Shia Sunni Dynamics in Palembang City

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Abstract

This study aims to analyse the dynamics between Shia and Sunni Muslims in Palembang City, which is important considering that these two sects often experience friction in the religious social reality, leading to conflict. The long history of Shia and Sunni has always been an intriguing topic for discussion. Hegemony over other groups is not merely about sectarian doctrinal differences but also impacts all aspects of life, including social, political, economic, educational, and legal dimensions. The study employs a qualitative method with a literature review approach to examine the phenomena occurring between Shia and Sunni groups in Palembang City. The data was then analysed to draw conclusions from the study. The results of this study indicate that the Shia and Sunni groups in Palembang City experience a harmonious dynamic. This is not only evident in the history between Shia and Sunni, but more importantly, this study shows how Shia and Sunni groups build relationships through various approaches. Of course, all of these aspects are inseparable from the important role of ideology believed by both Shia and Sunni groups.

Keywords: *Dynamics, Shia, Sunni*

Abstrak

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis dinamika Syiah Sunni di Kota Palembang, menjadi penting melihat kedua aliran ini kerap mengalami gesekan dalam realitas sosial keagamaan yang berujung pada konflik. Sejarah panjang Syiah dan Sunni selalu menjadi ruang yang menarik untuk dibahas, hegemoni atas kelompok lain tidak hanya pada sisi doktrinal sektarianisme semata, tetapi berdampak pada seluruh aspek kehidupan seperti sosial, politik, ekonomi, pendidikan dan hukum. Penelitian ini menggunakan metode kualitatif dengan pendekatan library research untuk melihat fenomena yang terjadi antara kelompok Syiah dan kelompok Sunni di Kota Palenbang. Selanjutnya data dianalisis untuk mendapatkan suatu simpulan dari penelitian ini. Hasil penelitian ini menunjukkan bahwa kelompok Syiah dan Sunni di Kota Palembang mengalami dinamika yang harmonis, tidak hanya melihat dari sejarah antara Syiah dan Sunni saja, tetapi lebih dari itu penelitian ini menunjukkan bagaimana kelompok Syiah dan Sunni membangun suatu hubungan dengan berbagai pendekatan, tentu semua ini tidak terlepas dari peran penting ideologi yang diyakini oleh kedua kelompok Syiah dan Sunni.

Kata kunci: Dinamika, Syiah, Sunni

Introduction

Sectarianism often puts religion in a complicated situation, as seen in the long history of marriage in Islam after the death of the Prophet Muhammad. Events such as Saqifah Bani Saidah (Sidik, 2022) and Tahkim (Alal, 2002) resulted in diverse interpretations that produced groups such as Shia, Khawarij, and Murjiah (Zaini, 2015). These groups further grew to become an important part of what led to the emergence of various schools of thought. According to Aida(2017) the feud between Shia and Sunni is a phenomenon that is still ongoing today. This feud not only affects religious aspects, but also has an impact on the political, economic, cultural, legal and educational sectors. The process of teaching and disseminating Shia and Sunni teachings often creates opportunities for dialogue between the two. Taufani(2023) even mentions that the process of Islamisation in the archipelago is inseparable from Shia and Sunni groups, which are still visible in teachings and traditions today. Therefore, it is necessary to conduct a thorough study to understand the interaction between Shia and Sunni in Palembang area.

Research on Shia and Sunni communities has long captivated scholars; however, conflicts between these two groups continue to arise frequently. From a historical perspective, the evolution of Shia and Sunni in Islamic culture shows dynamic complexity. Although both groups claim that their teachings are sourced from the Quran and Hadith, fundamental differences in beliefs and teachings have often fuelled protracted conflicts (Manan & Paran, 2020). Beyond mere theological differences, divisions between Shias and Sunnis have led to conflicts that go beyond intellectual horizons, culminating in physical violence and warfare in various regions, such as Iraq and Indonesia (A. Fauzi, 2020). In Indonesia, violence against the Shia community in Sampang, Madura, stands out as a tragic event that highlights the tensions between these groups. Clashes in Sampang dating back to 1980 have caused considerable loss of life and property, and culminated in violent events in December 2011 and August 2012 (A. S. Maarif et al., 2015). These conflicts illustrate that the weak application of religious values based on multiculturalism is a crucial factor that triggers division. Therefore, in-depth analysis is essential to understand and resolve the dynamics of conflict between Shia and Sunni, in order to foster harmony and stability in society.

Shia and Sunni represent the two main branches of Islam, each showing significant differences in their development and spread. More than 85 per cent of the global Muslim population identifies as Sunni, while the exact number of Shia adherents remains uncertain as many people do not disclose their faith, particularly in regions where the majority of the population is not Shia (Wahid, 2018). Most countries from North Africa to the Sahara Desert, including Saudi Arabia, Indonesia, and Bangladesh, are majority Sunni. In contrast (Majid, 2007), Iran is the only country to make Shia Islam the state religion, and the majority of the population in Iraq and Bahrain also adhere to Shia Islam, significant Shia communities are also present in Afghanistan, Kuwait, Pakistan and Syria (Sumarno, 2020). As a minority sect on a global scale, Shia Muslims often lack support from other Islamic communities, which affects their worldview. This perspective is infused with themes of suffering and hope for salvation, as they believe that the Imams are divinely chosen and that a saviour will emerge at the end of time to establish God's just kingdom. The concept of the Imamate is one of the key differentiators between Shia and Sunni beliefs.

