

Converging Religious Doctrine: Sunni-Shi'i Marriages in Indonesia

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ABSTRACT

Taking the floor in Bondowoso, this article sheds light on the cross marriage practices between Sunni-Shi'i communities. The main question addresses how the marriages converge religious norms and socio-cultural dynamics, considering the significant theological differences between the two. This study positions itself within the context of Islamic jurisprudence, highlighting the normative differences in marriage practices between Sunni-Shi'i traditions. Through in-depth interviews and participant observation, the findings reveal that love, economic considerations, and strong social support play crucial roles in overriding the different doctrines. Sunni-Shi'i couples in Bondowoso successfully take care of their relationships through mutual respect and open communication, contributing to broader social cohesion. The marriages between Sunni and Shi'i individuals in Bondowoso adhered to a combination of religious and state legal frameworks to ensure legitimacy and social acceptance. Some couples followed the Sunni Shafi'i school of thought ensuring that the marriage contract (*akad nikah*) included the presence of two witnesses and the guardian (*wali*) for the bride. In cases where Shi'i traditions were incorporated, the ceremony sometimes included additional blessings or teachings from Shi'i scholars, while the concept of temporary marriage (*mut'ah*) was explicitly avoided due to broader Sunni opposition. Additionally, all marriages were officially registered under Indonesia's state law through the Office of Religious Affairs (KUA), aligning with national legal requirements for marriage recognition.

[Berlatar di Bondowoso, artikel ini menyoroti praktik pernikahan antara anggota komunitas Sunni dan Syiah. Pertanyaan utama yang dibahas adalah bagaimana pernikahan tersebut mengharmoniskan norma-norma agama dan dinamika sosial budaya, mengingat adanya perbedaan teologis yang signifikan di antara keduanya. Studi ini berada dalam konteks yurisprudensi Islam, dengan menyoroti perbedaan normatif dalam praktik pernikahan antara tradisi Sunni dan Syiah. Melalui wawancara mendalam dan observasi partisipatif, temuan penelitian ini mengungkap bahwa cinta, pertimbangan ekonomi, dan dukungan sosial yang kuat memainkan peran penting dalam mengatasi perbedaan doktrin. Pasangan Sunni-Syiah di Bondowoso berhasil menjaga hubungan mereka melalui saling menghormati dan komunikasi yang terbuka, yang pada akhirnya berkontribusi terhadap kohesi sosial yang lebih luas. Pernikahan antara anggota Sunni dan Syiah di Bondowoso mengikuti kombinasi kerangka hukum

agama dan negara untuk memastikan legitimasi serta penerimaan sosial. Beberapa pasangan sengaja mengikuti mazhab Syafi'i dengan memastikan bahwa akad nikah dilaksanakan dengan kehadiran dua saksi serta wali bagi mempelai wanita. Dalam kasus di mana tradisi Syiah turut dimasukkan, upacara pernikahan terkadang mencakup doa tambahan atau pengajaran dari ulama Syiah, sementara konsep pernikahan temporer (*mut'ah*) secara eksplisit dihindari karena adanya penolakan yang luas dari kalangan Sunni. Selain itu, semua pernikahan secara resmi didaftarkan sesuai dengan hukum negara melalui KUA, sejalan dengan persyaratan hukum nasional untuk pengakuan pernikahan.]

KEYWORDS

Sunni-Shi'i marriage, mut'a, Shi'i community, love, religious doctrine

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Introduction

Research on Sunni-Shi'i relations in Indonesia is typically conducted from a conflict perspective.¹ Interactions between the Sunni and Shi'i communities are often framed within historical tensions, doctrinal differences,² and even intense clashes that extend into various social spheres, including marriage and divorce.³ Such sectarian conflicts lead to social fragmentation and reinforce longstanding prejudices about the 'toxic' nature of their relationship.⁴ In contrast, this pattern does not hold in Bondowoso, where inter-sect Sunni-Shi'i marriages are more common and socially accepted. This phenomenon has drawn researchers' attention, as it suggests that love between individuals—along with other factors such as economic considerations and community support—can help overcome

¹ Ahmad Zainal Abidin et al., *Between Conflict and Peace: The Government Policies and Sunni-Shi'i Relationship in Sampang and Yogyakarta*, vol. 21, no. 2 (2020), <http://ejournal.uin-suka.ac.id/ushuluddin/esensia>, accessed 20 Jul 2022.

² Ahmad Fauzan, *Doctrinal Differences and Social Cohesion: A Study of Sunni-Shi'i Interactions*.

³ Muhammad Fauzinuddin Faiz, *Dekonstruksi Fiqh Talak: Konsep Dan Pembacaan Ulang Dalam Studi Hukum Islam* (Yogyakarta: Pustaka Ilmu, 2019).

⁴ Rahmat Hidayat and Dina Pratiwi, "The Influence of Legal Education on Understanding Joint Property in Marriage Among Urban Communities," *Indonesian Journal of Islamic Law* 3, no. 1 (June 25, 2020): 35–51, <https://doi.org/10.35719/ijil.v3i1.2028>.

theological boundaries that have long been perceived as rigid in mainstream discourse.

Studies on Sunni-Shi'i relations in Indonesia have largely focused on the historical and theological tensions between these two sects. For instance, Hasan explores the historical roots of sectarianism and its impact on social dynamics within Indonesian Muslim communities.⁵ Similarly, Ahmad examines how deep theological differences hinder social integration and often lead to conflict. These studies argue that Sunni-Shi'i Islamic doctrines are fundamentally incompatible, creating persistent barriers to harmonious relations and inter-sect marriages. Additionally, Yusof explores the efforts of religious institutions in promoting dialogue and understanding between the two sects but concludes that these initiatives often fall short in bridging their doctrinal divides.

A study closely related to this paper is Musdhalifah's research, which analyzes how the Sunni-Shi'i community in Kampung Arab, Bondowoso, has successfully integrated their differences through inter-sect marriages. Musdhalifah finds that strong cultural and historical ties, along with the active role of community leaders in mediation and support, facilitate this amalgamation. She also notes that despite significant theological differences, everyday practices and the adaptability of local culture help ease tensions and foster social cohesion.⁶ In contrast, our article situates itself within the context of Bondowoso, where, despite normative doctrinal differences, the Sunni and Shi'i communities engage in inter-sect marriages with notable frequency and social acceptance. This study argues that the unique socio-cultural and economic conditions in Bondowoso create a conducive environment for such marriages, challenging the notion that Sunni-Shi'i doctrines are insurmountable barriers.

My research aims to contribute to the academic debate by providing empirical evidence that demonstrates how love, economic interdependence, and community support can transcend theological mandates. By highlighting the successful negotiation of love and faith in Bondowoso, this article suggests that under certain conditions, it is possible to foster social cohesion and harmony between Sunni and Shi'i communities, offering a fresh perspective on inter-sect relations in Indonesia.

This research employs a qualitative approach conducted over nearly a year, from February 2023 to early 2024. The study primarily utilizes in-depth interviews and participatory observation as data collection techniques. A total of 30 informants were interviewed, including 15 key informants: Sunni-Shi'i couples, six community leaders from both sects, four religious officials and *keluarga sakinah* counselors from the Office of Religious Affairs (*KUA*), three judges and mediators from the Religious Court (*PA*), and two representatives from the

⁵ Wardatul Asfiah, "Akulturasi Budaya Arab Dan Lokal Dalam Membangun Harmoni Sosial Pada Masyarakat Kademangan Bondowoso," *Mozaic: Islamic Studies* 01, no. 01 (2022).

