

The Epistemology of Dissent: Ritual, Counter-Memory, and Hermeneutic Sovereignty among Shi'a Muslims in Garut, Indonesia

Hani Hanifah¹

Institut Muhammadiyah Darul Arqam Garut, Indonesia
Email: hanihanifah.staidamu@gmail.com

Asep Burhanuddin²

Institut Muhammadiyah Darul Arqam Garut, Indonesia
Email: asepburhanstaidamu@gmail.com

*Correspondence: hanihanifah.staidamu@gmail.com

Received: 2025-10-28; Revised: 2026-01-04; Accepted: 2026-01-04; Published: 2026-05-26

DOI:10.15575/Jaqfi.viii.54858

Abstract: *This article advances the thesis that the distinctive ritual practices of Indonesia's Shi'a Muslim communities tawassul (intercessory supplication through the Ahl al-Bayt), the commemoration of Ashura (10 Muharram), and the commemoration of Ghadir Khum (18 Dhu al-Hijja) function not primarily as expressions of devotional piety but as epistemological operations through which a minority community constructs and defends its hermeneutic sovereignty against majoritarian pressure. Drawing on phenomenological hermeneutics (Ricoeur), Shi'a Islamic philosophy (Corbin, Mulla Sadra), and the theory of corporeal counter-memory (Connerton), this article analyzes ethnographic data from the Majelis Tahlil dan Shalawat community in Ciparay, Garut Regency, West Java. Three key propositions are developed: tawassul enacts an ontological hierarchy of being grounded in Mulla Sadra's tashkik al-wujud; Ashura operates as a mechanism of corporeal counter-memory that transmits a counter-historiography against the Sunni majoritarian narrative; and Ghadir Khum functions as a performative speech act (in Austin's sense) that renews the community's claim to an epistemic lineage running from the Prophet through the Ahl al-Bayt. The article argues that the Glock-Stark religiosity framework dominant in Indonesian Islamic studies is structurally inadequate to capture this epistemological dimension, given its Protestant-derived belief-first assumption. It further argues that Indonesia's religious tolerance discourse requires reconceptualization beyond equal recognition of devotion toward acknowledgment of minority epistemic sovereignty in the sense theorized by Miranda Fricker.*

Keywords: Shi'a Epistemic Sovereignty; Corporeal Counter-Memory; Ontological Tawassul; Ghadir Khum Performativity

1. Introduction

A paradox has persisted for fourteen centuries without philosophical resolution. Two Muslim communities reading the same sacred text, pronouncing the same profession of faith, and orienting themselves toward the same *qibla* perform rituals that are physically identical yet reach diametrically opposing theological verdicts about those very acts. When a Shi'a Muslim recites the *doa tawassul* invoking Imam Ali ibn Abi Talib, he believes he is performing *tawhid* in its most

refined form: drawing near to God by making an intermediary of those whom God has sanctified. When a Sunni Muslim witnesses the same act, he sees with equal conviction a violation of *tawhid*: directing devotional address through anyone other than God is *shirk* or approaches it.

These two readings cannot simultaneously be correct within the same logical system. Yet they have coexisted, often within the same social space, across centuries. This is not a theological disagreement awaiting resolution through better dialogue. It is an aporia rooted in a fundamental difference of epistemology: who holds the authority to determine what counts as *tawhid* and what counts as *shirk*? Through what channel does authoritative knowledge of divine will legitimately flow? The question of epistemic authority in Islam is the philosophical core from which all Sunni-Shi'a tension from the Battle of Karbala in 61 AH/680 CE to contemporary conflicts in Indonesia ultimately radiates.

The academic study of Shi'a Muslim communities in Indonesia has grown substantially since the Iranian Revolution of 1979 and has intensified following violent incidents targeting Indonesian Shi'as in the 2000s and 2010s.¹ This literature has produced valuable sociological mapping of Shi'a communities, documented Sunni-Shi'a relational dynamics, and analyzed state responses to sectarian conflict. What it has consistently failed to produce is a philosophically adequate account of why specific Shi'a ritual practices rather than mere Shi'a presence constitute the most sensitive flashpoints of conflict. The dominant interpretive move has been to explain conflict through social factors: resource competition, political manipulation of religious identity, or straightforward ignorance and prejudice. These explanations are not wrong. They are simply insufficient. They operate at the level of the visible without interrogating the level of the epistemological.

The insufficiency is visible in the policy failure it generates. Decades of inter-religious dialogue programs, tolerance education, and official condemnations of anti-Shi'a violence have not eliminated and in some regions have not measurably reduced the intensity of communal tension. This failure is predictable: if the conflict is epistemological at its root, then interventions aimed at the devotional level will leave the conflict structurally intact. A more precise philosophical diagnosis is required before adequate remedies can be designed.

This article argues that Shi'a ritual practices in Indonesia function not primarily as expressions of devotional piety as a belief-first framework would assume but as epistemological operations. They function as exercises of *hermeneutic sovereignty*: practices through which a minority community constructs, maintains, and reproduces its right to define religious meaning from within its own epistemic framework, against the persistent pressure of a majority that contests the very legitimacy of that framework.

¹ Chiara Formichi, "Shaping Shi'a Identities in Contemporary Indonesia between Local Tradition and Foreign Influence," *Die Welt des Islams* 54, no. 3-4 (2014): 212-236; Zulkifli, *The Struggle of the Shi'is in Indonesia* (Canberra: ANU E Press, 2013), 1-30.