The dynamics of the relationship between Shia and Sunni communities in Palembang City reflect the complexity of socio-religious interactions in Indonesia's multicultural society. Palembang City, as one of the centres of Islamic civilisation in South Sumatra, has long been a meeting place for various Islamic sects, including Sunni and Shia. Previous research by Noupal and Supriyanto (2022) showed that social relations between Alawiyin Shia and Alawiyin Sunni groups in Palembang take place in the form of associative through cooperation in trade, da'wah,

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and socio-religious activities and dissociative, which is characterised by limited disputes but does not lead to open conflict. This finding confirms that differences in mazhab are not always a trigger for social disintegration, but can be managed through kinship ties and local values.

This research offers a new approach by exploring contemporary dynamics that have not been touched by previous studies. The main focus is on how the younger generations of both communities shape their religious identities amidst digital information flows and the influence of social media. This approach utilises digital ethnography methods and in-depth interviews across generations, allowing researchers to capture the nuances of changing perceptions and more dynamic patterns of interaction. In addition, this research also examines the public narratives that develop in local and national media, as well as how religious institutions and local governments respond to emerging sectarian issues. The novelty of this research lies in the integration of an interdisciplinary approach that combines religious studies, sociology, and digital communication, as well as the focus on young actors as agents of social change. Thus, this research not only enriches the academic repertoire on Shia-Sunni relations in Indonesia, but also makes a practical contribution to efforts to strengthen tolerance and social cohesion at the local level. In conclusion, the Shia-Sunni dynamics in Palembang is a reflection of the challenges and opportunities in building social harmony in the midst of diversity, and this study is here to expand our understanding of the process in a more in-depth and contextualised manner.

This article aims to complement existing research on the relationship between Shia and Sunni Muslims, particularly in Palembang city. The focus of this research is to observe the dynamics of interaction between the two groups that occur harmoniously. In this context, three main questions are raised: (a) what is the nature of the dynamics of relations between Shia and Sunni in Palembang; (b) what factors inhibit and support the formation of these dynamics; and (c) what is the consistency of the dynamics of Shia-Sunni relations in fostering harmony and social-religious coexistence in Palembang. It is anticipated that these questions will contribute significantly to a more comprehensive understanding of the dynamics of relations between Shia and Sunni groups in Palembang.

This article is based on the argument that the conflict between Shia and Sunni often becomes the main issue in the differences between sects and madhhabs in Islam, which impact on various aspects of life. However, the dynamics between Shia and Sunni adherents in Palembang City show a different pattern, where the two groups coexist harmoniously despite their differences. The character of Palembang people, which is deeply embedded in Malay culture, plays an important role, as they are known for their openness to diversity and newcomers. Therefore, this research becomes interesting as it examines the dynamics of Shia and Sunni relations in Palembang, not only from the perspective of theological or sectarian differences, but also by highlighting the factors that contribute to maintaining good relations amidst the potential emergence caused by these differences. While the differences between these two sects should not trigger conflict, there are some similarities that, although not overwhelming, can be identified as common ground. It is important to emphasise these similarities in order to prevent division and misunderstanding between the two sections. Thus, it is hoped that Shia and Sunni can work together in harmony to realise the values of rahmatan lil 'alamin in Islam.

Research Method

This article was prepared using a qualitative research method with a phenomenological approach. Primary data sources are obtained from literature review and observation of various phenomena that occur in society. The author conducts in-depth research and collects references from various This article was prepared using qualitative research methods with a

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phenomenological approach (Sholeh, 2016). The main data sources were obtained through literature studies and observations of various phenomena that occur in society. The author searches and collects references from various sources, such as books, journals, published scientific articles, as well as unpublished papers and papers of Islamic scholars. In addition, special attention was paid to the traditions of the Hatuhaha Muslim community, especially to ritual practices that are closely related to the research topic. The collected data were classified according to the needs of the research in order to construct relevant analyses. The analysis stage was conducted using data reduction techniques, data presentation, and in-depth interpretation of the information obtained. This process aims to systematically map the data, analyse the relationship between elements, and produce significant conclusions that support the research objectives.

Result and Discussion

A. Sunni Shia Theology

Shia theology is one of the main branches of Islamic thought that was born from historical events and succession conflicts after the death of the Prophet Muhammad in 632 AD. The main root of the emergence of Shia lies in the belief that Ali bin Abi Talib, the Prophet's cousin and grandson, was the only person legitimately appointed by the Prophet to lead Muslims (Dewi, 2016). The group that adhered to this belief became known as the *Shia Ali*, or what later developed into the Shia school of thought. In the early days of Islam Shia was not yet established as a theological and juridical school organised (Jayana, 2022). In the early days Shia was still a political and spiritual movement centred on loyalty to the Prophet's family, especially Ali and his descendants. However, a major turning point in the formation of Shia identity occurred in 680 AD, in the tragic events at Karbala. There, the Prophet's grandson, Husayn bin Ali, along with a small number of his followers, were massacred by the forces of Caliph Yazid bin Muawiyah of the Umayyad Dynasty (Fauzi, 2016). This tragedy not only shook the feelings of Muslims, but also became the theological and spiritual foundation for Shia, emphasising the values of sacrifice, resistance to tyranny, and the importance of holy leadership.

From the tragedy of Karbala, the concept of *Imamate* began to develop as a central doctrine in Shia theology (Kemalasari, 2022). In contrast to Sunnis who consider the leadership of the ummah to be the result of deliberation, Shias argue that *imams* are spiritual and temporal leaders appointed by God, not by humans (Anas, 2018). These Imams are believed to be holy men who are *infallible* (preserved from sin), inheritors of the Prophet's divine knowledge, and spiritual guides of the people (Amelia, 2017). Imamiyah Shia recognise twelve Imams, starting from Ali ibn Abi Talib to Muhammad al-Mahdi (Mattori, 2022), who are believed to disappear in the supernatural and will return at the end of time as the bearers of justice. With the 12th Imam's entry into *ghaibah* in 874 CE, religious authority in Shia society passed to the scholars and fuqaha (Abd, 2015). They became the custodians of the theological and legal heritage and the link between the people and the supernatural Imam. During this period, Shia theology began to be codified systematically. Figures such as Shaykh al-Mufid and Shaykh al-Tusi developed a rational theological framework, answering the challenges of Sunni, Mu'tazilah, and other groups (Seyidbeyli, 2020). In this context, Shia developed a rational approach through the *Usuli* tradition, which emphasised

the importance of ijtihad and the role of the mujtahid, and a more conservative and textual *Akhbari* group emerged.