⁶ Musdhalifah Musdhalifah, "Interfaith Marriage Between Sunni And Shi'i: A Phenomenological Study In The Bondowoso Arab Community", *Suparyanto dan Rosad* (2015, vol. 5, no. 3 (2020): 248-53.

Indonesian Ulema Council (*MUI*) of Bondowoso. The remaining 15 informants were interviewed for data validation and triangulation purposes.

Observations were conducted during various community events, religious gatherings, and household interactions to gain a comprehensive understanding of the ongoing social dynamics. The collected data was analyzed using thematic analysis to identify patterns and themes related to love, economic factors, and community support in facilitating Sunni-Shi'i marriages. The theoretical framework guiding this analysis is based on Parsons' structural functionalism and social cohesion theory, which is further elaborated with Abdullah Saeed's perspective on religious understanding. This combined framework provides a lens to examine how these marriages contribute to broader community unity. This approach enables a deeper understanding of how inter-sect marriages are negotiated and sustained within Bondowoso's unique socio-cultural context.

The unique characteristics of Sunni-Shi'i marriages in Bondowoso can be attributed to the region's socio-cultural structure. Bondowoso exhibits a high degree of ethnic and religious assimilation, which significantly contributes to creating an environment where inter-sect marriages are not only possible but also widely accepted. The population of Bondowoso consists of a heterogeneous mix of Javanese, Madurese, and Arab communities, each of which contributes its distinct customs and cultural practices to the social fabric.⁷ This diversity has fostered a culture characterized by tolerance and mutual respect, which is essential for accepting marriages that unite individuals from different religious backgrounds.

The integration of these communities is evident in their social customs and daily interactions. Local culture places a greater emphasis on maintaining social harmony and collective well-being rather than strictly adhering to religious doctrines. The high level of prosocial behavior within the community, such as mutual assistance and collaboration across ethnic and religious groups, clearly reflects a pragmatic approach.⁸ These interactions not only strengthen social bonds but also create a supportive environment for inter-sect marriages, which might otherwise be considered controversial. This dynamic has long been observed in Bondowoso.

The pragmatic approach to marriage in this region reflects an ongoing negotiation between love, faith, and socio-economic realities, resulting in a unique fusion of religious practices and cultural traditions. Several factors are believed to contribute to the prevalence and acceptance of Sunni-Shi'i marriages in Bondowoso. For instance, the local culture, characterized by a high level of ethnic

⁷ Radar Digital, "Kebudayaan Bondowoso yang Terbilang Unik Harus Diperkuat dengan Peraturan Daerah - Radar Jember," *Kebudayaan Bondowoso yang Terbilang Unik Harus Diperkuat dengan Peraturan Daerah - Radar Jember*, accessed July 28, 2024, <https://radarjember.jawapos.com/bondowoso/793063777/kebudayaan-bondowoso-yang-terbilang-unik-harus-diperkuatdenganperaturan-daerah>.

⁸ Ahmad Izzat Fannani, Amran Khaliqurrahman, and Isla Rania, "Balancing Justice and Tradition: An Islamic Legal Perspective on Constitutional Court Rulings Regarding Marriage Age," *Indonesian Journal of Islamic Law* 7, no. 2 (2024): 105–31, <https://doi.org/10.35719/e2ay6682>.

and religious integration, and the historical background of the community—shaped by a mix of Javanese, Madurese, and Arab influences—have fostered a culture of tolerance and mutual respect. Additionally, economic interdependence within these communities often necessitates cooperation and harmonious relationships, further encouraging inter-sect marriages.

The phenomenon of Sunni-Shi'i marriages in Bondowoso provides valuable insight into how communities can navigate theological differences and foster social harmony through pragmatic and inclusive practices. This study seeks to explore these dynamics further, offering a deeper understanding of the interaction between religious norms, the possibilities of love and emotional bonds, and socio-economic factors in shaping inter-sect marriage practices within these communities.

Sunni-Shi'i Marriage Practices in Bondowoso: Reasons for Cross-Sectarian Marriages

Sunni-Shi'i inter-sect marriages are practiced in nearly every district of Bondowoso, with their main hubs located in Kademangan (locally known as *Kampung Arab*) and Jembesari.⁹ In Kademangan, inter-sect marriages primarily involve Sunni Arabs and Shi'i Arabs, whereas in Jembesari, they take place between indigenous Sunni and indigenous Shi'i individuals.¹⁰ These locations serve as focal points for the unique phenomenon of inter-sect marriages in Bondowoso, despite the significant theological differences between the two groups.

The practice of inter-sect marriages in Bondowoso can be traced back to the region's long history as a hub of cultural exchange and trade, which brought together various ethnic and religious groups.¹¹ Since the Dutch colonial era, Bondowoso has been a strategic area due to its location along key trade routes.¹² This led to the influx of various migrant groups, including Arab communities who brought diverse Islamic traditions. These communities then interacted with the predominantly Sunni Muslim local population, as well as smaller groups such as the Shi'i.¹³ This dynamic fostered acculturation and cultural adaptation, including in religious practices and marriage traditions.

Based on observations and in-depth interviews with inter-sect couples, it was found that the marriage process in Bondowoso involves adjustments and adaptations from both sides. Couples often incorporate elements from both Sunni and Shi'i traditions into their wedding ceremonies, creating an inclusive practice

⁹ Wakhid Sugiyarto, "Dinamika Syiah Di Bondowoso Jawa Timur," in *Dinamika Syiah Di Indonesia* (Puslitbang Bimas Agama Dan Layanan Keagamaan Badan Litbang Dan Diklat Kementerian Agama, 2017).

¹⁰ *Sugiyarto*.

¹¹ Asfiah, "Akulturasi Budaya Arab Dan Lokal Dalam Membangun Harmoni Sosial Pada Masyarakat Kademangan Bondowoso."

¹² Muhammad Hidayat, "Menengok Kembali Budaya Dan Masyarakat Megalitik Bondowoso," *Berkala Arkeologi* 27, no. 1 (May 28, 2007): 19–30, <https://doi.org/10.30883/jba.v27i1.940>.

¹³ Asfiah, "Akulturasi Budaya Arab Dan Lokal Dalam Membangun Harmoni Sosial Pada Masyarakat Kademangan Bondowoso."

that respects both beliefs. The flexibility and openness within this community allow inter-sect marriages to take place and gain social acceptance. However, when examined from a principled perspective, this integration occurs only in the secular aspects of the marriage.¹⁴ One of the informants, Nabil (35), a Sunni who married Shi'i women named Fatimah (33), explained:

When we decided to get married, we knew there would be challenges from our families and communities. However, we agreed to incorporate elements from both of our wedding traditions. During the marriage ceremony, we invited scholars from both sides to offer prayers and advice. This made our families feel respected and included in the ceremony.¹⁵

This process of adaptation extends beyond the wedding ceremony and continues into their daily lives as a married couple. For instance, when it comes to religious celebrations, they make an effort to observe important occasions from both traditions. Fatimah shared:

We celebrate Eid al-Fitr and Eid al-Adha together, but we also commemorate Ashura according to Shi'i tradition. Ahmad is very supportive and even helps with the preparations. This reflects mutual respect and acceptance of each other's beliefs.¹⁶

Another couple, Zaenab (30) and Ali (32), who are also in an inter-sect marriage, described how they adjust their religious practices to ensure that both partners feel comfortable and respected.

