

# Religion and Violence: Unraveling Ahmad Syafii Maarif's Philosophical Thought on the Muslim Community's Internal Conflict

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## **ABSTRACT**

This article outlines the philosophical view of Ahmad Syafii Maarif (ASM) in addressing internal conflicts within Muslims by tracing its root causes among Arab elites, starting from the time of the Prophet's companions to inter-Arab conflicts in the contemporary era. This research is qualitative with a narrative approach using data from ASM's writings and other related sources. The researchers collected, summarized, and presented data in a narrative format before concluding the data. Data analysis was conducted using Miles and Huberman's thematic analysis technique. This article shows that the conflict among Muslims today, including in Indonesia, according to ASM, is the result of the legacy of conflict among Arab elites that began with the Prophet's companions until the conflict between Arab nations in the contemporary era. The root of the problem in the conflict is the desire for political power by Arab elites. ASM's post-Chicago studies resulted in substantial shifts in his attitude and philosophical perspective. He reevaluated the role of Islamic ethics in society concerning the concept of an Islamic state, encouraged interreligious tolerance among Muslims, questioned traditional female roles in Islam, and took a more critical stance toward sectarian differences within the faith. Indeed, ASM's thought is supposed to be an alternative for resolving the internal conflict among Muslims worldwide.

Keywords: Ahmad Syafii Maarif, Conflict, Islam, Religion and Violence, Sectarianism.

## **INTRODUCTION**

Religious conflicts have been more common in Indonesia since the end of the New Order. Conflicts between Muslims and Christians have been particularly virulent in Ambon and Poso. These confrontations, which typically stem from religious, cultural, and political differences, have culminated in violent incidents characterized by crimes such as homicide, sexual assault, and explosives, resulting in a huge loss of human life. Furthermore, tensions have surfaced in interfaith incidents including the

forced closure of Christian places of worship and intimidation of religious communities. The Setara Institute emphasizes the scale of these interfaith confrontations, reporting 199 disruptions to Christian worship events between 2007 and 2018.<sup>1</sup> It is critical to note that, in addition to interfaith conflict, Indonesia is dealing with internal religious issues.<sup>2</sup> One clear example is the country's escalating violence against the Shia Muslim community. An incendiary attack on the Al-Hadi Islamic Boarding institution, a Shia-affiliated institution in Batang, Central Java, in 2000, was a manifestation of internal conflict. Following this, in 2006, a mob attacked a Shia congregation in Bondowoso, East Java. In 2012, a terrifying episode involving Shia believers in Sampang happened, in which they were subjected to acts of violence and were forced to flee their houses.<sup>3,4</sup> This multilayered environment highlights the reality that internal religious conflicts in Indonesia manifest themselves in battles between Muslims and non-Muslims, as well as between diverse sections within the Muslim community professing conflicting ideas.

In addition, the presence of religious sects considered deviant has also been a cause of internal religious conflict.<sup>5,6</sup> The Ahmadiyah group, for example, has been considered a deviant sect by some other Islamic groups, resulting in conflict and acts of violence against the Ahmadiyah group. In addition to the Ahmadiyah group, certain Christian groups are also considered deviant sects by some Islamic groups in Indonesia.<sup>7</sup> Such conflicts disrupt religious and social life and can impact the well-being and safety of those involved. However, on the other hand, there are also peace efforts being made by several religious groups in Indonesia. In 2017, ulama and religious leaders from various religions in Indonesia formed the Indonesian Interfaith Alliance (AUBI) to strengthen dialogue between religious communities and strengthen religious tolerance. In addition, several civil society organizations and government agencies are also working to promote peace and tolerance in Indonesia through various programs and activities involving various religious groups. Such efforts must be continuously improved to create a peaceful and harmonious religious and social life in Indonesia.

