

Malaysia: So who is the real enemy here?

Shia, Sunni, religious radicalism and us, Muslims

Wednesday 2 December 2015, by [OTHMAN HAMZAH Shafiqah](#) (Date first published: 27 November 2015).

NOVEMBER 27 — I saw a tweet recently that said we had to stop Shiah from spreading because all Shiites are inherently violent people. So I wrote this tweet (which I then deleted):

“Jangan bagi Syiah berkembang sebab Syiah kejam? Kalau macam tu, Sunni pun jangan berkembang lah sebab puak ISIS tu semua Sunni.” (Don’t let Shiah spread because they are evil? If that’s the case, Sunni Muslims shouldn’t spread either because ISIS are Sunni Muslims.)

The kind of people who were found in the comments:

1. People who think I’m encouraging Shiah.
2. People who think I’m anti-Sunni.
3. People who think I am an ISIS apologist.
4. People who think I am implying ISIS = all Sunni Muslims.
5. People who think I shouldn’t have used ISIS as an example because they have nothing to do with religion.
6. People who equate me to Donald Trump because I’m “bad mouthing” Islam.

Almost immediately, I had people give my name to @PDRMsia because apparently I was trying to wreak havoc and tarnish the name of Islam.

I thought my point was pretty straightforward.

If you don’t want a bunch of violent Muslims (in this case, ISIS) to represent all Muslims, why let a bunch of violent Shiites represent those who are Shiah? How many of us actually know a Shiite personally?

To the people who got so offended when I linked ISIS to Islam, please learn to accept the fact that they are our problem now. Although I do believe that ISIS was probably created on political grounds, we have to understand that soldiers who were recruited were made to believe that they are fighting for a cause, for Islam, for jihad.

Saying “ISIS isn’t Islamic!” does not solve anything. We’re only ignoring the glaring problem here, that is religious fundamentalism. People like ISIS believe in a different interpretation of Islam, a rather violent one, and they believe that whatever they’re doing is leading them to the “true” path.

Most of us believe that what ISIS is doing is not Islamic for it is against the essence of the faith that

is compassion and mercy. However, this does not change the fact that they still identify as Muslims. Saying they are not doesn't simply make them non-Muslims.

To eradicate them, or at least stop people from wanting to join them, we have to first acknowledge that there is a fundamentalist interpretation of Islam out there. Muslim terrorist groups like ISIS, Al-Qaeda and the likes are following these interpretations.

Saying ISIS are not Muslims is like saying the Crusaders weren't Christians. They were all very much driven by religion.

We cannot simply say, "ISIS isn't our problem." As much as I want to believe so too, unfortunately, they very much are. As Muslims, we cannot simply wash them off our hands. It won't make them go away. We're only condoning in silence if we do. We have to fight against this violent ideology of Islam. We have to create a counter-narrative. But it's going to be difficult trying to do so in Malaysia, and let me tell you why.

Radicalism does not only come in the form of bloodshed but can also be spread through diffused fundamentalism. I have written about this before.

There is a reason why I used ISIS as a comparison to Sunni Muslims. How many of us actually knew that ISIS started off as Sunni Muslims trying to kill off all Shiites? In Malaysia, we are taught that Shiites are evil, or even worse, that their blood is halal, but at the same time, we condemn the killings done by ISIS. Do you see the paradox?

We are condemning the very thing that we let happen here. And sure, the Sunni vs. Shiah divide in Malaysia hasn't reached a point of mass murder, but these teachings that demonise the Shiites are the seeds that will eventually grow into militant thinking, into people like ISIS. We already have Malaysians leaving the country to join the terrorist group.

It genuinely scares me to think about the damage that ISIS has caused to the name of Islam, and how little we are doing to stop it. It isn't enough to just throw around a few verses of the Quran that teaches peace, saying you don't support ISIS because the Quran said so and so, but at the same time support the persecution and discrimination of Shiites. That's not how it works. You don't just say you're against violence. You have to act upon it too.

The first step to solving a problem is to acknowledge that we have one. In the words of Iyad El-Baghdadi, "ISIS is not a wound to Islam, it is a cancer from within." It is something that we have to fix from amongst ourselves, but how are we supposed to do that when we're always at each other's throats?

Recently, I was given the honour to be a part of a conference on countering radicalism. A few days prior to the event, some Islamist groups tried to shut us down. But still, the event went on as planned. While the conference was running, news of the Paris attacks started surfacing.

It seemed ironic to me that Islamist groups tried to stop a discussion on countering radicalism, and right then, an act of terror was carried out in the name of Islam. While the attacks were devastating, I also felt that it was timely (for a lack of better word) to show that it is high time that we acknowledge the rising radicalisation of Muslims.

The whole point of my tweet was not to say whose religious practices are right or wrong, the Sunni Muslims or Shiites. It wasn't a battle of theology. It was simply a plea to stop generalising people. It breaks my heart to see us fight each other instead of the common enemy.

I recently saw a statistic that said 11 per cent of Malaysians are in favour of ISIS while 25 per cent are still undecided. Do you know how extremely worrying those numbers are? I am genuinely afraid.

Please, let's just stop the needless fighting with each other. At a time like this where Islamophobia is on the rise, we Muslims have to stick together more than ever. The enemy is religious radicalism. Not your own Muslim brothers and sisters.

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P.S.

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<http://m.themalaymailonline.com/opinion/shafiqah-othman-hamzah/article/so-who-is-the-real-enemy-here#sthash.Z9aRGtc1.XIG5RK9k.dpuf>

* This is the personal opinion of the columnist.