We have an agreement to raise our children with an inclusive understanding of Islam," Ali said. "We teach them about the history and traditions of both sects so they can understand and appreciate the differences.¹⁷

The adaptive approach demonstrated by these couples illustrates their ability to negotiate identity within a diverse social context.¹⁸ From a social science perspective, this practice reflects cultural assimilation and religious pluralism, where individuals can maintain their religious identities while fostering social harmony.¹⁹ By integrating elements from both traditions and prioritizing inclusive education for their children, these couples not only reaffirm their commitment to their relationship but also promote diversity and tolerance within their community. This reflects symbolic interactionism theory, which emphasizes the importance of meaning created through social interactions in shaping individual

¹⁴ Husein Ja'far Al Hadar, "Sunni-Syiah Di Indonesia: Jejak Dan Peluang Rekonsiliasi," *MAARIF Institute for Culture and Humanity* 10, no. 2 (Desember 2015): 106–29.

¹⁵ Yek Nabil and Syarifah Fatimah, couple of Sunni-Shi'i marriage, September 9, 2023, Kademangan Bondowoso.

¹⁶ *Nabil and Fatimah*.

¹⁷ Zaenab and Ali couple of Sunni-Shi'i marriage, April 5, 2023, Kademangan Bondowoso.

¹⁸ Nathan James Bennett et al., "Communities and Change in the Anthropocene: Understanding Social-Ecological Vulnerability and Planning Adaptations to Multiple Interacting Exposures," *Regional Environmental Change* 16, no. 4 (April 2016): 907–26, <https://doi.org/10.1007/S10113-015-0839-5>.

¹⁹ Roger Boase and Hasan, eds., *Islam and Global Dialogue: Religious Pluralism and the Pursuit of Peace* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2010).

and group identities.²⁰ This practice also extends to important household decision-making. In many cases, Sunni-Shi'i couples in Bondowoso demonstrate remarkable negotiation and compromise skills. Darwis al-Gadri and Fatimah, for example, have established household rules that incorporate elements from both traditions.

We strive to make decisions together and always communicate openly," said al-Gadri. "For instance, when it comes to our children's education, we ensure they learn about both traditions so that they can choose the path that suits them best when they grow up."²¹

Support from various communities in Bondowoso, such as MUI²², FKUB²³, NU²⁴, Muhammadiyah²⁵, and government institutions, reflects the application of Parsons' structural functionalism (living theory) within this society. Parsons argues that social institutions, including religious bodies and community organizations, play a crucial role in maintaining social stability by facilitating adaptation and integration.²⁶ In the context of Bondowoso, these institutions not only mediate relationships between inter-sect couples but also promote the values of inclusivity and tolerance, which are essential elements in fostering social cohesion.²⁷

Furthermore, Parsons' theory highlights the importance of shared values in strengthening social solidarity. The support from the aforementioned communities reflects a value consensus that emphasizes unity and harmony within society. This support creates a normative framework that enables inter-sect couples to navigate their married lives with a sense of security and social acceptance.²⁸ This also demonstrates how the social structure in Bondowoso can accommodate diversity without compromising social cohesion.

On the other hand, Saeed's theory of contextualism in religious interpretation provides insight into how these institutions adapt religious teachings to the local social realities.²⁹ Saeed emphasizes that religious understanding should be contextual, meaning that religious teachings must be interpreted while taking into

²⁰ Ari Cahyo Nugroho, "Teori Utama Sosiologi (Fungsionalisme Struktural, Teori Konflik, Interaksi Simbolik)," *Majalah Ilmiah Semi Populer Komunikasi Massa* 2, no. 2 (2021): 185–94.

²¹ Muhammad Darwis al Gadri and Fatimah, couple of Sunni-Shi'i marriage, November 20, 2023.

²² Asy'ari Fasya, Chairman of the Indonesian Ulema Council, Bondowoso Regency, October 18, 2023, Bondowoso.

²³ Syaiful Haq, Chairman of Forum for Religious Harmony in Bondowoso Regency, December 17, 2023.

²⁴ Imam Barmawi Burhan, Nahdlatul Ulama figur in Bondowoso, December 12, 2023, Bondowoso.

²⁵ Abdul Rozak, Chairman Muhammadiyah Bondowoso, November 2, 2023, Bondowoso.

²⁶ Talcott Parsons, "The Theory of Human Behavior in Its Individual and Social Aspects," *The American Sociologist* 27, no. 4 (February 1996): 13–23.

²⁷ Fauzan, *Doctrinal Differences and Social Cohesion: A Study of Sunni-Shi'i Interactions*.

²⁸ Talcott Parsons, "Prolegomena to a Theory of Social Institutions," *American Sociological Review* 55, no. 3 (February 1990): 319–33, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2095758>.

²⁹ Abdullah Saeed, *Freedom of Religion, Apostasy and Islam* (Routledge, 2017).

account the existing social and cultural conditions.³⁰ In Bondowoso, this approach is reflected in the stance of religious institutions that support inter-sect marriages by emphasizing universal Islamic principles such as love, compassion, and tolerance.³¹ These institutions adapt religious teachings to the region's diverse local context, which in turn strengthens social integration and reduces the potential for conflict.³²

The combination of Parsons' structural functionalism and Saeed's contextualism helps explain how the Bondowoso community maintains social stability despite doctrinal differences in religious practices. Support from various communities and institutions demonstrates that, with proper adaptation, differences do not have to be a source of conflict but can instead serve as a strength in fostering an inclusive and harmonious society. The subdistrict head (*Camat*) of Jambesari, Bondowoso, stated:

Here, we respect differences and support couples who choose to marry across sects. We believe that love and unity are more important than theological differences. That is what makes our community strong and harmonious.³³

Thus, the practice of inter-sect marriages in Bondowoso not only reflects the flexibility and openness of the individuals involved but also highlights the broad community support they receive. The experiences of these couples demonstrate that with love, open communication, and strong social support, inter-sect marriages can thrive and even enrich the broader community.³⁴ Sunni-Shi'i marriages in Bondowoso offer a unique and dynamic model of how differences can be effectively managed through love and mutual respect for each other's beliefs. Misbah, a religious counselor in Bondowoso, stated:

Love is the essence of religion. Even though most Sunni-Shi'i couples do not fully understand their partner's doctrinal background, they know they are in love and want to build a life together. As long as they are willing to negotiate what practices to follow and which ones to set aside, that is enough for me to support their marriage. Here, there are no temporary 'Mut'ah' marriages because we always establish this as a prerequisite in every marriage ceremony. The Shi'i community agrees to this since many of them do not adhere to that doctrine either.³⁵

³⁰ Abdullah Saeed, "Ijtihad and Innovation in Neo-modernist Islamic Thought in Indonesia," *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations* 8, no. 3 (October 1997): 279–95, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09596419708721127>.

³¹ Abdul Hamid, "Abdullah Saeed's Progressive Ijtihad in the Application of Rechtsvinding Judges in Religious Courts," *Indonesian Journal of Islamic Law* 5, no. 2 (2022): 1–17, <https://doi.org/10.35719/ijil.v5i2.824>.