Three rituals from the community of Majelis Tahlil dan Shalawat in Ciparay, Garut Regency, West Java, serve as the primary analytical corpus: *tawassul* (the practice of invoking the intercession of the Prophet and the Ahl al-Bayt in supplication), the commemoration of *Ashura* (10 Muharram, commemorating the martyrdom of Imam Husayn at Karbala), and the commemoration of *Ghadir Khum* (18 Dhu al-Hijja, commemorating the Prophet's designation of Imam Ali as his successor). These three are not selected arbitrarily. They represent three distinct dimensions of Shi'a epistemological structure: *tawassul* enacts an *ontology* (a theory of the structure of being and its mediation); *Ashura* enacts a *historiography* (a theory of which events constitute Islamic history's defining moments); and *Ghadir Khum* enacts a *politeia* (a theory of who holds legitimate authority and through what succession). Together, they constitute what this article terms the Shi'a epistemic system: a coherent, internally consistent framework for determining what is true in matters of religion.

The community studied here Majelis Tahlil dan Shalawat in Ciparay, a Shi'a community in the Imamiyya or Ithna 'Ashariyya tradition was founded by Abah Wahyu Yunus, who converted to Shi'a Islam after a period of religious searching that took him through Nahdlatul Ulama and Darul Islam. The community currently operates under conditions of social pressure, practicing with varying degrees of openness depending on the religious climate in the surrounding neighborhood.² This contextual pressure the persistent experience of *taqiyya* as a lived necessity rather than a theological abstraction makes the community's ritual practices an unusually clear case study in how hermeneutic sovereignty is maintained under adversarial conditions.

The article proceeds as follows. Section 2 constructs a conceptual architecture by critically engaging the Glock-Stark framework and proposing four theoretical pillars drawn from Ricoeur, Connerton, Fricker, and the Shi'a philosophical tradition. Section 3 outlines the methodological approach. Section 4 develops three extended argumentative movements corresponding to each ritual. Section 5 synthesizes the findings into the concept of hermeneutic sovereignty and its implications for tolerance discourse. Section 6 draws philosophical conclusions, identifies the limits of this analysis, and proposes an agenda for further inquiry.

The dominance of Glock and Stark's five-dimensional religiosity framework in Indonesian Islamic studies is not an intellectual accident.³ Since its systematic introduction in the early 1990s, the framework has functioned as what Kuhn calls a disciplinary matrix⁴ a shared set of assumptions that defines which questions count as legitimate research questions and

² On the sociology of Indonesian Shi'a community organization, see Zulkifli, *The Struggle of the Shi'is in Indonesia*, 88–140. The practice of *taqiyya* (precautionary dissimulation) in this context is analyzed in Formichi, "Shaping Shi'a Identities," 220–228.

³ Charles Y. Glock and Rodney Stark, *American Piety: The Nature of Religious Commitment* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1968), 11–28; Djameludin Ancok and Fuad Nashori Suroso, *Psikologi Islami: Solusi atas Problem-Problem Psikologi* (Yogyakarta: Pustaka Pelajar, 1994), 76–89.

⁴ Thomas S. Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, 50th Anniversary ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012), 174–191. The concept of "disciplinary matrix" is developed in the postscript to the second edition.

which methods are appropriate for answering them. The framework's five dimensions ideological, ritualistic, experiential, intellectual, consequential have provided Indonesian religious studies with a workable taxonomy that translates empirical observations into commensurable data. Its uptake has been comprehensive: Shi'a community studies, Islamic religiosity scales, and comparative analyses of Muslim identity in Indonesia all routinely employ Glock-Stark as their foundational framework, with the implicit assumption that it captures the universal structure of religious experience.

The problem is architectural rather than empirical. The Glock-Stark framework was constructed within the intellectual horizon of mid-twentieth-century American sociology of religion, whose primary object was mainline Protestantism. Its foundational assumption is what this article terms the *belief-first model*: religious belief (ideology) is the primary dimension from which ritual practice is derived. Ritual, in this schema, expresses or enacts pre-existing belief. One believes in the resurrection; therefore one participates in Easter liturgy. One believes in the Five Pillars; therefore one performs *salat*. The direction of ontological dependence runs consistently from belief to practice, making ritual essentially epiphenomenal significant for its role in expressing and reinforcing belief, but deriving its meaning from that prior belief rather than generating it.⁵

This assumption, which passes unexamined in most applications of the framework, is precisely the assumption that Shi'a theological anthropology inverts. In Shi'a Islam, the concept of *wilayah* loving attachment to and acknowledgment of the Ahl al-Bayt as the legitimate continuers of prophetic authority is not a belief that produces ritual practice as its expression. It is a *habitus* in the Bourdieuan sense of a structured set of dispositions inscribed in the body through repeated practice that is constituted and reconstituted through ritual action itself.⁶ One does not first believe in *wilayah* and then perform tawassul; the repeated performance of tawassul is precisely how *wilayah* is formed, deepened, and transmitted across generations. The community in Ciparay gathers every Tuesday evening not to enact a belief they already hold independently of the ritual: the ritual is the mechanism through which the belief is sustained as a living reality rather than a propositional abstraction.