The Wahid Foundation survey conducted in October 2017 also showed that the Ahmadiyah group ranked first as the most disliked group, with a percentage of 43.4%, followed by the LGBT group, with 33.2%. Then, the Christian and Jewish groups occupied the third and fourth positions with 14.7% and 6.1%, respectively. Meanwhile, the Shia group ranked 6th with a percentage of 1.2%.<sup>8</sup> The survey shows the existence of polarization and intolerance in Indonesian society towards minority groups. It challenges government and civil society efforts to build religious harmony and preserve diversity in Indonesia. Ahmad Syafii Maarif (ASM) emphasized in his writing the importance of interfaith and inter-Muslim dialogue to build a better understanding and avoid greater conflicts in the future. ASM also highlights the need for strengthening religious education that promotes tolerance and teaches the values of diversity to the younger generation.

In the discourse of contemporary Islam, ASM is one of the Indonesian Muslim intellectuals who actively writes and discusses the Sunni-Shia conflict in various articles, books, and columns in the mass media. ASM has been unraveling the issue of the Sunni-Shia conflict since the 1980s until the end of his life. ASM took a firm stance and did not want to be trapped in the extreme Sunni and Shia axis that has divided the unity of Islam. As is known, in the development of contemporary Islam, Saudi Arabia has carried out a massive anti-Shia campaign since the 1980s in response to the Iranian Revolution. At the same time, Shia followers also responded by publishing books attacking Sunni beliefs.<sup>9</sup>

So far, scholars' writings on ASM thought on religion can be grouped into three categories: *firstly*, Islam, democracy, pluralism, and tolerance.<sup>10,11,12,13,14</sup> Suhaimi and Raudhonah note that Ahmad Syafii Maarif's thoughts on democracy and religious pluralism emphasize the importance of understanding

the diversity of religions and beliefs in Indonesia to achieve peace and equality.<sup>15</sup> Therefore, in contesting Islamic thought, he emphasizes the importance of analyzing the root of religious conflict and finding inclusive and dialogical solutions. *Secondly*, internal conflicts, education, and Islam<sup>16,17,18,19</sup> Ahmad Syafii Maarif emphasizes the importance of understanding differences in opinions and finding common ground to promote peace, understanding the root of problems, finding inclusive and dialogical solutions, and understanding a more inclusive and pluralistic thinking framework.<sup>20,21</sup> ASM also emphasizes the importance of understanding religious and cultural diversity and building awareness of diversity within society.<sup>22,23,24</sup>

Finally, the ulama's role in religious conflicts. The importance of ulama as individuals and role models who act as mediators and promote dialogue and peace between religious groups is emphasized by ASM.<sup>25,26,27,28,29</sup> Thus, this article fills the gaps in previous writings by providing ASM's alternative perspectives on addressing internal conflicts in Islam by tracing the root causes of these conflicts, which stem from the legacy of conflict among Arab elites, Sunni, and Shia, which dates back to the companions of the Prophet and continues to the present day. ASM's ideas are supposed to provide an alternative to the rising Sunni-Shia radical axis that is dividing the Muslim world's unity. As a result, by emphasizing the importance of democracy, diversity, and tolerance in Islam, this text contributes to Indonesian Islamic thinking. ASM's thinking also focuses resolving internal Islamic problems, fostering education to acknowledge religious differences and diversity, and emphasizing ulama's position as a religious conflict mediator. His contributions have aided in contextualizing Islam within Indonesia's distinct cultural and socioeconomic framework, which can be critical in resolving internal issues in the post-New Order era, particularly in Indonesia.

## METHODS

This study is qualitative research with a narrative approach. The data in this article were obtained from ASM's writings that focus on Sunni-Shia issues and enriched by various relevant books and journals related to the study focus. The article was analyzed using the thematic analysis technique, where the researchers organized the data according to themes relevant to the study focus. In analyzing the data, the researchers followed the interactive model of Miles and Huberman, which consists of data reduction, data display, and conclusion/verification.<sup>30</sup> The researchers first collected research data from various sources. The researchers then reduced, summarized, and selected the main points from the obtained data. After that, the researchers presented the information in narrative text format. The final step was for the researchers to conclude the analyzed data.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Islam and Its' Conflict History