³² Abdullah Saeed, "Inclusivism and Exclusivism among Muslims Today between Theological and Social Dimensions" (S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies, 2020), <https://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep40180>.

³³ Mohammad Taufan, Sub-district Head of Jambesari, January 25, 2023.

³⁴ Gary F Bell, "Multiculturalism In Law Is Legal Pluralis: Lessons From Indonesia, Singapore And Canada," *Singapore Journal of Legal Studies*, 2006, 315–30.

³⁵ Misbah Salam, Penyuluh Agama & Koordinator Moderasi Beragama KUA Jembesari, June 1, 2024, Jembesari Bondowoso.

From the perspective of social phenomenon theory, Misbah's statement can be analyzed as a manifestation of social adaptation dynamics within a heterogeneous society.³⁶ In structural functionalism theory, developed by Parsons, society is viewed as a system composed of interrelated parts that work together to maintain stability and balance. Misbah illustrates how love and practical negotiation serve as mechanisms for overcoming complex doctrinal differences between the Sunni and Shi'i communities in Bondowoso.³⁷ This phenomenon supports the theory that social interaction and cultural adaptation have the ability to diffuse ideological tensions and foster social harmony.³⁸ By emphasizing the importance of love and compromise, and by establishing clear boundaries—such as the rejection of *mut'ah* practices—the Bondowoso community demonstrates its ability to prioritize inclusive and pragmatic social values over rigid religious dogma. This, in turn, strengthens social cohesion and enhances community stability.

Based on the experiences of those involved, several key factors motivate individuals to enter inter-sect marriages. The most dominant reason is love.³⁹ Many couples express that a strong emotional bond and love are the primary drivers for pursuing marriage, despite coming from different religious backgrounds.⁴⁰ Economic factors also play a significant role, as many couples view marriage as a means to enhance financial stability through mutual support.⁴¹ Strong community support also plays a significant role, as the surrounding society provides moral and social encouragement to inter-sect couples, helping to alleviate potential tensions and conflicts arising from theological differences.⁴² Fauzi (49), a Sunni who married Tala' (46),⁴³ a Shi'i girl, explained: "

At first, we often met at work. From there, we got to know each other and realized that we had many similarities beyond our religious differences. Over time, our emotional bond grew, and love became the strong foundation that led us to marriage.

The habit of meeting at work has been a significant factor, as reflected in the Javanese proverb "*Witing tresno jalaran soko kulino*", which means *love grows*

³⁶ Bernard Barber, "Talcott Parsons on the Social System: An Essay in Clarification and Elaboration," *Sociological Theory* 12, no. 1 (February 1994): 101–5, <https://doi.org/10.2307/202038>.

³⁷ Alvin Boskoff, "The Systematic Sociology of Talcott Parsons," *Social Forces* 28, no. 4 (1950): 393–400, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2572249>.

³⁸ Yao-Chia Chuang, "Effects of Interaction Pattern on Family Harmony and Well-being: Test of Interpersonal Theory, Relational-Models Theory, and Confucian Ethics," *Asian Journal of Social Psychology* 8, no. 3 (2005): 272–91.

³⁹ Siti Sarah Muwahidah, "For the Love of Ahl Al-Bayt: Transcending Sunni-Shi'i Sectarian Allegiance," *Journal of Shi'a Islamic Studies* 9, no. 3 (2016): 327–58.

⁴⁰ Llewellyn Howes, "Editorial: Faith and Love; Spirituality and Humility," *Neotestamentica* 51, no. 1 (2017): 1–4.

⁴¹ Nathan J. Bennett et al., "The Capacity to Adapt?: Coastal Communities in a Changing Climate, Environment, and Economy on the Northern Andaman Coast of Thailand," *Ecol Soc* 19, no. 2 (2014): 5, <https://doi.org/10.5751/es-06315-190205>.

⁴² Parsons, "Prolegomena to a Theory of Social Institutions."

⁴³ Fauzi Thamrin and Tala', couple of Sunni-Shi'i marriage, March 15, 2024, Bondowoso.

through familiarity. Sulis (38) and Mahfid (41),⁴⁴ a couple working at the same company, shared:

We often worked together on the same team and were involved in major projects. This closeness fostered mutual understanding and love, which eventually led us to an inter-sect marriage.

Similarly, for couples like Rini (35) and Agus (39),⁴⁵ both market vendors, their daily encounters while serving customers and helping each other when stock ran low created a sense of mutual reliance, which eventually blossomed into love. These conditions suggest that routine interactions in work or trade settings can bridge theological differences and lead couples to inter-sect marriages.”Meanwhile, Zaenab (30) and Ali (32)⁴⁶ mentioned that their primary motivation for marriage was economic stability. Ali said:

We both work in the same sector and realized that by combining our incomes, we could achieve greater financial security. An inter-sect marriage became a practical solution for us to reach this shared goal.

Several couples also noted that the habit of meeting at work played a crucial role in their decision to marry. For instance, Jakfar (28) and Aisyah (26),⁴⁷ who work at the same company, shared:

At work, we often collaborated on major projects. This intense interaction allowed us to understand each other better and break down theological barriers. Love grew from there, and we decided to get married.

The phenomenon of inter-sect marriages driven by economic factors and workplace interactions demonstrates how social interactions and emotional connections can overcome deep theological differences.⁴⁸ Social structures and dynamics often shape both individual and collective behavior, including the choice of a life partner.⁴⁹ Frequent encounters at the workplace create opportunities for intensive interactions, which gradually foster mutual understanding and love.⁵⁰ In this context, love or emotional bonds serve as a dominant force, enabling individuals to transcend doctrinal boundaries and build harmonious relationships.⁵¹ Thus, love functions not only as the primary driver of marriage but

⁴⁴ Sulis and Mahfid, couple of Sunni-Shi'i marriage, February 20, 2024, Jembesari Bondowoso.

⁴⁵ Rini and Agus Miswanto, couple of Sunni-Shi'i marriage, January 15, 2024, Jembesari Bondowoso.

⁴⁶ Zaenab and Muhdlor, couple of Sunni-Shi'i marriage.

⁴⁷ Jakfar and Aisyah, couple of Sunni-Shi'i marriage, May 10, 2023, Jembesari Bondowoso.

⁴⁸ Janaki Abraham, “Contingent Caste Endogamy and Patriarchy: Lessons for Our Understanding of Caste,” *Economic and Political Weekly* 49, no. 2 (2014): 56–65.

⁴⁹ Zulkifli, “The dynamics of Sunni-Shi'i integration in Indonesia: a structural-functional perspective,” *IJoReSH: Indonesian Journal of Religion, Spirituality, and Humanity*, vol. 2, no. 2 (2023), pp. 136–57.

⁵⁰ Patrick Masterson, “Love and Faith,” in *In Reasonable Hope*, Philosophical Reflections on Ultimate Meaning (Catholic University of America Press, 2021), 159–63, <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv1khdqhh.16>.

⁵¹ Sushma Kavikondala et al., “Structure and Validity of Family Harmony Scale: An Instrument for Measuring Harmony,” *Psychological Assessment* 28, no. 3 (2016): 307.

also as a social mechanism that facilitates cohesion and integration within a diverse society.