The heyday of Shia theology occurred when the Safavid Dynasty in Iran (16th century) made Shia the official state school (Afifah et al., 2022). It was in this context that Shia became a powerful religious institution with far-reaching political and social implications. The tradition of *marja' taqlid*, the system of authority of the highest ulama, began to develop and became a distinctive character of contemporary Shia (Kurniawan et al., 2022). In addition, Shia theology was also enriched by elements of philosophy and Sufism, especially through figures such as Mulla Sadra, who combined rational, spiritual, and esoteric thought in the philosophy of wisdom (Nasr, 2017). In the 20th century, Shia theology experienced an intellectual and political renaissance. Figures such as Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini introduced the concept of *Wilayat al-Faqih* (clerical leadership) which became the ideological basis of Iran's Islamic Revolution in 1979 (Rais, 2018). This revolution marked a new chapter in Shia history, where theology was no longer on the edge of power, but became the foundation of the modern state. On the other hand, thinkers such as Muhammad Baqir al-Sadr sought to develop an Islamic economic and political system that was removed from Shia theological principles (Furqani, 2019). In the Shia view, there are four important principles that characterise Shia followers in which people believe that the Imams are free from sin and error ('*ismah*) (Diniyah & Mubarok, 2021), as well as believing in the arrival of the imam mahdi al-Muntadzor (*mahdiism*) (Noah, 2020), then (*taqqiyah*) as a political strategy used to disguise the identity of the Shia group from threats and this was commonly used when Shia were still a minority (Iffah, 2022), and finally the belief of the Shia group in the return of the Imam who will become the leader of the people and lead to the path of salvation (*raj'ah)* (Iryana et al., 2019)., 2018).

The concept of *Imamate* in Shia theology has a significant influence on the sustainability of Shia ideology, especially in the field of politics and government. The belief in the Imam is not only understood as part of spiritual or inner teachings, but also plays an important role in strengthening the position of Shia in ideological discourse throughout Islamic history (Muslih, Shobirin, et al., 2022). The Imam's function as a spiritual and political leader provides a strong theological basis for Shia to actively engage in issues of governance and struggles of thought. Therefore, this doctrine becomes one of the main pillars that maintain the dignity and relevance of Shia in the various socio-political dynamics faced. On the other hand, the central tenet in the *Ahlu Sunnah* (Sunni) tradition emphasises the belief that the Qur'ān is not a creature, a view that categorically rejects the Muktazilah view that the Qur'ān is a created being. This view underpins the Sunni commitment to follow the teachings of Islam as handed down by the Prophet Muhammad, the Companions, and the Tabi'in, the early generations of Islam. Thus, the Sunni tradition has a strong theological foundation in maintaining orthodoxy and rejecting rationalistic approaches that are considered to deviate from the basic principles of religion (Latif, 2019). Muhammad Imarah, as cited by Shihab, states that the Sunnis have their own pattern in understanding and structuring the leadership structure in Islam. They rank the virtues of the Khulafaur Rashidin based on the order of their reign, and allegiance is given to the ruling leader, regardless of his level of piety (Siregar, 2021). In addressing injustice, the Sunni approach tends to avoid rebellion or revolution, and favours stability and social transgression. This approach reflects the basic Sunni principle of upholding societal peace despite political pressures and challenges.

In the Sunni political view, the existence of a government is considered inevitable so that humans can live together and cooperate with each other to achieve the ultimate goal of living a good life according to the guidance of Sharia. By implementing the principles of sharia, Muslims are believed to be able to achieve a noble position in the hereafter (Latif, 2019). However, the Sunni school also sets certain conditions for a leader, namely that the caliph must be male and come from the Quraysh tribe. This shows that in the Sunni tradition, the legitimacy of leadership is not solely determined by religious or moral qualities, but also by certain hereditary factors and social status (F. Fauzi, 2020). Meanwhile, in Shia belief, the main basis for the recognition of Ali bin Abi Talib as the successor of the Prophet Muhammad rests on the event of *Ghadir Khum* (Ahmad Khoirul Fata, 2017). In this important moment, the Prophet openly appointed Ali as the leader of the general public (*wilayah 'ammah*) and as the protector (*wali*) of the Muslims. The incident is believed to have occurred when the Prophet returned from the Wada' Hajj, on his way back to Medina. At a place called Ghadir Khum, in the presence of many companions, the Prophet declared Ali as his successor (Afwadzi, 2014). This moment became the main theological and historical argument in the Shia tradition to assert Ali's leadership as the legitimate heir of the Prophet, as well as a fundamental point of difference in political views between Shias and Sunnis.