Within Islam's framework, two major schools of thought exist: Sunni and Shia. Sunni, also known as *Ahlusunnah wal Jamaah*, can be defined as individuals who consistently adhere to the traditions of Prophet Muhammad, both in word and deed, while acknowledging and venerating the Prophet's companions.<sup>31</sup> Shia can be interpreted as followers, defenders, and supporters. Shia adherents believe that Ali was directly appointed as the successor to Prophet Muhammad during his return from pilgrimage at a place known as Ghadir Khum.<sup>32</sup>

There are various viewpoints concerning the emergence of Shia Islam. Some argue that Shia began to exist after the death of Prophet Muhammad when his companions became embroiled in tension at the Saqifah Bani Saidah. The Banu Hashim faction desired Ali to succeed the Prophet in leading the

Muslim community. Another perspective suggests that Shia emerged when Ali assumed the position of caliph, replacing Uthman ibn Affan. The more prevalent opinion is that the emergence of Shia was rooted in Ali's failure to negotiate with Muawiyah after the Battle of *Siffin*.<sup>33</sup> ASM tends to lean toward the latter view.<sup>34</sup> In essence, the Sunni-Shia schism originated from a political conflict among the Prophet's companions regarding who had a greater entitlement to succeed the Prophet as the leader of the Muslim community. Something that initially had political implications ultimately culminated in theological disputes.

Politically, Sunni Muslims believe that Abu Bakar Asshiddiq, Umar bin Khattab, Utsman bin Affan, and Ali bin Abi Thalib are the four caliphs responsible for continuing Muslim leadership after the death of the Prophet. On the other hand, Shia Muslims believe that Ali is the most suitable companion to succeed the Prophet in leadership because he was a close family member of the Prophet (*Ahlul Bait*), known for his noble character, extensive knowledge, and direct appointment by the Prophet during the event of Ghadir Khum.<sup>35</sup>

The Sunni-Shia conflict originated in the Arab world and later spread beyond the Arab region.<sup>36,37</sup> In Indonesia, anti-Shia sentiments began to emerge after the outbreak of the Iranian Revolution in 1979. The initiators of anti-Shia sentiments in Indonesia were the organization of Persatuan Islam (Persis) through its official magazine, *Al-Muslimun*. The issue was related to the polemics of *mut'ah* marriage (temporary marriage).<sup>38</sup> Another group actively promoting anti-Shia sentiment was the Dewan Dakwah Islam Indonesia (DDII), led by Mohammad Natsir. The anti-Shia campaign conducted by DDII was driven by their belief in the concept of *difa'* or self-defense against all threats, whether external, such as Christianization, or internal, such as secularism, Islamic Jamaah (LDII), Ahmadiyah, and Shia.<sup>39</sup>

The Islamic group that was also actively campaigning for anti-Shia sentiments is *Al-Irsyad*. The anti-Shia sentiment launched by *Al-Irsyad* is closely related to the attitudes of its members (who are generally non-sayyid Arab communities)<sup>40</sup>, who tend to be anti-sayyid. Most sayyids have a background as Shia followers. *Al-Irsyad's* anti-Shia stance is also influenced by their theological views of Wahhabism and their proximity to anti-Shia groups in the Middle East. The culmination of *Al-Irsyad's* resistance to Shia was during the 36th National Congress of *Al-Irsyad* in Pekalongan in 1996, where *Al-Irsyad* called on the government to prohibit the spread of Shia teachings in Indonesia.<sup>41</sup>

In the New Order era, the ruling regime expressed concerns regarding the presence of Shia teachings. The authorities perceived the revolutionary Shia ideology as a potential threat to the existing status quo. The New Order regime drew lessons from the events of the 1979 Iranian Revolution, in which the revolutionary Shia ideology successfully garnered mass sympathy and led to the overthrow of the incumbent regime.<sup>42,43,44</sup> In other words, rejecting Shia teachings during the New Order era was primarily a matter of political concern rather than theological contention.