Community support also plays a crucial role in sustaining inter-sect marriages. A community leader, (*Camat*) in Kademangan, Bondowoso, stated:

Here, the community strongly supports couples who choose inter-sect marriages. They provide significant moral and social encouragement, making these couples feel accepted and valued. This greatly helps to reduce the pressures associated with theological differences.⁵²

Additionally, some couples receive encouragement from their parents to pursue inter-sect marriages as a means of achieving family prestige and improving economic conditions. Fadli (34), a Sunni, and his wife, Masruroh (31), a Shi'i, shared.

Our parents saw this marriage as an opportunity to strengthen ties between our extended families and improve our family's financial situation. They were very supportive and encouraged us to go through with it.⁵³

Community support and family encouragement for inter-sect marriages in Bondowoso can be seen as part of an interconnected social system. According to Parsons, society consists of subsystems that interact to achieve social balance and integration. The moral and social support from the community, as described by *Camat* Bondowoso,⁵⁴ functions as a mechanism of adaptation and integration, reinforcing social cohesion. Meanwhile, parental encouragement to achieve family prestige and economic stability through inter-sect marriages reflects the goal attainment and pattern maintenance functions within the social system.

Each element—community support, family encouragement, and emotional relationships between couples—is interconnected, forming a new, more inclusive and harmonious social structure. This creates an environment where theological differences can be negotiated and integrated into broader social practices, resulting in a more dynamic and diverse society. Thus, the reasons behind inter-sect marriages in Bondowoso are highly diverse and reflect the social and cultural complexity of the community. Love, economic stability, frequent interactions at the workplace, and community support all play crucial roles in motivating couples to marry despite significant theological differences. Additionally, parental encouragement to achieve family prestige and improve their social and economic status also holds significant influence. This suggests that inter-sect marriages are not solely driven by emotional factors but are also shaped by broader practical and social considerations.

⁵² Suhaji, Sub-district Head of Kademangan, May 3, 2023, Bondowoso.

⁵³ Muhsin Fadli and Masruroh, couple of Sunni-Shi'i marriage, June 20, 2023, Kademangan Bondowoso.

⁵⁴ Mohammad Taufan, *Camat* Jembesari, July 1, 2023, Jembesari Bondowoso.

Crossing the Lines of Sunni-Shi'i Marriages: Challenging Status Quo

Inter-sect marriages between Sunni and Shi'i individuals in Bondowoso represent a significant challenge to the traditional status quo, where strict adherence to sectarian lines has long been the norm.⁵⁵ These marriages not only defy deep theological divisions but also question the socio-cultural boundaries that have historically separated these communities.⁵⁶ By crossing these boundaries, Sunni-Shi'i couples navigate a complex landscape that involves religious expectations, family pressures, and community norms, often facing substantial resistance from their surroundings.⁵⁷ Nevertheless, their union symbolizes the potential for a shift toward greater inclusivity and mutual respect, highlighting the evolving dynamics within Muslim communities in Indonesia.⁵⁸

Despite the promising aspects of inter-sect marriages, Sunni-Shi'i couples in Bondowoso face various challenges in their married lives. The most dominant challenge is differences in beliefs and ideology.⁵⁹ Many couples experience pressure from extended families and the broader community, which continue to uphold the theological doctrines of their respective sects. These challenges often manifest in rejection or disapproval of the religious practices observed by the couple, as well as in decision-making regarding their children's religious education. However, couples who successfully overcome these obstacles demonstrate a high level of commitment and tolerance, which are essential for maintaining the stability of their marriage.⁶⁰

One of the informants, Fatimah (33), a Shi'a who married Ahmad (35), a Sunni, described the challenges they faced from their extended families. Fatimah and Ahmad encountered strong opposition from their parents, who were concerned about the differences in their religious practices and the potential impact on their lives. At times, their parents refused to participate in their religious ceremonies, which was deeply disheartening. However, Fatimah and Ahmad remained united, prioritizing the love and mutual respect that strengthened their bond. Another couple, Zainab (30) and Ali (32), shared similar sentiments. Ali stated that their biggest challenge faced was deciding on their children's religious education. Ali's family wanted them to follow Sunni teachings, while Zainab's family insisted on Shi'i practices. They had to find a middle ground, which required a lot of patience and open communication. Both agreed to educate their children about both sects and let them choose their own path when they grow up.

⁵⁵ Chiara Formichi, "Violence, Sectarianism, And The Politics Of Religion: Articulations Of Anti-Shi'a Discourses In Indonesia" 98, no. 98 (2015): 1-27.

⁵⁶ YAFA SHANNEIK and ANNELIES MOORS, eds., *Global Dynamics of Shi'a Marriages* (Rutgers University Press, 2022), <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv2v55h5j>.

⁵⁷ Zulkifli, "The dynamics of Sunni-Shi'i integration in Indonesia".

⁵⁸ Bennett et al., "Communities and Change in the Anthropocene: Understanding Social-Ecological Vulnerability and Planning Adaptations to Multiple Interacting Exposures."

⁵⁹ Asfa Widiyanto, "Sunni-Shi'i ecumenism in Austria: A model for western Europe?", *Al-Jami'ah*, vol. 56, no. 1 (2018).

⁶⁰ Fasya, Chairman of the Indonesian Ulema Council, Bondowoso Regency.

Community pressure also presents a significant challenge, as seen in the case of Husein (28) and Aisyah (26). They shared their experience of facing social exclusion. When they first got married, some members of their community distanced themselves from them, believing that their union was an affront to their religious beliefs. It was a difficult period for both of them. However, over time, they managed to demonstrate that their marriage was founded on mutual respect and deepening love. Gradually, people began to accept them.

Navigating religious rituals and daily practices requires significant compromise and understanding, as seen in the case of Fadli (34) and Zainab (31). They follow different prayer times and fasting practices, which occasionally lead to confusion and conflict. However, they actively strive to respect each other's religious observances and find ways to accommodate both traditions. They even acknowledge that this process has strengthened their bond and deepened their understanding of each other's beliefs.

Decision-making regarding religious holidays and celebrations also poses challenges. Ahmad notes that internal conflicts often arise due to ideological differences. Fatimah elaborates that differing views on religious matters sometimes lead to arguments. For instance, the issue of temporary marriage (*mut'ah*) in Shi'a Islam is a particularly sensitive topic for them. To address such differences, both partners engage in open and honest discussions, striving to understand each other's perspectives and find common ground.

Despite these challenges, couples who successfully overcome them demonstrate remarkable resilience and adaptability. Their ability to maintain a strong relationship amidst external pressures is a testament to their commitment and love. They emphasize the importance of communication, patience, and mutual respect in navigating the complexities of inter-sect marriages. Thus, although Sunni-Shi'i couples in Bondowoso face significant challenges due to differences in beliefs and external pressures, their ability to navigate these obstacles reflects their dedication and tolerance. The experiences of these couples provide valuable insights into the dynamics of inter-sect marriages and reaffirm the potential for harmonious coexistence despite theological differences.

