

## Muhammad Abduh's Reformation Thoughts and Its Reception on Indonesian and Malaysian Islamic Reform Movements

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### Abstract

This study investigates how Islamic reform and renewal ideas introduced by Muhammad Abduh (1849-1905) in Egypt have been transmitted, received, and appropriated in Indonesia and Malaysia. Although some previous studies have been conducted on the transmission of Muhammad Abduh in Southeast Asia, they are mainly historical and lack epistemological analysis. Muhammad Abduh's ideas and works, which had epistemological roots driving Indonesian and Malaysian reformists to implement reform ideas, were discussed trivially. By closely reading the *Theology of Unity (Risālat al-Tauhid)* of Muhammad Abduh and examining how his ideas are adopted, appropriated, and impacting reform movements in Indonesia and Malaysia, this study shows that the concept of unity of God, the importance of independent reasoning (*ijtihād*), and positive outlook toward worldly affairs through good deeds have impacted Islamic reform in Indonesia and Malaysia differently. In Indonesia, reform ideas are taken by civil society organizations (CSOs) that continuously promote reform and renewal through civil society-based activities, means, and institutions. In contrast, in Malaysia, they are handled by religious scholars, political figures, and state officials who employ religious institutions, political means, and state apparatus to implement reform.

**Keywords:** Reform, renewal, Muhammad Abduh, Indonesia, Malaysia

### Introduction

The emergence of Islamic reform and renewal thought in the modern era is inextricably linked with a reformation of religious thought introduced by Muhammad Abduh (1849-1905) in the late nineteenth century. With Jamaludin Al-Afghani, Abduh advocated a rational and liberal approach to Islam. The influence of Abduh's approach to Islam continued throughout Islamic thought, from Egypt to Indonesia and Malaysia. Muhammad Abduh believed in the context of inner decay and the need for inner revival in Islamic society. According to the orthodox Muslim conception, the Prophet Muhammad was sent to preach a way of individual salvation and build a virtuous society.<sup>1</sup> Nevertheless, there is a gap between what Islamic society should be and what it has become. Muslim countries were suffering from colonialism and backwardness in many aspects of life. Superstitions, myths, and the stagnancy of thought shaped their religiosity. Furthermore, the advancement of European modernity inflicted civilizational anxiety on them.<sup>2</sup>

By arguing that Islam is compatible with modernity and that revelation is not opposed to reason, Abduh showed how Muslims should deal with modernity as individuals and society. Here, Abduh began his project, namely Islamic reform, by rationalizing Islam. As a result, he appeased Western-educated scholars and allayed the fears of traditionalists. On the one hand, he set modern educated people's conscience at rest by allowing them to be loyal to both the culture into which they were born and the culture into which they were educated. On the other hand, he enlightened the traditionalists who were puzzled by the success of Europe and the failure of Muslims by telling them that Islam could also lead to similar success as that of Europe.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Albert Hourani, *Arabic Thought in the Liberal Age, 1798-1939* (Cambridge University Press, 1983), 136.

<sup>2</sup> Mohammad Syifa Amin Widigdo, "Arab-Muslim Intellectual Responses to Modernity: Navigating Anxiety and Authenticity in the Thoughts of Muhammad Abid al-Jabiri and Abdurrahman Taha," *Afkar: Jurnal Akidah dan Pemikiran Islam* 26, no. 2 (2024): 1-30.

<sup>3</sup> M. A. Zaki Badawi, *The Reformers of Egypt* (The Muslim Institute, 1978), 49.

Abduh's project of Islamic rationalization indeed shared a trajectory similar to that of Max Weber, who considered "the disenchantment of the world (*Entzauberung der Welt*)."<sup>4</sup> According to Weber, this process began in the ancient Jewish prophecy under the influence of Hellenistic scientific thought. Then, it culminated in Calvinist theology and practice, which rejected all Muslim magical sacramental means in the quest for salvation.<sup>4</sup> 'Abduh's 'disenchantment of the world' can be seen in his critical and rational response to the widespread Muslim magical superstition practices of the Muslims. In the mind of 'Abduh, all these magical elements were anti-rational. To follow Max Weber's thesis, these magical elements must be excluded from both the practice of Islam and the conception of the world. In this context, 'Abduh has touched upon the fundamental idea of secularization, as Parsons (1961) considers "the liberation of society from superstition."<sup>5</sup> Accordingly, Abduh's project of rationalization could mean liberation, which means the liberation of society from superstition. Second, it could also mean 'de-sacralization' to the extent that the sacralization of certain things, which are not truly sacred, should be radically devalued in the modern world. This project was rooted in Abduh's discussion of the unity of God, the role of reason, and human deeds. Muhammad Abduh's thought can be summarized into six key characteristics, Islam is presented as a dynamic and rational religion that aligns with science; a commitment to purifying Islamic teachings from superstition, blind imitation (*taqlid*), and corrupting external influences; educational reform aimed at developing a progressive system grounded in Islamic principles; reinterpreting Islamic doctrines through a modern lens; defending Islam against Western intellectual and missionary challenges while selectively embracing the scientific and technological advancements of the West; and advocating political and intellectual reform to empower the Muslim community. In conclusion, Abduh's reformist thought is founded on rationalism, renewal, and openness to modern knowledge, while remaining firmly rooted in the authentic principles of Islam.<sup>6</sup>