### **Islam and Its' Conflict History**

Before being a pluralist Muslim, ASM was documented as a fundamentalist who aspired to establish an Islamic state. In his pre-Chicago phase, ASM was an ardent admirer of the thoughts of Maududi, Maryam Jameela, and other Islamist figures. He was also a former admirer of the Masyumi Party. However, ASM's Islamic outlook gradually transformed after pursuing his doctoral studies at the University of Chicago in the United States in 1979. Fazlur Rahman, a Muslim intellectual who taught at the University of Chicago, was pivotal in reshaping ASM's perspective on Islam. In ASM's view, Fazlur Rahman was an intellectual par excellence who deeply understood classical and modern Islamic traditions and was critical of the modern world. During his time in Chicago, ASM actively attended

various lectures taught by Fazlur Rahman.

There are four key turning points in ASM's attitude, perspective, and philosophical thought following his studies in Chicago.<sup>45</sup> *First*, ASM revised his views regarding Islam and the state. ASM began to realize that the most important principle in the relationship between Islam and the state is how Islamic morals can influence society rather than emphasizing the attributes of an Islamic state. *Second*, ASM became more open to issues of intra and interreligious tolerance. ASM began to recognize that a Muslim should uphold a stance of tolerance and respect for other religions. *Third*, ASM underwent intellectual development regarding the issue of women's leadership and reinterpreted various doctrines in Islam that tended to marginalize the position of women. *Fourth*, ASM became more critical in examining sectarian issues within Islam, such as Sunni, Shia, and Khawarij.

Post-Chicago, ASM became known for actively writing critical reflections on the phenomena of contemporary Islam, one of which pertains to the Sunni-Shia conflict. ASM brought a fresh perspective to Muhammadiyah, which had hitherto been considered somewhat dry in contemporary Islamic thought discourse. When ASM introduced ideas about pluralism, gender equality, intra/interreligious dialogue, democracy, and Human Rights (HAM), he faced resistance internally within Muhammadiyah and among Muslims. In one of his books published in the 1980s, ASM addressed the issue of the Sunni-Shia conflict within the Islamic world. In this book, ASM wrote his reflections:

*"Kemudian umat ini terpecah-belah, baik oleh interes politik maupun kontroversi teologis yang berlarut-larut. Kita mengenal umat ini sebagai kelompok Suni, Syi'ah, dan Khawarij, dan lain-lain. Mereka sama-sama menyatakan sebagai pembawa "panji-panji kebenaran". Dan, di bawah "panji-panji" itulah mereka baku hantam sesama mereka dalam bilangan kurun yang panjang. Dengan demikian lembaran sejarah pemeluk beriman juga penuh oleh darah seagama, padahal Al-Quran dengan bahasa keras dan tajam mengatakan bahwa pemeluk beriman itu wajib bersaudara."<sup>46</sup>*

"Subsequently, this community became fragmented, driven apart by political interests and prolonged theological controversies. This community comprises Sunni, Shia, Khawarij, and others. They all claim to be bearers of the "banners of truth." However, under these "banners," they have clashed for centuries. Thus, the pages of religious history are marred by the bloodshed among co-believers, despite the Quran's stern and unequivocal assertion that believers are obligated to be brothers." (free translation)

From the abovementioned perspective, ASM is not inclined towards any particular school of thought. It is because ASM realizes that the Sunni, Shia, and Khawarij categories are the products of past political maneuvering filled with various power intrigues, which do not align with the universal values of Islam as taught in the Quran, emphasizing the brotherhood of believers. ASM's views on internal conflicts within Islam can be considered highly progressive for his time, especially in the face of the New Order regime's strong stance advocating vigilance against Shia influences in Indonesia to counter the effects of the 1979 Iranian Revolution. As a powerful regime, the New Order utilized state apparatuses, such as the Department of Religious Affairs, to issue directives to suppress Shia teachings in 1983 and also enlisted the Indonesian Ulama Council (MUI) to issue warnings to Sunni followers about the spread of Shia ideology in 1984.