It is fascinating to observe how Habib Jakfar connects ontological and phenomenological approaches in understanding Sunni-Shi'i relations in Indonesia. His ontological approach focuses on the essence and existence of Islamic teachings as accepted by both groups, while his phenomenological approach considers the historical context and lived experiences that shape Sunni-Shi'i interactions. From the early arrival of Islam in Indonesia, he highlights that these two sects share a fundamental spiritual bond, particularly through the Sufi tradition, as well as long-standing cultural and historical ties that have connected them over time.⁶¹

In more detail, Jakfar explains that despite differences in practices and interpretations of *furu'uddin*—the branches of religious teachings—both Sunni and Shi'i remain united in their adherence to the core sources of Islam. These differences, which are methodological and interpretative in nature, should not be

⁶¹ Al Hadar, "Sunni-Syiah Di Indonesia: Jejak Dan Peluang Rekonsiliasi."

seen as a cause for division but rather as a dialectical process that enriches religious understanding. However, according to Jakfar, in recent decades, the rise of takfirism—which can be seen as a continuation of neo-Khawarij ideology—has exacerbated divisions by introducing narratives of exclusivism and excommunication, further deepening sectarian tensions.⁶²

In Bondowoso, Jakfar observes that these theological differences also manifest in fiqh-related issues concerning Sunni-Shi'i inter-sect marriages. While doctrinal distinctions exist—such as the acceptance of *nikah mut'ah* in Shi'i Islam, which is rejected in Sunni jurisprudence—in practice, inter-sect couples in Bondowoso tend to prioritize inclusivity and emphasize equality in marital life. According to Jakfar, ontological and phenomenological awareness of deep spiritual and cultural commonalities is key to understanding and accepting differences, as well as preventing potential conflicts. The key to Sunni-Shi'i reconciliation in Indonesia, including in Bondowoso, lies in fostering this awareness as an integral part of both Islamic identity and national identity. This phenomenon aligns with Taufiq al-Sayf's concept that the sovereignty of the *ummah* takes precedence over the state or *wali al-faqih*, highlighting the primacy of communal harmony over rigid sectarian divisions.⁶³

Between Love and Religious Doctrines: Religious Considerations and Personal Motivations

In Sunni Islam, the *akad nikah* (marriage contract) is a straightforward process, involving mutual consent from both parties, the presence of two witnesses, and the giving of dowry (*mahr*) by the groom to the bride. This process is guided by the teachings of the four major Sunni *madhabs*: Hanafi, Maliki, Shafi'i, and Hanbali.⁶⁴ Sunni jurisprudence places emphasis on mutual agreement and the fulfillment of contractual obligations, which are considered essential for the validity of a marriage. The simplicity of the *akad nikah* reflects Sunni Islam's theological commitment to clarity and straightforwardness in legal matters, ensuring that the contractual aspects of marriage are easily understood and followed by the community.

There are significant differences in marriage practices between Sunni and Shi'i Islam, particularly regarding the acceptance of temporary marriage (*mut'ah*)⁶⁵ While Shi'i Islam permits this practice in which Sunni Islam strictly prohibits. In Shi'i jurisprudence, especially within the Ja'fari school, which is followed by Shi'i Islam, *mut'ah* allows individuals to enter into a temporary marriage for a predetermined period, accompanied by an agreed-upon *mahr*.⁶⁶ his arrangement

⁶² *Al Hadar*.

⁶³ Taufiq Al-Sayf, *Nadhariyyah Al-Sulthah Fī al-Fiqh al-Syī'i* (Bairut: al-Dār al-Baydha', 2002).

⁶⁴ Frederic Wehrey (ed.), *Beyond Sunni and Shi'i The Roots of Sectarianism in a Changing Middle East*, <https://www.ptonline.com/articles/how-to-get-better-mfi-results>.

⁶⁵ A. Primer and Sunni-Shi'i Con, *V. Op-Ed*, vol. 8, no. 1 (2014), pp. 142–5.

⁶⁶ Sagi Polka, "Taqrīb Al-Madhāhib-Qaradawī's Declaration of Principles Regarding Sunni-Shi'i Ecumenism," *Middle Eastern Studies* 49, no. 3 (2013): 414–29, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00263206.2013.783824>.

enables marriages to last for a specified duration, which can be short or long, depending on mutual agreement. Sunni jurisprudence does not recognize *mut'ah* and often sees it as a point of contention between the two sects. In Shi'i Islam, the acceptance of *mut'ah* reflects a distinct theological perspective on marriage, allowing for temporary unions in specific circumstances, which contrasts sharply with Sunni Islam's emphasis on permanent marital bonds.⁶⁷ The primary driving force behind Sunni-Shi'i marriages in Bondowoso is the profound and cohesive influence of love. Love transcends theological barriers and cultural differences, enabling couples to navigate their religious beliefs and traditions with remarkable strength and grace.

In Bondowoso, the fusion of Javanese, Madurese, and Arab cultures has created a distinct social structure, where love serves as a bridge connecting different worlds. Love allows Sunni-Shi'i couples to overcome religious differences and build peaceful, fulfilling relationships.⁶⁸ The delicate balance between love and faith not only sustains their personal relationships but also strengthens social unity and harmony in Bondowoso. Their stories stand as a testament to the enduring power of love, which—at its most genuine—can transcend the boundaries set by religious teachings and cultural norms, fostering understanding and cohesion in a diverse society.⁶⁹

Love is a fundamental foundation of faith. Trust and love are inherently interconnected and inseparable—trust manifests love, and love manifests trust. True faith cannot exist without love, just as trust is a crucial prerequisite for love. This perspective is deeply rooted in the teachings of Sufi scholars, who center their religious devotion around love. Trust and compassion cannot be forced; they must be freely given and received. This core principle is reflected in how Sunni-Shi'i couples in Bondowoso manage their relationships.

By embracing love as a fundamental principle of their faith, individuals can build strong, enduring marriages that uphold both religious teachings and deep emotional bonds.⁷⁰ This approach not only strengthens personal relationships but also serves as a model for the harmonious coexistence of love and faith, fostering a community that values diversity while promoting unity and mutual respect.⁷¹

The negotiation between love and faith in Sunni-Shi'i marriages in Bondowoso exemplifies the community's ability to navigate a complex social and religious landscape. Couples often engage in open communication and compromise, finding common ground through shared values and mutual respect.

⁶⁷ Shafique N Virani, "'Taqiyya' and Identity in a South Asian Community," *The Journal of Asian Studies* 70, no. 1 (August 28, 2011): 99–139.

⁶⁸ Khaled Abou El Fadl, "NEGOTIATING HUMAN RIGHTS THROUGH LANGUAGE," *UCLA Journal of International Law and Foreign Affairs* 5, no. 2 (February 18, 2000): 229–36.

⁶⁹ SHANNEIK and MOORS, *Global Dynamics of Shi'a Marriages*.

⁷⁰ Noryamin Aini, Ariane Utomo, and Peter McDonald, "Interreligious Marriage in Indonesia," *Journal of Religion and Demography* 6, no. 1 (May 6, 2019): 189–214, <https://doi.org/10.1163/2589742X-00601005>.

⁷¹ Reza Karimi, Maryam Bakhtiyari, and Abbas Masjedi Arani, "Protective Factors of Marital Stability in Long-Term Marriage Globally: A Systematic Review," *Epidemiology and Health* 41 (2019): 1–10, <https://doi.org/10.4178/EPIH.E2019023>.