Applying the Glock-Stark model to Shi'a ritual is formally analogous to applying Newtonian mechanics to quantum phenomena: the framework produces locally coherent descriptions that nonetheless miss what is most distinctive about the object under investigation. More concretely, it produces the kind of analysis in which tawassul is classified as a "ritual dimension" expressing a "belief" in the intercession of holy persons a description that is not false but so underdetermined that it systematically fails to capture the ontological, political, and

⁵ Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007), 3–22. Taylor traces the Protestant genealogy of the belief-first model of religion and shows how it became naturalized as a universal description of religious experience, obscuring the practice-first logic of many non-Protestant traditions.

⁶ Pierre Bourdieu, *The Logic of Practice*, trans. Richard Nice (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990), 52–79; Henry Corbin, *En Islam Iranien: Aspects spirituels et philosophiques*, vol. 1 (Paris: Gallimard, 1971), 112–145.

historiographical weight the practice carries within the Shi'a epistemic system. This underdetermination is not a minor analytical limitation; it is the reason that scholarship built on this framework cannot explain why *tawassul* generates fierce theological controversy while many other Shi'a-Sunni devotional differences do not.

The conceptual architecture proposed here rests on four theoretical pillars, each addressing a dimension that the Glock-Stark framework systematically obscures. Together, they enable an analysis that moves from description to interpretation from what Shi'a communities do to what their practices claim.

The first pillar is Paul Ricoeur's phenomenological hermeneutics, particularly his concept of meaningful action as text. In *The Conflict of Interpretations* and the programmatic essay "The Model of the Text," Ricoeur argues that any significant human action not merely verbal utterance has the character of a text: it is produced by an agent, becomes detached from the intentions of that agent once performed, and opens onto a plurality of interpretations not entirely controlled by the original actor.⁷ Ritual, on this account, is not the expression of meaning already determined elsewhere. It is the *production of meaning* in the act itself a meaning that may exceed the conscious intentionality of the participants, and that acquires new layers of significance in new contexts of reception. This framework allows the analyst to ask: what argument does *tawassul* make? What claim does Ashura assert? The answer is not reducible to the informants' explicit self-description, though it must be accountable to it.

The second pillar is Paul Connerton's theory of corporeal counter-memory. In *How Societies Remember*, Connerton demonstrates that social memory including contested political memory is preserved and transmitted not primarily through written archives or explicit narration, but through commemorative ceremonies and bodily practices: structured, repeated performances that encode memory in the body of the community rather than in any individual mind.⁸ The theoretical implication for Shi'a ritual study is considerable. Ashura is not merely a commemoration of a historical event; it is a precise mechanism for encoding and transmitting a specific reading of Islamic history a reading that fundamentally challenges the majoritarian Sunni narrative. The community's body *is* the archive. This is why burning books does not eliminate the tradition, and why communal pressure to abandon the ritual is experienced as an attack on identity rather than merely on custom.

The third pillar is Miranda Fricker's concept of epistemic injustice. In *Epistemic Injustice: Power and the Ethics of Knowing*, Fricker identifies two forms of epistemic injustice relevant here: *testimonial injustice* (when a speaker's testimony is given less credence than it deserves due to

⁷ Paul Ricoeur, *The Conflict of Interpretations: Essays in Hermeneutics* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1974), 3–24; Paul Ricoeur, "The Model of the Text: Meaningful Action Considered as a Text," *Social Research* 38, no. 3 (1971): 529–562.

⁸ Paul Connerton, *How Societies Remember* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 72–104; Jan Assmann, *Cultural Memory and Early Civilization: Writing, Remembrance, and Political Imagination* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 15–43.

identity prejudice) and *hermeneutical injustice* (when someone lacks the conceptual resources to articulate their own social experience because the dominant vocabulary does not accommodate it).⁹ Indonesian Shi'a communities suffer both forms. Their self-description of their own beliefs is systematically discredited they are presumed to be concealing dangerous doctrines, never to be telling the truth about their practice. And the dominant conceptual vocabulary for discussing Islam in Indonesia derived from Sunni categories of orthodoxy and heterodoxy does not contain the resources to articulate the internal logic of Shi'a practice in terms that the majority would recognize as legitimate. The concept of *epistemic sovereignty* developed in this article is a direct extension of Fricker's framework: it designates the community's active struggle to maintain their own hermeneutical resources against this double marginalization.

The fourth pillar is the Shi'a philosophical tradition as systematized by Henry Corbin and traceable to the ontological philosophy of Mulla Sadra Shirazi. Corbin's analysis of Shi'a Islamic philosophy demonstrates that *ta'wil* the hermeneutical practice of "returning" the exoteric meaning of a text or ritual to its inner, higher significance is not a secondary addition to Shi'a practice but its constitutive operation.¹⁰ Every Shi'a ritual has a *zahiri* (exoteric) dimension and a *batini* (esoteric) dimension. The *zahiri* dimension is what external observers can describe. The *batini* dimension is what the practice means from within the *walayah* relationship that connects the practitioner to the Imam. These two dimensions are inseparable: the exoteric performance is the vehicle of the esoteric experience, and without the latter, the former is in Shi'a theological terms spiritually incomplete. This two-level structure is the reason that descriptions of Shi'a ritual from the outside, however detailed and sympathetic, consistently fail to capture what the practice is for those inside it. It also explains why dialogue that remains at the level of the *zahiri* the visible ritual forms cannot resolve the underlying tension.

