterised by protracted social conflicts, some more benign than others.

This list of orientations towards Șt’ah Islam only scratches the surface of the process of “conversion” and reaction to the school and worldview and is the basis of more elaborate work which is ou-going.

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