This negotiation process is not only crucial for the success of their personal relationships but also contributes to broader social cohesion and stability.⁷²

The practice of inter-sect marriages in Bondowoso provides valuable insight into how communities can manage theological differences and foster social harmony through pragmatic and inclusive practices. By prioritizing social harmony, economic stability, and mutual respect, Sunni-Shi'i couples in Bondowoso demonstrate that love and faith can be successfully negotiated, leading to a more cohesive and integrated community.⁷³

The influence of love in Bondowoso is clearly reflected in how it shapes—and at times diverges from—standard religious guidelines within the framework of Sunni-Shi'i marriages. Love acts as a catalytic force, enabling couples to navigate the rigid boundaries set by religious doctrines, creating space for mutual respect and understanding. These dynamics highlight the flexibility and relational skills of human interactions, in contrast to the often rigid and doctrinally prescriptive nature of religious norms.⁷⁴

Love plays a crucial role in fostering mutual respect between partners, particularly in Sunni-Shi'i marriages, where it acts as a catalyst for developing appreciation and understanding of each other's religious beliefs, even amid theological differences. For example, Habib Muhammad Darwis al-Gadri, a follower of the Shi'i sect, and Fatimah binti Ali, a Sunni, have successfully maintained their marriage for over thirteen years. Their deep affection has motivated them to observe and respect both Sunni and Shi'i traditions, illustrating how respect and admiration can transcend significant religious differences.

Love also plays a vital role in facilitating open communication between couples, which is essential for navigating religious differences. In Bondowoso, institutions like the Office of Religious Affairs emphasize the importance of effective communication in premarital counseling. Couples are encouraged to engage in open discussions about their religious beliefs and practices, as this helps minimize misunderstandings and fosters a supportive environment. These open discussions are a direct consequence of love and dedication, enabling couples to find common ground despite coming from different sectarian backgrounds.⁷⁵

Furthermore, love fosters a willingness to make concessions and adapt, which is a crucial quality for marriages between individuals from different religious or cultural backgrounds. Many Sunni-Shi'i couples demonstrate a readiness to compromise, driven by their deep affection for one another. This often involves integrating customs from both traditions or even creating new family rituals that honor both belief systems. For instance, Habib Hasan bin Ali bin Syekh Abu Bakar and his wife have successfully blended Sunni and Shi'i traditions into

⁷² Roland E Kidwell, Franz W Kellermanns, and Kimberly A Eddleston, "Harmony, Justice, Confusion, and Conflict in Family Firms: Implications for Ethical Climate and the 'Fredo Effect,'" *Journal of Business Ethics* 106, no. 4 (February 4, 2012): 503–17.

⁷³ Sabrina Mervin et al., *The dynamics of Sunni-Shi'i relationships: doctrine, transnationalism, intellectuals and the media* (Hurst Publishers, 2013).

⁷⁴ Wehrey (ed.), *Beyond Sunni and Shi'i The Roots of Sectarianism in a Changing Middle East*.

⁷⁵ Moh. Noer Fauzan, instructor for the Kademangan Bondowoso religious affairs office, n.d.

their family dynamics over 19 years of marriage. Their deep love and mutual understanding have allowed them to navigate their religious differences skillfully, creating a balanced and harmonious household environment.⁷⁶

Institutional support and community dynamics allow deviations from conventional religious guidelines. Institutions such as KUA and the MUI play a crucial role in supporting marriages between different sects. These organizations provide premarital counseling that specifically emphasizes the development of tolerance and conflict resolution skills, equipping couples with the necessary tools to sustain relationships characterized by love and respect. The goal of MUI as a mediator is to prevent external religious conflicts from affecting the couple's relationship, thus allowing their love to grow despite religious differences.⁷⁷

Community integration promotes this deviation by fostering a sense of collective solidarity that transcends sectarian divisions. The acceptance and integration of diverse social capital have played a significant role in the success of Sunni-Shi'i marriages in Bondowoso. These marriages create mutual dependence, which in turn fosters social networks that support the couples and promote harmony within the broader community. This sense of unity is often fueled by the affection and admiration shown by the couples, thereby creating a model that can be emulated by society.

The successful examples of Sunni-Shi'i marriages in Bondowoso provide evidence that love can result in significant anomalies from conventional theological guidelines. In this context, an anomaly refers to a phenomenon that deviates from or does not align with the theological principles traditionally followed by Sunni and Shi'i communities. Traditionally, these two groups have sharp doctrinal differences—such as in marriage practices, family law, and religious rituals. This usually creates a clear separation between the two, even preventing marriage between individuals from both sects.⁷⁸ However, in Bondowoso, successful marriages between Sunni and Shi'i individuals challenge this understanding. It reflects the reality that, despite significant theological differences—such as divergent views on mut'ah marriage or other regulations—these relationships still thrive harmoniously. For example, the marriage of Habib Muhammad Darwis al-Gadri, a Sunni, and Fatimah binti Ali, a Shi'i, demonstrates that a combination of mutual respect and the integration of elements from both religious traditions can create a successful family life. Theologically, this is something rare or considered a deviation by most Sunni-Shi'i communities in Indonesia.⁷⁹

However, love acts as a powerful catalyst that empowers couples in Bondowoso to negotiate and often deviate from the rigid boundaries imposed by religious dogma. Love fosters mutual respect, transparent communication, and flexibility, all of which are crucial for the success of Sunni-Shi'i relationships. The presence of institutional support and community integration further strengthens

⁷⁶ Habib Hasan and Aisyah, a couples of Sunni-Shi'i marriage, August 25, 2023.

⁷⁷ Fasya, Chairman of the Indonesian Ulema Council, Bondowoso Regency.

⁷⁸ al Gadri and Fatimah, couple of Sunni-Shi'i marriage

⁷⁹ Hasan and Aisyah, couple of Sunni-Shi'i marriage.

these bonds, demonstrating the profound impact of love in promoting harmony among different groups.⁸⁰ The experiences of these couples show that love has the power to overcome significant differences and nurture an environment of respect and inclusivity. This highlights the capacity of human relationships to be flexible and adaptive, in contrast to religious norms.⁸¹

Although there are traditional differences between Sunni-Shi'i marriage jurisprudence, these standards are often overlooked in practice due to factors such as romantic love, economic considerations, strong community support, and the desire for endogamy.⁸² Endogamy, the tendency to marry within one's own ethnic group, plays a significant role in this phenomenon. Before the emergence of love, their primary inclination was to marry someone from their own ethnic group. The Arab community in Bondowoso has a long tradition of practicing endogamy. Individuals in this community show a preference for choosing partners from their own ethnic group, prioritizing this aspect over considerations of love or religion. This component of endogamy fosters early strong bonds and a sense of cultural similarity, which is later strengthened by love and mutual understanding.

Thus, the negotiation between love and belief or ideology becomes a crucial aspect of inter-sect marriages in Bondowoso. Many couples successfully navigate these differences by emphasizing the importance of love and mutual respect.⁸³ In many cases, love proves to be the dominant factor that enables couples to find common ground and resolve conflicts related to their religious differences.⁸⁴ These couples often make special agreements to respect each other's religious practices and raise their children with an inclusive understanding. As a result, love becomes the primary foundation that allows them to live harmoniously despite significant ideological differences.⁸⁵ The key finding of this research shows that love, supported by economic stability and community support, holds great power in bridging theological differences and creating strong social cohesion in Bondowoso.

Fatimah, a Shi'i woman married to Ahmad, a Sunni, shared that they decided from the beginning that their love for each other would always be the top priority. This means that they are aware to respect each other's religious practices and find ways to celebrate their beliefs together. For example, during religious holidays, they made an effort to participate in each other's traditions. This not only strengthens their bond but also teaches them a lot about mutual respect. Ahmad

⁸⁰ Stephen C Angle, "Human Rights and Harmony," *Human Rights Quarterly* 30, no. 1 (February 2008): 76-94.