Together, these four pillars form an integrated analytical framework. Ricoeur's hermeneutics provides the method for reading ritual as argument. Connerton's account of corporeal memory provides the mechanism by which the argument is transmitted across generations without requiring explicit philosophical education. Fricker's concept of epistemic injustice provides the political-philosophical frame for understanding the stakes of the community's ritual practices. And the Shi'a philosophical tradition provides the internal logic without which the external analysis remains structurally external. Together, they enable what this article calls a *hermeneutic phenomenology of epistemic practice*: an analysis that takes ritual seriously both as a phenomenon to be described and as an argument to be understood.¹¹

⁹ Miranda Fricker, *Epistemic Injustice: Power and the Ethics of Knowing* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 1–29 and 147–175.

¹⁰ Henry Corbin, *En Islam Iranien*, vol. 1, 22–68; Henry Corbin, *Spiritual Body and Celestial Earth: From Mazdean Iran to Shi'ite Iran*, trans. Nancy Pearson (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1977), 72–101.

¹¹ George Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine: Religion and Theology in a Postliberal Age* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1984), 30–72. Lindbeck's cultural-linguistic model of doctrine anticipates several of this article's claims about the practice-constitutive character of religious identity, though his framework stops short of the epistemological analysis developed here.

2. Methods

This article employs phenomenological hermeneutics as its mode of philosophical inquiry. The specific version developed here draws on Ricoeur's synthesis of Husserlian phenomenology and Gadamerian hermeneutics, articulated most clearly in "The Model of the Text" and developed across his career from *Conflict of Interpretations* to *Oneself as Another*.¹² The key methodological commitment this approach requires is a double movement: first, suspending normative judgment about the truth or falsity of Shi'a theological claims (*epoche*) in order to describe the structure of ritual as it appears within the intentional horizon of the participants; second, moving from that description to an interpretive engagement with the layers of meaning deposited in the ritual that exceed the participants' explicit self-understanding. Phenomenological hermeneutics is chosen over descriptive phenomenology alone because the rituals under analysis are not simply expressions of experience, they are arguments, ways of asserting and transmitting a contested position in an ongoing dispute about religious authority.

The analytical corpus consists of four distinct layers held in interpretive dialogue. The first layer comprises first-person informant narratives about the meaning of each ritual, gathered through in-depth interviews conducted in July 2024 with five members of the Majelis Tahlil dan Shalawat community in Ciparay, Garut: Abah Wahyu Yunus (community leader), Muhammad Ishak (ustaz and secretary), Yudi Ahmad Kamaludin, Ayi Sasmita, and Yoki Susanto (congregation members). The second layer comprises informants' descriptions of ritual practice the sequence of acts, their timing, and their prescribed forms. The third layer comprises classical Shi'a theological and philosophical texts that provide the doctrinal architecture within which informant self-understanding is situated, whether or not informants explicitly cite these texts. The fourth layer comprises the social and political context of Shi'a communities as a minority in Indonesia, including documented patterns of discrimination, legal ambiguity, and communal pressure.

The argumentative movement follows three steps. The first step establishes the epistemological character of each ritual by analyzing what claim it makes about who has the right to define religious truth moving from the phenomenological description of practice to its implicit philosophical content. The second step shows how that epistemological claim stands in structural tension with the epistemological foundations of Sunni majority Islam not as a matter of contingent disagreement but as a consequence of different foundational ontologies. The third step synthesizes these three analyses into a general account of Shi'a ritual as hermeneutic sovereignty and draws out the implications for the theory and practice of religious tolerance in Indonesia.

¹² Paul Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, trans. Kathleen Blamey (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 113–168; Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 2nd ed., trans. Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall (New York: Continuum, 2004), 277–307.

3. Results and Discussion

Tawassul: Ontology of Intercession and the Inversion of Tawhid

When the community leader of Majelis Tahlil dan Shalawat describes *tawassul* as “a supplication entrusted to those whom Allah has purified,” this single phrase encodes the entire ontological architecture of Shi’a theology. The phrase “purified by Allah” (*al-muta’harun*) is a deliberate theological allusion to Qur’an 33:33, the verse of *tathir*, which Shi’a exegesis reads as divine confirmation of the *’isma* (infallibility or immunity from error) of the Ahl al-Bayt.¹³ In the context of Shi’a theology, *’isma* is not merely a moral quality an exceptional degree of personal piety that makes the Imam an admirable model. It is an ontological quality: a constitutive feature of the Imam’s mode of being that renders him uniquely capable of receiving and transmitting prophetic knowledge without distortion. The Imam is structurally positioned between the ordinary human world and the divine source of revelation not as a god, but as the highest form of created being, the most complete mirror of the divine light.

Mulla Sadra Shirazi provides the most rigorous philosophical foundation for this ontological claim. In the *al-Asfar al-Arba’a* (The Four Intellectual Journeys), Mulla Sadra develops his doctrine of *tashkik al-wujud* the systematic gradation of being. Existence, on this account, is not a univocal concept applicable equally to all entities. It is an intensive concept: there are degrees of intensity of being, from the most attenuated at the periphery of existence to the most complete and luminous at its center, which is the Necessary Being (Allah). All other entities exist as gradations of emanation from this center, and their degree of being corresponds to their proximity to the divine source.¹⁴ The Prophets and the Imams those who have achieved what Mulla Sadra calls the state of *fana’* (annihilation of the ego-self in the divine) through the purification of the *nafs* are not ontologically equivalent to ordinary human beings. The divine light shines through them with greater intensity, not because they are not human but because the structural filters that ordinarily attenuate the divine light in human beings have, through *isma*, been removed.