Shiites to this day celebrate the event of Ghadir Khum as one of the important festivals that marked the public announcement of Ali's right as caliph (Hatta, 2017). In Shia teachings, the core of their doctrine is not only concerned with law or mysticism, but rather with loyalty to Ali and the belief that the leadership rights of Muslims can only be inherited through Ali's descendants (Hasim, 2012). This view in the 7th and 8th centuries became the basis for political movements that challenged the rule of the Umayyad and Abbasid dynasties. Although the attempts of Ali's followers to seize the caliphate often failed, their resistance confirmed that the legitimacy of leadership in the Shia tradition relied heavily on Ali's family lineage, both from a political and theological point of view (Afifah et al., 2022). The failure to seize political power motivated some Shia figures to turn from political struggle to deeper religious reflection. After the disappearance of the last Imam in 873 and the end of direct communication with the hidden Imam in 941, the absence of spiritual guidance from the Imam brought significant changes to the religious and social aspects of Shia (Noah, 2020). Traditions such as the commemoration of Ashura, which commemorates the death of Husayn at Karbala, and the condemnation of Mu'awiyah, who was considered an enemy of Ali, became very strong religious rituals in the lives of Shia. Moreover, the commemoration of Ghadir Khum further reinforces the Shia collective identity as a community that supports the rights of Ali's descendants (Posha, 2023). From a political perspective, Shia assert that only the descendants of the Prophet are legitimate to lead Muslims, on the basis of nash (direct appointment) and exceptional intellectual abilities. In the Shia view, leadership is an inheritance that is passed on from generation to generation, not the result of election or deliberation (Muslih, Moh Shobirin, et al., 2022). This concept reinforces the claim that the right to hold the caliphate rests entirely within the family of Ali, confirming that leadership in Shia is not just a political issue, but also has a deep theological and esoteric dimension.

Whereas in Sunni theology, as one of the main branches in Islamic thought, was born and developed after the death of the Prophet Muhammad in 632 AD. When the Prophet Muhammad died, Muslims faced differences of opinion regarding who had the right to replace him as the leader of the people (Anshori, 2022). A large part of the Muslim community, later known as Sunnis, accepted the election of Abu Bakr as the first caliph through a process of deliberation (*shura*) involving the companions of the Prophet. They believe that the leadership of Muslims should be based on individual abilities, the context of

the community, and moral and intellectual criteria, not based on descent (Prasetyo et al., 2021). Since then, Sunni theology has developed with an emphasis on the Qur'an, hadith, *ijma'* (consensus of the people), and qiyas (analogy) in the development of Islamic teachings and law. This history of Sunni theology illustrates how the Muslim community endeavoured to preserve the basic principles of Islam as delivered by the Prophet Muhammad, while seeking a middle ground on the question of leadership of the community.

In Sunni theology, several basic concepts are the main pillars of their beliefs. One of them is tawhid, which means belief in the oneness of God. This concept teaches that Allah is the one true God, with no partner and no equal. In addition, Sunni theologians also emphasise the concept of prophethood or nubuwwah, with the belief that the Prophet Muhammad was the last prophet who brought God's revelation in the form of the Qur'an, which became a guide to life for mankind (Halimah Dja'far, 2014). Another very important concept in Sunni teaching is akherah, which teaches that every human deed will be counted and accounted for in the afterlife. The afterlife, according to Sunni teachings, is an inseparable reality from the life of the world, with rewards of paradise for the believers and good deeds, and hell for the disbelievers. These basic concepts provide the foundation for the spiritual and moral life of Muslims, and confirm the main teachings in Islam (Anshori, 2022). The principles of Sunni theology not only include belief in God and prophethood, but also include the application of Islamic law in daily life. One of the main tenets of Sunni theology is the belief in six core teachings known as the pillars of faith. These pillars include faith in God, angels, God's books, His messengers, the Day of Judgement, and destiny. This principle obliges every Muslim to believe in the entirety of Islamic teachings as part of their spiritual journey. In addition, sharia or Islamic law forms the basis for Sunni life, drawn from the Qur'an and hadith. To establish law in situations not explicitly explained in the sacred texts, Sunnis rely on ijma' (consensus of the people) and qiyas (analogy). In this regard, Sunni theologians leave room for scholars to develop and interpret Islamic law in accordance with changing times and social contexts.

One aspect that distinguishes Sunni theology from other schools, such as Shia, is their view of the leadership of Muslims. In Sunni theology, leadership or caliphate does not depend on a particular lineage, but rather on the ability of individuals chosen through deliberation and the context of the ummah. This is reflected in the election of Abu Bakr as the first caliph after the Prophet Muhammad, which is considered a legitimate decision based on deliberation among the companions. Leaders appointed as caliphs must have good moral and intellectual qualities, as well as the ability to lead Muslims justly (Sunni et al., 2022). Sunni theologians therefore emphasise that the leadership of Muslims should be based on individual abilities and capacities, not by blood relations or a particular lineage, which distinguishes them from the Shia view which believes that leadership should be inherited in the family of Ali (Maarif, 2019). Overall, Sunni theology provides clear and solid guidance for Muslims in living their daily lives, both spiritually and socially. By prioritising basic principles such as monotheism, prophethood and social justice, Sunni theologians emphasise the importance of following teachings sourced from the Qur'an and hadith, as well as decisions made through the context of the people (Latif, 2019). On leadership, Sunni theologians emphasise the selection of leaders based on ability and the context of the people, rather than descent or bloodline, which makes their teachings more inclusive and based on moral and intellectual criteria. As such, Sunni theologians offer a moderate view, emphasise unity, and leave room for the development of Islamic law in the face of the challenges of the times.