Previous studies on Muhammad Abduh's intellectual legacy and its influences in the Muslim world have addressed a specific aspect of Abduh's Islamic reform and reception in Southeast Asia. Mona Abaza observes the role of *Al-Manar* in engendering Islamic modernity in Southeast Asia.<sup>7</sup> Ahmad Nabil Amir discusses the influence of Muhammad Abduh in Indo-Malay regions in the context of Qur'anic exegesis and the Islamic reform movement.<sup>8</sup> Muslich Shabir and Sulistyono Susilo, in particular, investigated the impact of Muhammad Abduh's thoughts on the educational settings in Muhammadiyah.<sup>9</sup> Hamka's honoris causa doctoral address also discusses Abduh's influences on Muslim scholarly figures in Indonesia.<sup>10</sup> Meanwhile, in the Malaysian context, Maszlee Malik and Hamidah Mat argue that Abduh's ideas of reform can be seen in the Sunnah reform movement in Perlis.<sup>11</sup> These studies provide a valuable description of how Abduh's reform ideas have been received in Southeast Asia. However, the epistemological roots of Abduh's reform ideas and how they are adopted, contextualized, or appropriated in Southeast Asian settings have not been comprehensively studied. Therefore, this paper first attempts to discover the roots of Abduh's religious, intellectual, and modernist outlook and its role in the development of rationalism in Islam through a close reading of Muhammad Abduh's work, namely *The Theology of Unity (Risalat at\_Tauhid)*.<sup>12</sup> Second, this study also investigates how the epistemology of Abduh's intellectual and social reforms is appropriated in the context of Southeast Asian Muslim Islam.

<sup>4</sup> Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and The Spirit of Capitalism*, trans. Talcott Parsons (Dover Publication, 2003), 105.

<sup>5</sup> Talcott Parsons, *Essei-Essei Sosiologi Talcott Parsons, (Talcott Parsons' Essays Sociology)* (Aksara Persada Press, 1986).

<sup>6</sup> See H.A.R. Gibb, *Modern Trends in Islam* (The University of Chicago Press, 1947); Peter G. Riddell, *Islam and the Malay-Indonesian World: Transmission and Responses* (University of Hawaii Press, 2001); Zaharah Salleh, "Pengaruh Islah Muhammad 'Abduh dalam gerakan Islam di Malaysia: kajian khusus terhadap Jamaah Islah Malaysia (JIM)" (Doctor Universiti Malaya, 2003); Adibah Yasmin Alias, Mohd Irwan Syazli Saidin, and Jamaie Haji Hamil, "Pengaruh Muhammad 'Abduh Terhadap Kemunculan Fundamentalism-Reformis Kaum Muda di Tanah Melayu (1900-1930)," *Kemanusiaan: The Asian Journal of Humanities* 30, no. 2 (2023): 119-41.

<sup>7</sup> Mona Abaza, "Southeast Asia and the Middle East: Al-Manar and Islamic Modernity," in *From the Mediterranean Sea to the China Sea*, ed. Denys Lombard Claude Guillot, and Roderich Ptak (Harrassowitz Verlag, 1998).

<sup>8</sup> Ahmad Nabil Amir, "The Influence of Muhammad Abduh in The Nusantara: From Qur'anic Exegesis to Islamic Reform Movement," *Afkaruna: Indonesian Interdisciplinary Journal of Islamic Studies* 18, no. 2 (2022): 260-278.

<sup>9</sup> Muslich Shabir and Sulistyono Susilo, "Muhammad Abduh's Thought on Muhammadiyah Educational Modernism: Tracing The Influence in its Early Development," *Qudus International Journal of Islamic Studies* 6, no. 2 (2018): 127-159.

<sup>10</sup> Kevin W. Fogg, "Hamka's Doctoral Address at Al-Azhar: The Influence of Muhammad Abduh in Indonesia," *Afkaruna* 11, no. 2 (2015): 125-156.

<sup>11</sup> Maszlee Malik and Hamidah Mat, "The Historical Development of the "Sunnah" Reform Ideology in the State of Perlis, Malaysia," *Sage Open* 7, no. 3 (2017), <https://doi.org/10.1177/2158244017726356>.

<sup>12</sup> Muhammad Abduh, *Risalat al-Tawhid*, ed. Muhammad Imarah (Dār al-Shurūq, 1994); Muhammad Abduh, *The Theology of Unity*, trans. Isha Musa'ad and Kenneth Cragg (George Allen and Ulwin, 1966).