Tawassul directed toward the Imams, within this framework, is not a deviation from *tawhid* but a recognition of it an acknowledgment of the ontological hierarchy of creation that *tawhid* itself implies. To pray through the Imam is to pray through the being who, of all created beings, stands closest to the divine source. The Imam is not an obstacle placed between the worshipper and God; he is the transparent medium through which divine proximity becomes

¹³ Mohammad Ali Amir-Moezzi, *The Divine Guide in Early Shi’ism: The Sources of Esotericism in Islam*, trans. David Streight (Albany: SUNY Press, 1994), 29–58; Sayyid Muhammad Husain Tabataba’i, *Al-Mizan fi Tafsir al-Qur’an*, vol. 16 (Beirut: Mu’assasat al-A’lami, 1991), 309–333.

¹⁴ Fazlur Rahman, *The Philosophy of Mulla Sadra* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1975), 26–52; Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *Islamic Philosophy from Its Origin to the Present: Philosophy in the Land of Prophecy* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2006), 179–200.

most fully accessible. The informant's phrase "those whom Allah has purified" is not devotional hyperbole. It is a precise ontological claim about the structure of creation.

This is the point at which Sunni and Shi'a epistemologies diverge not at the level of jurisprudence, where differences are substantial but negotiable, but at the level of ontology, where differences are foundational and structurally resistant to compromise. Ash'arite Sunni theology the dominant theological school in Indonesian Sunni Islam denies the existence of intermediaries who possess any special ontological status beyond the Prophet Muhammad. After the Prophet's death, the *maqam* of prophetic authority is no longer actively accessible as a living channel of transmission. *Ijma' al-sahaba* (the consensus of the Companions) and subsequently scholarly consensus take the place of living prophetic guidance as the community's epistemic anchor. Within this system, invoking Ali or Husayn as intermediaries is structurally equivalent to invoking any ordinary deceased human being and that, in the dominant Sunni theological view, constitutes *bid'a* (illicit innovation) or something approaching *shirk*.¹⁵

The conflict between these two positions cannot be resolved through dialogue, because it is not a disagreement about facts. It is a disagreement about the ontological framework within which facts are assessed. This is what Kuhn's concept of *incommensurability* captures: two paradigms that use the same vocabulary (*tawhid*, intercession, authority) but assign different conceptual contents to that vocabulary in ways that resist mutual translation without distortion. The Shi'a community in Ciparay performing *tawassul* every Tuesday evening is not simply praying it is enacting an ontology. The reason *tawassul* generates sharper controversy than many other Shi'a-Sunni differences is precisely that it makes the ontological claim explicitly, through bodily performance, in a way that makes avoidance of the underlying epistemological conflict impossible.

Ashura: Corporeal Counter-Memory and the Politics of Mourning

Connerton opens *How Societies Remember* with a deceptively simple question: how is shared knowledge of the past maintained in social groups? His answer is that the past is primarily preserved not through written archives or formal narration but through commemorative ceremonies and bodily practices structured, repeated performances that encode memory in the body of the community rather than in any individual mind or text.¹⁶ Ashura is, by this measure, one of the most sophisticated mechanisms of social memory in the history of human civilization a conclusion supported by the extraordinary persistence of the practice across fourteen centuries, through periods of active suppression, in communities separated by thousands of miles with minimal formal organizational connection.

¹⁵ Moojan Momen, *An Introduction to Shi'i Islam: The History and Doctrines of Twelver Shi'ism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985), 175–191; Richard Frank, *Al-Ghazali and the Ash'arite School* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1994), 55–78.

¹⁶ Connerton, *How Societies Remember*, 72–104; Mahmoud Ayoub, *Redemptive Suffering in Islam: A Study of the Devotional Aspects of Ashura' in Twelver Shi'ism* (The Hague: Mouton, 1978), 1–35.

On 10 Muharram, the Majelis Tahlil dan Shalawat community gathers to perform *doa ziarah* a liturgical prayer that ritually “visits” the tomb of Husayn at Karbala, collapsing the geographical distance between Garut and Iraq through ritual invocation. The community also hears the *maqatal* (a detailed narrative account of the killing of Husayn ibn Ali and his companions at Karbala in 680 CE), and chants elegiac poems commemorating Imam Husayn. Each element of this ritual complex has a specific mnemonic function. The *doa ziarah* establishes a temporal bridge between the present and 61 AH, rendering time non-linear: the community is simultaneously in contemporary Garut and present at Karbala. This temporal collapse is not a pious metaphor; it is a structural feature of the ritual’s logic, which treats Husayn’s martyrdom as an ever-present reality rather than a receding historical event. The *maqatal* encodes the details of the trauma with remarkable precision the names of each martyr, the sequence of killings, the final words of those who died so that knowledge of Karbala is not abstract historical memory but what might be called *inhabited memory*: memory that lives in the body and emotion of the community, accessible to retrieval through ritual rather than through intellectual recall. The elegiac poems train the community’s collective emotional responsiveness: the tears that flow during Ashura are not spontaneous individual expressions of grief but a corporeal practice that sharpens the community’s empathetic attunement to the tragedy and reinforces its identification with Husayn’s cause.