B. Socio-Religious Society of Palembang

The development of scientific traditions and religious education in the Palembang Sultanate reflects the socio-religious conditions at that time, whose influence is still felt until later times, at this time, the spread of Islam was not only limited to the elite, but also extended to reach the general public (Wibowo, 2022). Historically, the tradition of Islamic scholarship and teaching in South Sumatra, especially in Palembang, began during the era of the Palembang Darussalam Sultanate in the 18th century (Sepriady & Idris, 2018). In this period, Islam succeeded in replacing the influence of the previous Hindu-Buddhist kingdom, even so, religious education at that time was still limited to the ruling elite. After Sultan Mahmud Badaruddin II lost the struggle against the Dutch in 1823 AD which signalled the collapse of the Palembang Sultanate (Rochmiatun, 2017), the scholarly tradition involving the writing of religious works and religious education that was previously only enjoyed by the elite began to experience a summary. However, religious education among the wider community actually developed rapidly. According to Husni Rahim, before the spread of Islam to all levels of society, Islamic teaching spread within the palace and was only for the elite. All Palembang sultans, from the first Sultan to Sultan Ahmad Najamuddin II (1821-1825 AD), were known to have close ties with ulama (Ravico, 2016). They not only provided support, but also published religious works that gave birth to many books in various fields of Islamic science such as tawhid, tasawwuf, fiqh, history, and Qur'anic science.

During the Palembang Sultanate, the close relationship between ulama and rulers contributed greatly to the development of science and religious education in the region. This collaboration created an atmosphere conducive to the birth of productive ulama who produced highly influential religious works. Among them are Sheikh Syihabuddin bin Abdullah Muhammad who was active during the time of Sultan Mahmud Badaruddin Jayo Wikramo, Sheikh Kemas Fakhruddin who played an important role during the time of Sultan Ahmad Najamuddin I (1757-1774 AD), and Sheikh Abdus Samad al-Palimbani who was widely known during the time of Sultan Muhammad Bahauddin (1774-1804 AD) (Rochmiatun, 2016). These scholars were not only known as religious figures, but also as thinkers who contributed a lot to the development of Islamic thought in Palembang. Over time, especially in the 1830s, the condition of religious education in Palembang began to decline (Arviansyah, 2021). A report from the Resident of Palembang states that religious leaders were concerned about the low interest of the community in religious education and their diligence in worship. This situation became a concern for ulama and religious leaders who saw the importance of spreading religious knowledge so that people could be more obedient in carrying out religious obligations (Rahim, 1998). Nonetheless, by the 1850s, the community began to show significant changes. The awareness to perform religious duties, especially obligatory ones such as Friday prayers and Ramadan fasting, increased quite rapidly.

During this period, the ongoing Dutch colonialism did not consider the religious developments that occurred in Palembang as a serious threat. History records that although the people of Palembang began to show greater interest in religious life, it was limited to ritual worship and did not lead to movements that could undermine the stability of the colonial government (Susetyo & Ravico, 2021). Although there was a stronger movement in religious life among the people, the colonial authorities did not feel threatened. Their attention was more focused on larger issues that could disrupt their rule, while changes in people's religious life were considered harmless to Dutch colonial rule at the time (Sari et al., 1970). Thus, despite the improvements in religious practice, this did not trigger significant social or political upheaval, and in the end, the people of Palembang continued to live their lives in the realm of worship without affecting the colonial power structure.

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At the end of the 19th century, in the 1880s to be precise, the term *'fanatic'* began to be used to describe significant changes in the religious appearance and behaviour of the Palembang people. This phenomenon reflected a striking increase in religious awareness, where the religious lifestyle of the people began to become apparent, especially in their appearance (Nasution, 2017). Religious leaders and pilgrims, for example, wear long white robes and a turban wrapped around their heads, and carry prayer beads always in their hands, a change that signifies a profound transformation in the way people express their faith. In addition, the number of worshippers attending Friday prayers has also increased sharply. This is reflected in the huge crowds that fill the mosque making it difficult for people to traverse the area during Friday prayers (Amran, 2020). This significant change signifies that the people of Palembang are starting to rely more on the religious aspect of their lives, a shift that is very different from the previous era.

In the period of the late 19th century to the early 20th century, the religious awareness of the people of Palembang was increasing. This was evident from the high desire of the people to learn more about Islam, not only that, the spirit to gain religious knowledge was also growing (Wibowo, 2022). The tradition of religious teaching and learning that developed during this period became the basis for the formation of a more structured Islamic education in Palembang. People began to realise that religious education was the key to strengthening their understanding of Islam and strengthening their Islamic identity in the midst of increasingly complex challenges of the times (Ismail, 2004). On the other hand, the tradition of religious teaching has also undergone a transformation, although it is still carried out in a simple and limited manner. Religious teaching is conducted from house to house or in langgar (mushola), small places of worship that can be reached by the wider community.

This informal religious education developed as a response to the lack of religious education facilities provided by the Dutch colonial government, the condition of the nation that was still under colonisation made access to formal education very limited, so that people had to try their best to maintain their religious traditions (Wibowo, 2022). Within these limitations, the teaching of religion became one of the ways for the community to maintain their identity and as a form of resistance to the increasingly strong colonial influence. The Palembang people saw the importance of religion as a source of strength in facing social and political challenges, as well as a foundation for maintaining their spiritual sovereignty. Ultimately, despite the difficult conditions, the spirit to maintain religious traditions and deepen religious knowledge remained a top priority for the Palembang people, who continued to grow despite the many challenges they had to face.

In the structure of religious and community bureaucracy during the Sultanate and colonial periods, there were three main elements that formed a solid unit in the spread of Islamic values. First, religious officials known as Penghulu Natagama and their staff played an important role in managing and organising religious affairs (Rahim, 1998). They acted as a liaison between the colonial government and the community, as well as an administrative authority in the field of religion. Their role in enforcing religious policies and overseeing the implementation of Islamic law shows how the religious bureaucracy at that time was not only spiritual but also systematically organised and had a great influence on social life (Fauzi, 2019). As under colonial rule, the penghulu was tasked with ensuring that the community complied with the prescribed religious regulations, while maintaining good relations with the colonial authorities.