⁸¹ Omar Farahat, *The Foundation of Norms in Islamic Jurisprudence and Theology, The Foundation of Norms in Islamic Jurisprudence and Theology*, 2019, <https://doi.org/10.1017/9781108614252>.

⁸² Joanna Overing Kaplan, "Endogamy and the Marriage Alliance: A Note on Continuity in Kindred-Based Groups," *Man* 8, no. 4 (1973): 555-70, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2800740>.

⁸³ Frederic Wehrey, *Beyond Sunni and Shi'i*.

⁸⁴ 'Abdallāh Aḥmad an-Na'īm, *Islam and the Secular State: Negotiating the Future of Shari'a*, 1. Harvard Univ. Press paperback ed (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Press, 2009).

⁸⁵ Kidwell, Kellermanns, and Eddleston, "Harmony, Justice, Confusion, and Conflict in Family Firms: Implications for Ethical Climate and the 'Fredo Effect.'"

added that they agreed to raise their children with knowledge of both Sunni and Shi'i traditions.

Hosen⁸⁶ and his wife Aisyah, who initially faced rejection from their community, explained how they navigated these challenges. They shared that they have many discussions about how to integrate their beliefs. They realized that being open and honest with each other was key. For example, they decided that their children would learn about both sects equally and have the freedom to choose their own path when they grow up. Aisyah emphasized that love and respect are their guiding principles. They celebrate each other's religious milestones and ensure that both traditions are honored in their home. They claim that this approach has helped them to build a harmonious family environment where the differences become a source of strength rather than conflict.

In terms of community support, Pak Lurah, a local community leader, commented that some couples in his community who marry across sects provide an example of how love and respect can overcome deep theological divides. Their commitment to each other and their families is truly inspiring. They have shown that with the right support, these marriages can thrive and contribute positively to the social structure of the community.

Another couple, Zaenab and Ali (32), explained their strategy for handling external pressure such as seeking support from friends and community members who understand their situation.⁸⁷ Zaenab added that their negotiations are not only about religious practices, but also about daily decisions. They have learned to compromise and make the best choices for our family as a whole. This includes everything from financial planning to how we spend our weekends.⁸⁸

In discussing the relationship between love and faith in Sunni-Shi'i marriages in Bondowoso, it is crucial to frame this analysis within a theoretical context that encompasses both theological and social dimensions. Anderson, in his book *Mutuality Matters: Family, Faith, and Just Love*, emphasizes that love in marriage must be understood as a form of mutual giving that transcends mere romantic affection.⁸⁹ Anderson argues that true love in marriage is characterized by mutual respect and a shared commitment to each other's well-being. This perspective aligns with the findings in Bondowoso, where Sunni-Shi'i couples prioritize respect and understanding as foundational elements in their relationships, enabling them to approach theological differences constructively. Anderson's concept of "just love" seems to resonate with Anselm's view,⁹⁰ which stresses that love should be just and equitable, ensuring that all parties feel valued—an essential principle in the context of inter-sect marriages.

⁸⁶ Ahmad Hosen, "Tasyayuk. The marriage perpetrator of Sunni-Shi'i", interview (15 Mar 2023).

⁸⁷ Zaenab and Muhdlor, couple of Sunni-Shi'i marriage.

⁸⁸ *Zaenab and Muhdlor*.

⁸⁹ Herbert Anderson, ed., *Mutuality Matters: Family, Faith, and Just Love* (Lanham, Md: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2004).

⁹⁰ Anselm Kyongsuk Min, ed., *Faith, Hope, Love, and Justice: The Theological Virtues Today* (Lanham, Maryland: Lexington Books, an imprint of The Rowman & Littlefield Publishing Group, Inc, 2018).

Similarly, Venden, in *Love, Marriage, and Righteousness by Faith*, explores the idea that faith in the context of marriage is not just a personal spiritual endeavor, but also a shared journey involving both partners.⁹¹ Venden argues that love and faith are intrinsically interconnected, as true faith manifests in actions that reflect love, kindness, and understanding. This theological framework supports the narrative that Sunni-Shi'i couples in Bondowoso navigate their differences through a mutual commitment to these values, which are deeply embedded in both traditions. The emphasis on righteousness through faith suggests that the couples view their marriage as a covenant requiring continuous effort and commitment—not only to each other but also to their religious traditions. This helps explain why these couples emphasize open communication and mutual respect, as these are seen as crucial for both their spiritual well-being and the success of their relationship.⁹²

By integrating this theoretical perspective, it becomes clear that love in the context of Sunni-Shi'i marriages in Bondowoso serves not only as an emotional bond but also as a moral and spiritual commitment that fosters resilience and adaptability.⁹³ This approach not only helps unite theological differences but also strengthens the broader community by providing an example of unity that respects diversity. Thus, applying this theoretical framework offers a deeper understanding of how love and faith interact to create stable, inclusive, and harmonious marriages.⁹⁴ Therefore, the experiences of Sunni-Shi'i couples in Bondowoso highlight the power of love and respect in bridging significant ideological differences. Supported by economic stability and strong community networks, these couples have successfully navigated their religious differences and created harmonious and inclusive families. This study affirms the potential of love and social support to overcome theological barriers and promote social cohesion within a diverse community.

Concluding Remarks

Love, economic stability, and strong community support are the primary factors driving these marriages. Despite significant theological differences, couples prioritize emotional bonds and mutual respect to navigate their relationships. Challenges such as familial and community pressures, differences in religious practices, and decisions regarding children's religious education are prevalent. However, these couples demonstrate remarkable resilience and commitment in overcoming these obstacles, highlighting the dominance of love and mutual respect in resolving conflicts.

⁹¹ Morris L. Venden, *Love, Marriage, and Righteousness by Faith* (Boise, Idaho: Pacific Press Pub. Association, 1989).

⁹² Edward F. Mooney, ed., *Ethics, Love, and Faith in Kierkegaard: Philosophical Engagements* (Indiana University Press, 2008).

⁹³ Ali El-Sayed Suleiman, *Love Between Philosophy And Science: Studies In The Soul And Society* (Riyadh, K.S.A.: Maktabah shafhāt dzahabiyah, 2000).

⁹⁴ Vern L Bengtson, Norella M Putney, and Susan Harris, eds., *Families and Faith: How Religion Is Passed Down across Generations* (Oxford University Press, 2013).

The occurrence of Sunni-Shi'i intermarriages in Bondowoso, Indonesia, exemplifies how love and socio-cultural factors can surpass theological disparities and promote social unity. This study highlights the ways in which diverse ethnic groups, economic interdependence, and the active involvement of religious and governmental organizations contribute to the acceptance and occurrence of intermarriages. The interplay between love and faith not only sustains personal relationships but also enriches the social fabric of Bondowoso, fostering mutual respect for diversity and collective celebration of unity. This research underscores the importance of supportive community networks and economic stability in facilitating successful cross-sectarian marriages. By providing a microcosm of inclusivity and mutual respect, Sunni-Shi'i couples in Bondowoso offer a model for overcoming deep-rooted theological differences and fostering harmonious coexistence in diverse societies.

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