The philosophically critical question is: what memory, exactly, is being transmitted through this elaborate mechanism? The answer is not simply “memory of a sad historical event.” What is transmitted is a *hermeneutics of Islamic history* a way of reading the entire trajectory of Islam after the Prophet’s death that differs fundamentally from the Sunni majoritarian narrative. In the dominant Sunni narrative, Karbala is a tragedy that resulted from political miscalculation and civil strife Husayn made an *ijtihad* that proved catastrophically mistaken, and the Umayyad response, while regrettable, was not an act of fundamental illegitimacy.¹⁷ In the Shi’a narrative, Karbala is the moment at which truth (embodied in Husayn ibn Ali, the grandson of the Prophet and the son of the legitimate Imam) was confronted nakedly by power (embodied in Yazid ibn Mu’awiya, whose claim to the caliphate the Shi’a tradition regards as fundamentally illegitimate). Truth chose martyrdom over compromise. Husayn did not lose; he won, because he preserved the integrity of the imamate’s legitimate line at the cost of his life, bearing witness to the principle that no authority built on the betrayal of the Prophet’s household can claim religious legitimacy.

These two readings are not merely different emphases within a shared narrative. They entail two different evaluations of the legitimacy of Islamic history’s subsequent course. If Karbala was a tragedy resulting from Husayn’s political miscalculation, then the authority of the Umayyad dynasty and by analogical extension, the majority of Muslim political authority that has claimed Sunni legitimation across the centuries was, in retrospect, legitimate if regrettable.

¹⁷ Ayoub, *Redemptive Suffering in Islam*, 89–133; Wilferd Madelung, *The Succession to Muhammad: A Study of the Early Caliphate* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 321–341.

If Karbala was the moment at which truth was betrayed by power, then the entire subsequent history of Islamic political authority requires reading with systematic epistemic suspicion. Ashura, performed annually, is therefore a *historiographical act*, not merely a devotional one. The community that gathers to mourn Husayn is not simply expressing grief; it is making a continuing claim about how Islamic history should be read.

Foucault's analysis of counter-memory adds an indispensable further dimension.¹⁸ Power, Foucault argues, operates not only through direct coercion but through the control of legitimate knowledge the determination of which knowledges count as serious knowledge, which memories count as history, and which voices count as authoritative. The Shi'a community performing Ashura in a social environment that regards them with suspicion, and in a national religious culture that does not include Karbala as a constitutive element, is enacting what Foucault calls an *insurrection of subjugated knowledges*: a refusal to accept the majoritarian determination of which reading of the past is legitimate. The tears, the chants, the recitation of the *maqal* these are political acts in the deepest sense, not because they aim at any earthly political goal, but because they are acts of epistemic resistance against the majoritarian claim to determine what Islamic history means.

Ghadir Khum: Performative Speech Acts and Epistemic Succession

Of the three rituals under analysis, Ghadir Khum is the most directly politico-epistemological in character. On 18 Dhu al-Hijja, the community commemorates the event at which according to a hadith whose authenticity is broadly acknowledged by scholars of both Sunni and Shi'a traditions, though its interpretation remains fiercely contested the Prophet Muhammad, at a location called Ghadir Khum on the journey back from the Farewell Pilgrimage, declared: "Whoever holds me as his master (*mawla*), Ali is his master."¹⁹ This statement, uttered before a large gathering at a historically verified location, is one of the most discussed and most consequential utterances in Islamic history.

The hadith is among the most debated in Islamic history, not because its authenticity is seriously in doubt it is narrated with multiple chains of transmission in Sunni sources of high standing²⁰ but because its meaning is disputed at the most fundamental level. The Sunni interpretive tradition reads *mawla* in this context as "beloved friend" or "ally" (*wali* in the sense of affective proximity and support). The Shi'a interpretive tradition reads *mawla* as "lord" or "authority-holder" (*wali* in the sense of political-spiritual *wilayah* that includes the right to govern and to interpret revelation). This is not a philological disagreement about lexical range alone

¹⁸ Michel Foucault, "Two Lectures," in *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings, 1972–1977*, ed. Colin Gordon (New York: Pantheon, 1980), 78–108. The concept of "insurrection of subjugated knowledges" appears on p. 81.

¹⁹ Momen, *An Introduction to Shi'i Islam*, 15–18; Madelung, *The Succession to Muhammad*, 253–263.

²⁰ The hadith is transmitted in Sunni sources including al-Tirmidhi, *Sunan al-Tirmidhi*, hadith no. 3713, and Ahmad ibn Hanbal, *Musnad*, vol. 4, 281. For a comprehensive textual analysis, see Madelung, *The Succession to Muhammad*, 253–263.

though the Arabic word *mawla* does carry both senses in classical usage. It is a disagreement about what the Prophet was *doing* with language at Ghadir Khum: was he performing a speech act that installed Ali as his successor in authority, or was he making a constative assertion about his love for Ali?

J.L. Austin's distinction between constative and performative utterances provides the sharpest analytical tool available for this question.²¹ A constative utterance describes a state of affairs; its success condition is truth. A performative utterance does not describe but enacts: it brings about the state of affairs it names, provided the conditions of felicity are met the speaker has the authority to perform the act, the circumstances are appropriate, and the conventional procedures are correctly followed. "I hereby declare you husband and wife" does not describe a marriage it constitutes one. Similarly, "Whoever holds me as his master, Ali is his master," uttered by the Prophet of Islam in the presence of his entire community at the conclusion of the Farewell Pilgrimage does this enact the installation of Ali as the legitimate successor holder of authority, or does it merely report an affective relationship?