Secondly, the Alawiyyin group, consisting of sayyids of Hadramaut descent, had a significant influence in maintaining social legitimacy and strengthening the spread of Islamic values. These sayyids are not only recognised for their respected lineage, but also for their role in shaping a deep Islamic scholarly tradition (Fuadiyah & Hudaidah, 2021). They spread

the teachings of Islam through exemplary moral and spiritual approaches, and established close ties with the community. The group played an important role in creating a strong religious climate, which focused not only on ritual aspects, but also on social and moral aspects. According to several studies, the Alawiyyin group is often a place of reference for the community in seeking spiritual guidance and religious knowledge, given their depth of knowledge in various branches of Islamic science (Suparto et al., 2019).

Third, independent ulama who played a role in religious teaching, especially in teaching the Quran and other religious books, made a major contribution to the religious education that developed at that time (Rochmiatun, 2016). They organised religious teaching in private homes or langgar (musholla), making religious education accessible to people from different social strata. This education is more informal but very effective in transmitting religious knowledge to the community, especially to those who do not have access to formal education (Amalia & Hudaidah, 2022). The role of these independent ulama indicates the democratisation of religious knowledge, where every individual, regardless of social status, has the same opportunity to study Islam.

The religious leaders, the Alawiyyin, and the independent ulama form a system that complements and strengthens each other in the spread of Islam. Without any of these elements, the process of spreading Islamic law in society would lose its power and effectiveness. Scientifically, this system can be understood as a socio-religious model that integrates elements of administrative authority, scholarship and spiritual teaching in an organised network. This study shows that the existence of this third element allowed for a more extensive and continuous transfer of religious knowledge and practice, which in turn strengthened the religious and social identity of the community at the time. Especially in socio-religious studies, it is often found that the successful spread of religion is not only determined by the ability to lead in a spiritual context, but also by the ability to build social networks that support a comprehensive and inclusive understanding of religion.

C. Shia Sunni Dynamics in Palembang

In a diverse society, conflicts can arise due to the lack of a dynamic and open communication space between various parties in a community. Openness to accepting others as partners in dialogue is crucial to creating spaces that can reduce tensions in social interactions. This helps to prevent heterogeneous communities from being trapped in suspicion of one another. Without dialogue, different truth claims can trigger conflicts that ultimately create a situation that does not support the creation of a harmonious life. Louis Kriesberg in sociological conflict theory states that the slightest difference can be a manifestation of conflict in a lighter form (*softconflict*), which if not managed properly can develop into a large or *hard* conflict (*hardconflict*) (Kriesberg & Titarenko, 2021). One way to manage conflict in a plural society is through dialogue, which allows parties with different views to talk to each other and find common ground. Every difference in society is actually not completely contradictory, because there are always points of convergence that can be used as a basis for building understanding (Jaya, 2019). Dialogue is an effective means of finding common ground, with the hope of easing tensions and preventing greater conflict. Therefore, an open communication space is very important in maintaining peace and harmony between different groups, such as those in heterogeneous societies.

In Palembang, interfaith dialogue space has become a social construction that develops over time. Previously, Palembang City had experienced tensions related to differences in beliefs, especially related to recitations that were considered provocative by some parties, especially those with Shia beliefs (Noupal & Supriyanto, 2020). However, over time, the initially sharp religious sentiments began to subside, providing space for initiatives from

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religious leaders to build organisations that aim to avoid potential divisions. This shows the importance of managing conflict wisely so that negative sentiments do not develop into bigger problems. Among the efforts made to bring the two groups together between Shia and Sunni can be seen the establishment of communities aimed at facilitating communication and co-operation between the groups. This is expected to play an important role in strengthening relations between groups that were previously separated due to differences in beliefs. With the dialogue of these communities, people can avoid tensions caused by differences, and make dialogue the main tool to resolve conflicts. This kind of initiative is very important in maintaining social harmony in the midst of a diverse society, where differences in religion and belief are often a source of potential conflict.

Palembang society, as a part of Indonesia that has religious and cultural diversity, also reflects the dynamics of relations between different religious groups, one of which is between Shia and Sunni adherents. The history of the relationship between these two groups has not always been smooth, but they have managed to maintain peace and harmony in their social interactions, which ultimately contributes to the harmony of Palembang society as a whole. This relationship has a diverse historical context, with various conflicts and reconciliations occurring throughout time. The relationship between Shia and Sunni adherents in Palembang is inseparable from the influence of the history of the entry of Islam into this region. Islam in Indonesia, including Palembang, spread through trade routes, and this influx of religion brought influences from various sects, including Shia and Sunni (Nurdin et al., 2015; Taufani, 2023). In Indonesia, Sunni is the majority sect, but Shia also has a loyal following, albeit smaller in number. In the context of Palembang, the development of this second group has its own dynamics, formed through interaction with the local community and the political and social influences around them. At first, the differences between Shia and Sunni may not be so pronounced, as they share many similarities in terms of basic worship practices, Over time, differences emerged in terms of more specific rituals and beliefs, such as the Ashura celebration commemorated by Shia in memory of the Karbala tragedy (Mustolehudin, 2012). These differences have sometimes fuelled tensions, although on many occasions, the two groups have been able to maintain relatively peaceful relations.

The success in managing relations between Shia and Sunni in Palembang cannot be separated from the important role played by religious leaders and community leaders. Religious leaders have a strategic position in easing tensions that may arise between the two groups. They not only act as leaders in worship, but also as mediators who maintain social harmony. Clerics and religious leaders often serve as liaisons between the two groups, inviting them to sit together, engage in dialogue, and find solutions to existing problems. Through dialogue, various tensions that have the potential to damage relations between groups (Rauf, 2021). In some cases, religious leaders have even taken the lead in encouraging both parties to prioritise similarities over differences, and to focus more on Islamic values of tolerance and brotherhood. These initiatives are crucial, as without a mediating figure, tensions can continue to escalate into larger conflicts. Dialogue is the primary means of resolving differences between Shias and Sunnis in Palembang. In a heterogeneous society, dialogue serves as a space to express differences openly and listen to each other. This dialogue is not only limited to formal forums, but is also carried out in daily life on an informal level, such as meetings held at the mosque, joint community service, or other social activities. All of this creates opportunities for both groups to understand, respect and co-operate with each other in everyday life.