When ASM wrote the article mentioned above, the Middle East was embroiled in the Iran-Iraq War (1980-1988) involving Iraq and Iran. This war was often characterized as a Sunni-Shia conflict.<sup>47</sup> Saddam Hussein, the leader of Iraq at the time, was known for his harsh stance against his political opponents, particularly Shia groups. On the other hand, the 1979 Iranian Revolution had raised

Saddam's government. Saddam feared that the Iranian revolution would nurture the seeds of the Shia revolution in Iraq and potentially overthrow his rule.<sup>48</sup> During this period, ASM emerged as a contemporary thinker who responded to the division within the Islamic world,<sup>49</sup> exacerbated in the name of Sunni and Shia due to the ambitions of political elites in the Middle East.

In the 1990s, ASM frequently expressed his critical reflections on the Sunni-Shia conflict in various writings. In one of his articles, ASM wrote:

*".... munculnya sunisme dan syi'isme dalam sejarah lebih merupakan fenomena Arab tinimbang Islam. Dengan demikian bila ada gagasan untuk menampilkan sebuah Islam yang tidak berada dalam pasungan yang bercorak Arab itu, menurut penulis bukan saja halal dari sudut ajaran, tapi sudah merupakan keharusan sejarah yang tidak dapat ditunda-tunda lagi. Penulis mengamati bahwa Islam dalam jubah suni dan jubah syi'i adalah Islam yang sudah sangat lelah untuk dapat ditampilkan bagi bangunan peradaban yang akan datang."<sup>50</sup>*

"The emergence of Sunnism and Shiism in history is more of an Arab phenomenon than an Islamic one. Therefore, if there is an idea to present an Islam that is not confined to the Arab mold, in the author's view, it is not only permissible from a doctrinal perspective but is also a historical imperative that cannot be postponed any longer. The author observes that Islam in the garb of Sunnism and Shiism has become greatly exhausted and may not be suitable for the construction of the civilization of the future." (free translation)

The passage reaffirms ASM's long-held view, which he had been expressing since the 1980s, that the Sunni and Shia categories are something that Muslims should move beyond. In this writing, ASM emphasizes that the Sunni-Shia conflict has no inherent connection with Islamic teachings. He asserts that Islam needs to be presented in a new light that upholds the principles of brotherhood, equality, and tolerance.

The emergence of the Sunni-Shia conflict originally stemmed from the Battle of Siffin, involving the factions of Ali bin Abi Thalib and Muawiyah bin Abu Sufyan. Ali's faction was nearly victorious in this battle,<sup>51</sup> but Muawiyah's side requested peace by raising a copy of the Quran on a spear. As the commander, Ali ultimately instructed his followers to cease the attack. After the battle stopped, both factions engaged in *tahkim* (negotiations) in Dumat al-Jandal in 657 CE.

In brief, some of Ali's supporters were dissatisfied with the outcome of the negotiations involving representatives of Ali and Muawiyah, leading to the emergence of a new faction known as the Khawarij (those who left Ali's ranks). In their development course, the Khawarij accused Ali, Muawiyah, and their followers of apostasy, justifying their permissibility for assassination. When Ali prepared to perform the dawn prayer at the Kufa Mosque, a Khawarij member named Abdurrahman bin Muljam treacherously killed Ali with his sword. With Ali's death, the path for Muawiyah to pursue the coveted caliphate position became more wide open. The events of the Battle of *Siffin* had torn apart the unity of the Islamic world.

In the post-2000s era, ASM remained actively articulating his critical reflections on the Sunni-Shia conflict, particularly during the tumultuous Arab Spring 2010. The Arab Spring unfolded in various Arab countries, including Syria.<sup>52,53</sup> The emergence of Sunni-Shia sentiments in the Syrian conflict began<sup>54</sup> with the actions of a group of students who wrote anti-government slogans on the walls of the city of Daraa. The police decided to imprison the perpetrators of this act. Upon their release, it was discovered that the students had been tortured in prison. An angry mob subsequently staged demonstrations to protest against the Governor of Daraa.<sup>55</sup> These demonstrations led to the emergence of casualties from

civilian and military sectors. Various international media outlets then extensively reported that the Assad regime had brutally suppressed the demonstrations in Daraa. Reports related to the brutality of the Assad regime were continuously sensationalized by various foreign media, creating the impression that the Shia-Assad regime had killed the predominantly Sunni demonstrators.