The Shi'a tradition has consistently read this as performative: the Prophet, in the fullness of prophetic authority, was installing Ali through a speech act whose felicity conditions were met the speaker had the requisite authority (divine commission), the circumstances were appropriate (the Farewell Pilgrimage, in front of the entire Muslim community), and the conventional procedure (public declaration before witnesses) was satisfied. The Sunni tradition has consistently read it as constative: the Prophet was expressing his love and support for Ali, urging the community to reciprocate that affection, but not transferring formal authority.

The implications of these two readings for Islamic epistemology are radical. If Ghadir Khum was performative if the Prophet was in fact installing Ali as the successor holder of epistemic and political authority then the epistemic succession from the Prophet runs through Ali and the subsequent Imams, and the entire edifice of Sunni epistemology grounded in *ijma' al-sahaba* and the scholarly consensus of the ulama is built on an illegitimate foundation. Authoritative knowledge of Islam does not flow democratically through the community of the Companions; it is transmitted through a specific chain of designated Imams who alone possess the *ta'wil* necessary to interpret revelation correctly. The Shi'a community in Ciparay that celebrates Ghadir Khum with a two-*rak'a* voluntary prayer, a sermon, communal supplication, and a shared meal is performing, in Austin's terms, an *illocutionary act* of renewal: reaffirming the epistemic contract that determines from whom authoritative knowledge of Islam is received. The celebration is not nostalgic historical commemoration. It is the community's periodic assertion of a specific and consequential claim about the structure of Islamic epistemological authority.

²¹ J.L. Austin, *How to Do Things with Words*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975), 1–38; John R. Searle, *Speech Acts: An Essay in the Philosophy of Language* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969), 54–71.

Ritual as Hermeneutic Sovereignty

The three analyses converge on a single larger argument. *Tawassul*, Ashura, and Ghadir Khum are not three practices that happen to coexist within the Shi'a ritual calendar by historical accident. They are the three principal expressions of a single coherent epistemological structure: the conviction that authoritative knowledge of God, of history, and of legitimate authority is accessible in its fullness only through the channel of *wilayah*: loving alignment with the Ahl al-Bayt as the legitimate heirs of prophetic authority. *Tawassul* enacts the ontological dimension of this conviction; Ashura enacts its historiographical dimension; Ghadir Khum enacts its political dimension.

A community that maintains these practices under persistent social pressure is not merely preserving customary habits or ethnic identity markers. It is exercising what Fricker's framework allows us to call *hermeneutic sovereignty*: the active maintenance of the conceptual resources necessary to articulate and defend one's own experience within one's own terms, rather than within the terms imposed by the dominant group.²² The significance of this concept for understanding Sunni-Shi'a conflict in Indonesia cannot be overstated. What is at stake is not simply the right to perform certain rituals a right that the Indonesian constitution formally guarantees. What is at stake is the right to operate a different epistemic system: a system that carries, embedded within it, an implicit critique of the Sunni majoritarian claim to define authentic Islam.

This has direct implications for the discourse of religious tolerance in Indonesia. The dominant model of tolerance in Indonesian religious policy is what this article terms *devotional tolerance*: the recognition that all religious communities have an equal right to worship their God according to their traditions. This model is expressed in the constitutional guarantee of religious freedom and in the Pancasila framework of national unity in diversity. It is a significant achievement. Devotional tolerance is structurally insufficient, however, when the conflict is epistemological rather than merely devotional. Telling the Shi'a community that they are free to pray in their own way resolves nothing if the underlying conflict is about whose framework for determining the meaning of prayer is legitimate.

What is required and what Indonesia's religious tolerance discourse has consistently failed to articulate is *epistemic tolerance*: the recognition that different communities may operate different frameworks for determining religious authority, and that none of these frameworks has an *a priori* right to be treated as the default against which others are measured as deviant. This is a considerably more demanding standard than devotional tolerance, because it requires not merely "let them pray" but "acknowledge that their way of knowing is as valid as yours." The persistent recurrence of Sunni-Shi'a conflict in Indonesia despite repeated rounds of inter-

²² Fricker, *Epistemic Injustice*, 147–175; Will Kymlicka, *Multicultural Citizenship: A Liberal Theory of Minority Rights* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 75–106.

communal dialogue is explicable, on this analysis, not as a failure of goodwill but as a structural consequence of attempting to resolve an epistemological conflict at the level of devotional accommodation.

Conclusion

This article argues that the ritual practices of the Shi'a community of Majelis Tahlil dan Shalawat in Ciparay tawassul, Ashura, and Ghadir Khum function as epistemological operations that assert hermeneutic sovereignty under majoritarian pressure. The Glock-Stark framework cannot capture this, as it treats ritual as derivative of belief rather than constitutive of it; a phenomenological-hermeneutic approach offers a more adequate lens.

More fundamentally, the article shows the limits of religious tolerance discourse in Indonesia. Tolerance at the level of devotional recognition fails to address the deeper epistemological conflict over who defines authentic Islam. A more adequate approach requires rethinking tolerance in terms of competing epistemic frameworks, closer to the political theory of recognition than to liberal models of difference.