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This cultural dialogue is also closely related to the ongoing social transformation in Palembang. Palembang's evolving society, with increasing levels of education and openness, contributes greatly to the creation of a healthy and constructive space for dialogue. Education, especially those based on the values of tolerance, is key to shaping an open attitude among the younger generation. This is also reinforced by high social cohesiveness, which allows Palembang society to quickly overcome conflicts and keep relations between religious groups harmonious. The dynamics of relations between Shia and Sunni in Palembang reflect the diversity found in Indonesian society in general (Book, 2018). Despite differences in rituals and beliefs, these two groups have shown an extraordinary ability to manage these differences through dialogue and cooperation. The role of religious leaders, peace organisations, as well as strong cultural dialogue, have ensured that the conflicts that have arisen have not developed into larger divisions. As a result, Palembang has managed to maintain its status as a pluralistic city, with the values of tolerance and harmony maintained.

Palembang as one of the major cities in Indonesia that is socially and religiously plural, is an important representation of the practice of coexistence in a multicultural society (Boty, 2015). In the midst of differences in religious beliefs and traditions, including between the Sunni and Shia communities, Palembang has demonstrated social resilience through the development of a culture of dialogue that has become the main instrument in maintaining harmony and preventing conflict escalation. This phenomenon not only reflects a locally-based conflict resolution mechanism, but also reflects the importance of social and cultural capital in building sustainable peace. Cultural dialogue in Palembang can be understood as a form of social interaction that grows from local values that emphasise consensus, deliberation and mutual cooperation. The tradition of discussing or *doing rembug-an* in Palembang society is not only limited to the realm of custom and family, but also penetrates into the public sectors, including in solving religious problems (Amina, 2021). Dialogue becomes an important instrument in mediating ideological differences between Sunni and Shia groups, especially when sensitive issues regarding religious practices or theological differences surface. This shows that conflict resolution based on open and participatory communication is still relevant in the context of a complex contemporary society.

An important factor in the success of the culture of dialogue in Palembang is the existence of high social cohesion, which is strengthened by a network of community leaders and religious leaders from various backgrounds. Their role in creating informal meeting spaces and cross-group religious forums makes dialogue not only a means of discussion, but also an arena for reconciliation. Activities such as community service, joint recitation, and rotating nightly ronda showcase social integration that transcends ideological boundaries. In this context, an inclusive approach based on local culture can reduce the potential for latent conflict and create a productive and long-lasting dialogue atmosphere. Education and social transformation also play an important role in strengthening this culture of dialogue. The relatively high level of education among Palembang people has shaped a mindset that is more open to diversity, as well as encouraging awareness of the importance of tolerance and the right to live together in diversity. Educational institutions, both formal and non-formal, act as important agents in sowing the values of pluralism, as well as being the initial space

for the formation of critical and empathic attitudes towards religious and cultural diversity. This awareness strengthens community participation in maintaining social stability, especially in dealing with religious issues that have the potential to cause social friction.

In the perspective of modern conflict resolution theory, the practice of dialogue in Palembang can be categorised as community-based *preventive diplomacy*, which relies on interpersonal communication, social trust, and mediation by non-state actors. The involvement of civil society in building communication bridges between different groups demonstrates the effectiveness of *grassroots peacebuilding* in the context of developing countries. This also shows that harmony is not a passively created condition, but the result of active social interaction and is continuously maintained through mutually agreed cultural and institutional mechanisms. Thus, cultural dialogue in Palembang is not just a symbol of peaceful co-existence, but also a strategic form of social capital in building an inclusive society amidst the complexity of religious identities. This practice is relevant to be used as a model for community-based conflict resolution in other regions, both in Indonesia and in other countries with similar socio-religious situations. Palembang's success in maintaining harmony through dialogue shows that differences are not always a source of conflict, but can become positive social energy if managed with the right approach, participatory, and respectful of the dignity of each group.

D. Nurturing Religious Harmony in Palembang

In a pluralistic society like Palembang, maintaining inter-religious harmony is not a one-time thing. Interactions between Sunni and Shia groups that are generally peaceful still face periodic challenges that can disrupt social stability if not managed properly. One of the main challenges is the emergence of incidental tensions due to differences in beliefs, especially when certain religious symbols or practices are considered crossing the line by other groups caring for religious harmony caring for religious harmony (Jalari & Fajrul Falaah, 2022). Such tensions are not only based on theological differences, but are also influenced by complex social, political and psychological dynamics. In many cases, exclusive narratives about the single *truth* (*truth claims*) become the main trigger for latent conflict, which can then develop into open confrontation if not immediately mediated through a healthy dialogue space (Saumantri, 2022). Another significant challenge is the influx of external influences that complicate Sunni-Shia relations at the local level. The globalisation of information and the connectedness of society through digital media often bring sectarian issues from abroad into domestic social spaces (A. Fauzi, 2020). This phenomenon creates a space that magnifies global identity conflicts to the local level, making the Muslim community in Palembang part of a wider ideological battlefield. As a result, the harmony built through interpersonal relationships and local social practices can be disrupted by extreme narratives sourced from outside the Palembang context. This kind of ideological intervention requires careful handling, especially through cultural and educational policies that can strengthen the community's resistance to external incitement.