Since the spread of negative news concerning the brutality of Assad, the polemics surrounding Sunni and Shia have once again heated up in various Muslim nations. The intervention of Saudi Arabia (a Sunni bloc) and Iran (a Shia bloc) in Syria has further sharpened the Sunni-Shia polarization.<sup>56</sup> In the Syrian conflict, Iran supports the Assad regime, while Saudi Arabia supports the Syrian people in their opposition to the Assad regime. Iran is interested in protecting Assad to maintain the Tehran-Baghdad-Beirut-Damascus alliance, whereas Saudi Arabia is interested in toppling Assad to strengthen its influence in the Middle East.

In Indonesia, the anti-Shia campaign emerged vigorously through flyers, national seminars, book publications discrediting the Shia groups, and threats of persecution against Shia-affiliated institutions. On social media, the anti-Shia campaign appeared to be widespread. BBC Indonesia noted that in 2015 (January-October) when the Syrian conflict was in turmoil, the hashtag #antiShia had been tweeted more than 39,000 times. Meanwhile, the word 'Shia' had been tweeted as many as 530,000 times.<sup>57</sup> In response to the Arab Spring, ASM wrote:

*"Sebagai produk sejarah konflik politik elit Arab, Muslim, sunisme, syi'isme, dan kharijisme telah merasuk jauh ke ranah teologi, fikih, dan teori politik dengan pendukungnya masing-masing. Arabisme salah jalan itulah yang diekspor ke seluruh jagat raya selama berabad-abad, tidak saja oleh Muslim Arab, tetapi Muslim non-Arab juga turut serta dalam gelombang penyebaran paham pemicu perpecahan ini. Seakan-akan yang serba-Arab itu pastilah benar karena Al-Quran sebagai al-Furqan (pembeda antara yang benar dan salah) tidak pernah diajak berunding dalam merumuskan peta persoalan..."<sup>58</sup>*

*"As a product of the historical conflicts among Arab political elites, Muslims, Sunnism, Shiism, and Kharijism have deeply permeated the realms of theology, jurisprudence (fikih), and political theory, each with its supporters. The misguided path of Arabism was exported to the entire world for centuries, not only by Arab Muslims but also by non-Arab Muslims who propagated this divisive ideology. It is as if anything associated with Arab culture must be correct because the Quran, as al-Furqan (the criterion distinguishing right from wrong), has never been consulted in formulating the landscape of these issues... (free translation)*

*... Sampai hari ini, Muslim non-Arab ternyata tidak punya tapisan yang ketat untuk menilai Arabisme dalam kategori ini berdasarkan kriteria Al-Quran yang dipahami secara benar dan kontekstual. Situasi menjadi semakin runyam karena Muslim yang non-Arab itu pada umumnya tidak mampu mempelajari ajaran Islam dari sumber aslinya dalam Bahasa Arab. Maka keberuntungan rumusan Islam dalam bungkus Arabisme itu tidak dapat dielakkan lagi. Bagi saya, meneruskan cara beragama semacam ini sama saja dengan melanggengkan malapetaka dan penderitaan bagi umat ini."<sup>59</sup>*

... nowadays, non-Arab Muslims appear to lack a rigorous framework for assessing Arabism in this category based on the criteria of the Quran, correctly and contextually understood. The situation becomes even more complicated because non-Arab Muslims generally cannot study Islamic teachings from their source in Arabic. Consequently, the entanglement of Islam within the

packaging of Arabism becomes inevitable. Continuing with such a religious approach is equivalent to perpetuating calamity and suffering for this community.” (free translation)

Through the article above, ASM emphasized that being a good Muslim does not necessarily require adhering entirely to an Arab-centric Islam steeped in the historical conflicts of Sunni and Shia. In his role as a Muslim intellectual with a background in history, ASM did not want to fall into the trap of romanticizing the glory of Islam in the past. ASM remained critical and reflective in his examination of Islamic history, especially concerning the Sunni-Shia conflict that has divided the unity of the Muslim community for centuries. ASM’s critical reflections written post-Chicago, from the 1980s to the post-2000s, there are several tendencies in ASM’s views on the Sunni-Shia conflict. Firstly, the Sunni-Shia conflict is a political conflict among Arab elites driven by a thirst for power. Regardless of the significant contributions of the Prophet’s companions in spreading Islam, they remained ordinary humans with a desire for power (will to power). The polarization between Sunni and Shia continues today because it has become firmly institutionalized in ideology, scholarship, and politics.