This analysis is limited in two ways: it treats Shi'a epistemology as relatively coherent despite its lived transmission being largely oral, and it is based on a single community. Future research should therefore compare diverse Shi'a communities in Indonesia, examine how epistemological concepts are transmitted in practice, and develop a normative framework for epistemic tolerance.

Ultimately, the Sunni–Shi'a divide is not primarily about ritual difference but about authority in defining Islam. Addressing this requires philosophical, not merely sociological or legal, engagement

References

- Amir-Moezzi, Mohammad Ali. *The Divine Guide in Early Shi'ism: The Sources of Esotericism in Islam*. Translated by David Streight. Albany: SUNY Press, 1994.
- Ancok, Djamaludin, and Fuad Nashori Suroso. *Psikologi Islami: Solusi atas Problem-Problem Psikologi*. Yogyakarta: Pustaka Pelajar, 1994.
- Assmann, Jan. *Cultural Memory and Early Civilization: Writing, Remembrance, and Political Imagination*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011.
- Austin, J.L. *How to Do Things with Words*. 2nd ed. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975.
- Ayoub, Mahmoud. *Redemptive Suffering in Islam: A Study of the Devotional Aspects of Ashura' in Twelver Shi'ism*. The Hague: Mouton, 1978.
- Bourdieu, Pierre. *The Logic of Practice*. Translated by Richard Nice. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990.
- Clarke, Lynda. "The Rise and Decline of Taqiyya in Twelver Shi'ism." In *Reason and Inspiration in Islam*, edited by Todd Lawson, 46–63. London: I.B. Tauris, 2005.

- Connerton, Paul. *How Societies Remember*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989.
- Corbin, Henry. *En Islam Iranien: Aspects spirituels et philosophiques*. 4 vols. Paris: Gallimard, 1971.
- Corbin, Henry. *Spiritual Body and Celestial Earth: From Mazdean Iran to Shi'ite Iran*. Translated by Nancy Pearson. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1977.
- Donner, Fred. *Muhammad and the Believers: At the Origins of Islam*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2010.
- Formichi, Chiara. "Shaping Shi'a Identities in Contemporary Indonesia between Local Tradition and Foreign Influence." *Die Welt des Islams* 54, no. 3-4 (2014): 212-236.
- Formichi, Chiara. *Islam and the Making of the Nation: Kartosuwiryo and Political Islam in Twentieth-Century Indonesia*. Leiden: KITLV Press, 2012.
- Foucault, Michel. "Two Lectures." In *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings, 1972-1977*, edited by Colin Gordon, 78-108. New York: Pantheon, 1980.
- Frank, Richard. *Al-Ghazali and the Ash'arite School*. Durham: Duke University Press, 1994.
- Fricker, Miranda. *Epistemic Injustice: Power and the Ethics of Knowing*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007.
- Gadamer, Hans-Georg. *Truth and Method*. 2nd ed. Translated by Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall. New York: Continuum, 2004.
- Glock, Charles Y., and Rodney Stark. *American Piety: The Nature of Religious Commitment*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1968.
- Hallaq, Wael. *Sharia: Theory, Practice, Transformations*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009.
- Kuhn, Thomas S. *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*. 50th Anniversary ed. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012.
- Kymlicka, Will. *Multicultural Citizenship: A Liberal Theory of Minority Rights*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995.
- Lindbeck, George A. *The Nature of Doctrine: Religion and Theology in a Postliberal Age*. Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1984.
- Madelung, Wilferd. *The Succession to Muhammad: A Study of the Early Caliphate*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997.
- Momen, Moojan. *An Introduction to Shi'i Islam: The History and Doctrines of Twelver Shi'ism*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985.
- Mulla Sadra (Sadr al-Din al-Shirazi). *Al-Hikma al-Muta'aliya fi'l-Asfar al-'Aqliyya al-Arba'a*. 9 vols. Tehran: Maktabat al-Mustafawi, 1981.
- Nasr, Seyyed Hossein. *Islamic Philosophy from Its Origin to the Present: Philosophy in the Land of Prophecy*. Albany: SUNY Press, 2006.
- Nasr, Vali. *The Shia Revival: How Conflicts within Islam Will Shape the Future*. New York: Norton, 2006.
- Rahman, Fazlur. *The Philosophy of Mulla Sadra*. Albany: SUNY Press, 1975.

Ricoeur, Paul. *The Conflict of Interpretations: Essays in Hermeneutics*. Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1974.

Ricoeur, Paul. "The Model of the Text: Meaningful Action Considered as a Text." *Social Research* 38, no. 3 (1971): 529–562.

Ricoeur, Paul. *Oneself as Another*. Translated by Kathleen Blamey. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992.

Searle, John R. *Speech Acts: An Essay in the Philosophy of Language*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969.

Tabataba'i, Sayyid Muhammad Husain. *Al-Mizan fi Tafsir al-Qur'an*. 20 vols. Beirut: Mu'assasat al-'Alami, 1991.

Taylor, Charles. "The Politics of Recognition." In *Multiculturalism: Examining the Politics of Recognition*, edited by Amy Gutmann, 25–73. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994.

Taylor, Charles. *A Secular Age*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007.

Zulkifli. *The Struggle of the Shi'is in Indonesia*. Canberra: ANU E Press, 2013.