Interfaith education and dialogue are also key foundations for creating a more harmonious future. By strengthening inclusive religious literacy and expanding spaces for encounter between different groups, both at the formal and informal levels, communities can build shared trust that becomes social capital in reducing the potential for conflict (Noupal & Pane, 2017). Local initiatives such as interfaith communication forums, cooperation

between religious leaders, and community-based conflict resolution trainings can strengthen social resilience in the face of diversity dynamics. In the long run, this strategy will not only strengthen local peace, but also make Palembang an example of best practice in managing social harmony amidst the complexity of religious identities. Challenges and hopes in Sunni-Shia relations in Palembang place the issue of harmony not just as a normative discourse, but as a dynamic social process and requires collective commitment from all elements of society. The hope for a peaceful and inclusive future will not be realised without active efforts in building equitable social structures, transformative education, and nurturing cultural dialogue. Palembang, with its history and heritage of pluralism, has great potential to become a social laboratory for interfaith peace in Indonesia and the world.

Interactions between Shia and Sunni communities show a complex pattern, reflecting the social and cultural diversity of the city. In general, the relationship between these two groups is coexistence, with collaboration in various aspects of life (Noupal & Supriyanto, 2020; Nurdin et al., 2015). For example, in social activities such as community service, night watch, and religious activities at the mosque, members from both groups are often involved together, creating strong social ties. In addition, in the economic sphere, mutually beneficial relationships, with regular transactions, indicate a healthy economic integration. However, while these relationships are predominantly positive, it is not uncommon for tensions to arise fuelled by differences in beliefs. Small incidents, such as differences in the performance of worship or religious symbols, sometimes lead to disagreements. In addition, sectarian narratives that develop on social media can weaken the situation, reinforce negative stereotypes, and deepen the gap between the two groups (Hajar, 2020). This phenomenon shows that despite efforts to maintain harmony, external challenges still affect the dynamics of relations between diverse communities in Palembang.

The dynamics of relations between the Shia and Sunni communities in Palembang have a significant impact on the social structure of society. Polarisation of religious identity can weaken social cohesion, creating social boundaries that limit interactions between individuals from different groups. But on the other hand, local communities' efforts to strengthen solidarity through joint activities, such as celebrating religious holidays and social activities, show that strong social capital can be the main pillar in maintaining harmony (Strasser, 2021). The younger generation plays an important role in this process (Purnama & Nurman, 2018). Those who are exposed to information through social media often have a more open view towards differences. However, without proper guidance, they are also vulnerable to negative influences that can reduce sectarian tensions. Interfaith education and dialogue are key in shaping inclusive and moderate understanding among the younger generation.

Local governments and religious leaders have a strategic role in building and maintaining interfaith harmony. Through inclusive and dialogical policies, they can create space for Shia and Sunni communities to understand and respect each other's differences. In addition, responses to external pressures, such as the influence of transnational groups that carry sectarian narratives, require a thoughtful approach based on national values. Identity politics is also an important issue in this context. The exploitation of Sunni-Shiite issues in local political contestation can lead to polarisation and damage the social order that has been

built. Therefore, it is important for all parties to keep political identity from being used for momentary interests that can harm long-term interests. To strengthen harmony between Shia and Sunni communities in Palembang, several strategies can be implemented. Firstly, interfaith and inter-method education should be strengthened, both in formal educational institutions and in the community. Second, the establishment of a cross-community communication forum can be a forum for dialogue and mutual understanding. Third, conflict prevention based on cultural and participatory approaches, involving all elements of society, can help reduce potential tensions before they develop into open conflict. By integrating these strategies, it is hoped that Palembang City can become an example for other regions in building a harmonious and inclusive society, where differences are valued and used as a strength in building togetherness.

Conclusions

This research shows that the relationship between Shia and Sunni groups in Palembang City is very harmonious, where both have gone hand in hand, although there are some contradictions both in teachings and social practices, but the relationship between Shia and Sunni in Palembang City is relatively good and far from conflict between the two, this is because the communication that is built is not only as a flow of Islam but more towards the approach of inner bonds wrapped in marriage, education, socio-economic, and politics. It is also known that the entry and development of Islam in Palembang is estimated since the 7th century AD although there is no authentic evidence that explains the presence at that time, but it can be ascertained that Islam has become part of the forerunner of the formation of the Sultanate of Palembang Dar al-Salam. Although there are various speculations that Islam was present in the 7th century AD and developed in the 15th century AD.

The dynamics of the relationship between Shia and Sunni communities in Palembang reflect the complexity of social interaction in a pluralistic society. Despite differences of opinion, these two groups demonstrate the ability to coexist through various forms of social, economic and religious collaboration. Involvement in joint activities such as social services, night watches, and celebrations of religious holidays shows the existence of strong social ties between them. The challenges between them are always open, especially with the emergence of tensions fuelled by differences in beliefs, external influences, and the role of social media in spreading sectarian information. Community polarisation can weaken social cohesion, while younger generations exposed to information through social media often have a more open outlook towards differences, but are also vulnerable to negative influences.

In the political and policy context, local governments and religious leaders are crucial in maintaining social stability. Inclusive policies and interfaith dialogue can prevent conflict escalation. In addition, political identities that exploit Sunni-Shia issues in local political contestation should be avoided to maintain harmony. In terms of culture and education, local traditions that prioritise the values of tolerance, mutual cooperation and dialogue are important foundations in maintaining interfaith harmony. Formal and non-formal education that instils the values of religious moderation can form a young generation that is more tolerant and understands differences as wealth, not as a source of conflict. To strengthen harmony between Shia and Sunni communities in Palembang City, strategies are needed that include interfaith

and inter-school education, the establishment of cross-community communication forums, and conflict prevention based on cultural and participatory approaches. Thus, Palembang City can be an example for other regions in building a harmonious and inclusive society, where differences are valued and used as a strength in building togetherness.

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