*Secondly*, the persistence of the Sunni-Shia conflict indicates that Muslims often prioritize the ethics of their sects over upholding the universal ethics of the Quran, which emphasizes principles of equality, justice, brotherhood, and tolerance. In other words, the Muslim community tends to lean toward a historical Islam that adheres to the phenomena and realities of history rather than a Quranic Islam that emphasizes the principles of brotherhood and peace among believers as laid out in the Quran. ASM’s perspective, which emphasizes Quranic ethics, is influenced by Fazlur Rahman, his mentor in Chicago, who regarded the Quran more as a source of ethical principles than a source of law.<sup>60</sup> ASM tends to avoid quoting Hadith (sayings and actions of the Prophet Muhammad) when addressing the Sunni-Shia conflict. It seems to be a form of caution on ASM’s part because, as a historian and Muslim intellectual, he is undoubtedly aware that many political Hadiths could further worsen relations between Sunni and Shia communities.

*Thirdly*, ASM believes that Islam needs to be presented in a new, non-denominational, more open, and free-from-sectarian-conflict manner, devoid of the shadows of long-standing sectarian conflicts that have plagued the Arab world. ASM does not want the enduring conflict between Sunni and Shia, deeply ingrained in the collective memory of Arab society, to be inherited by Indonesian Muslims, who have a friendly and open character. History has shown that Islam in the Indonesian archipelago tends to be accommodating towards cultural Shiism (not the political Shiism as we know it today, which has caused turmoil in the Arab world). Cultural Shiism in Indonesia appears in various forms of Alawi piety (*Alid Piety*).<sup>61,62,63</sup> ASM’s significant attention to addressing the Sunni-Shia conflict in the Islamic world reflects his identity as a cosmopolitan Muslim who aims to present a new face of Islam filled with compassion and offering solutions to global issues. ASM holds high hopes that Indonesian Islam can become a new compass for the Muslim world, capable of engaging in dialogue with democracy, human rights, and pluralism.

## CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Several significant conclusions emerge from exploring the historical foundations of the Sunni-Shia conflict within Islam and diving into the philosophical growth of ASM. The Sunni-Shia divide began as a political power struggle among the Prophet’s companions after his death, gradually transforming into doctrinal divisions. Political influences have greatly impacted the conflict’s trajectory, with political elites maintaining it throughout history. Second, scholars such as Fazlur Rahman influenced ASM’s change from a fundamentalist to a pluralist Muslim. This transformation prompted him to advocate for Islam’s



global and ethical characteristics, emphasizing tolerance, respect for other religions, gender equality, and interreligious dialogue. Lastly, ASM advocates for a new interpretation of Islam free of denominational boundaries and open to embracing the Quranic ideals of brotherhood, peace, and tolerance. He contends that modern Islam must shed the baggage of historical sectarianism in order to be a compassionate and open faith.

Some recommendations emerge from these discoveries. First, it is critical to urge Muslims to place universal ethical ideals in the Quran ahead of sectarian connections. This shift in focus has the potential to help bridge gaps within the Muslim community and foster togetherness. Second, as ASM advocates, developing interreligious conversation and understanding is critical for peaceful coexistence. Promoting knowledge about the historical roots and history of the Sunni-Shia conflict can help dispel misconceptions and improve nuanced understandings among Muslims. Finally, promoting ASM's view of Islam as a compassionate and open faith that contributes constructively to world concerns is critical. Accepting Indonesian Islam as a peaceful cooperation and communication paradigm can encourage other Muslim communities worldwide. These ideas aim to minimize sectarianism, promote tolerance, and contribute to a more compassionate understanding of Islam in the modern world.

## ENDNOTES

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