## Method

This study's reading on the Theology of Unity (*Risālat al-Tauhīd*) primarily employed Paul Ricoeur's hermeneutical methodology, namely, explanation, explanation, understanding, and appropriation.<sup>13</sup> Therefore, the *Risālat al-Tauhīd* was read as a structured text comprising parts that constituted the entire text. In the second stage, understanding, the text was analyzed not only through the internal structure of the text but also by involving external factors. In this respect, the study of the *Risālat al-Tauhīd* book included and discussed the author's social and religious context to better understand what the book responded to. In the final stage, the appropriation, the act of interpretation culminated in self-interpretation and increased understanding of the self. Therefore, the interpreter needs to contextualize and seek the relevance of the text's meaning and its impacts. In this study, the appropriation stage in reading the *Risālat al-Tauhīd* means seeking its contextualization and appropriation in Southeast Asia, namely Indonesian and Malaysian, and the Islamic reform context. This study is inspired by Max Weber's Protestant Ethics and the Spirit of Capitalism to understand this contextualization and appropriation process.<sup>14</sup> Max Weber's work, which successfully explained the influence of Protestant ethics in the development of capitalism by mainly reading Richard Baxter and Benjamin Franklin's works, was used to understand the impact of Muhammad Abduh's thoughts and works on the emergence of Islamic rationalism, modernism, and reform in Southeast Asia.

## The Theology of Unity: Unity of God vs Shirk

The core idea of Protestant Puritanism is the rejection of any magical elements combined with harsh doctrines of the absolute transcendentality of God. In this case, the basic concept of Abduh's theology is analogous. He denies theology that shows the avowed enemy of reason. Theology consists mostly of intricate subtleties and credulous admiration of miracles, with free play to the imagination. The mainstream Islamic theological tenet, which relies mainly on mystical and miraculous explanations, not only degrades human reason but also leads to a kind of big sin, namely *Shirk*. For example, Islamic mysticism sects who believe in the possibility of direct acquaintance (unity) with God (*hull*) prove it through some extraordinary capacities and acts performed by saints (*karamat*), and then people tend to accept them. Muhammad Abduh would consider this tenet *shirk*, which is defined as acknowledging the presence of other divinities on His side.<sup>15</sup>

Abduh reformulates theology that demonstrates the unity of God in Himself and the act of creation. From Him alone, all being derived, and in Him alone, every purpose comes to its turn. He is the necessary being in his essence, attributes, existence, and acts. There is no existent equal to Him. The unity of existence and action denotes His uniqueness in the necessity of being and in His consequent giving being to contingents.<sup>16</sup> If the idea of secularization is based on the concept of what Harvey Cox called "the liberation of man from metaphysical tutelage" and the turning of his attention from other-worldly to this-worldly orientation, then 'Abduh's 'secularization' of Islamic theology is based on his anti-magical elements and superstitions in Muslim belief and the 'de-sacralization' of what not sacred.<sup>17</sup> This outlook can be viewed as a project of rationalization in the Muslim world. Muhammad Abduh's student and colleague, Rashid Rida (d. 1935), summarizes this rationalization process, which is expected to endanger the renaissance of Islam in five aspects: the emphasis on the purity of Islam, the prohibition of blind imitation, the promotion of rational interpretation of the Qur'an, the spirit of *ijtihad*, and the incorporation of modern knowledge.<sup>18</sup>

<sup>13</sup> Paul Ricoeur, *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences: Essays on Language, Action and Interpretation*, ed. John B. Thompson (Cambridge University Press, 1986); A. Ghasemi et al., "Ricoeur's Theory of Interpretation: A Method for Understanding Text (Course Text)," *World Applied Sciences Journal* 15, no. 11 (2011): 1623–29.

<sup>14</sup> Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and The Spirit of Capitalism*.

<sup>15</sup> Daniel Gimaret, "Gimaret, D. 'Shirk.'" *Encyclopaedia of Islam*. Edited by: P. Bearman, Th. Bianquis, C.E. Bosworth, E. van Donzel and W.P. Heinrichs. Brill, 2007. Brill Online, Indiana University Bloomington. 29 November 2007.," in *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, ed. P. Bearman et al. (Brill Online, 2007).

<sup>16</sup> Abduh, *The Theology of Unity*, 52.

<sup>17</sup> Harvey Cox, *The Secular: Secularization and Urbanization in Theological Perspective* (McMillan, 1966), 15.

<sup>18</sup> Khairul Hamim and M. Masykur Abdillah, "Renaissance of Islam: A Content Analysis of Muhammad Rashid Rida's Exegesis," *Journal of Islamic Thought and Civilization* 13, no. 2 (2023): 105-19.

Abduh's theological thought has been widely spread through his books, including *Risālat al-Tauhīd*, and magazine *al-Urwat al-Wuthqā* and *al-Manār* (along Rashid Rida).<sup>19</sup> Indo-Malay scholars who used to study, visit, or encounter their fellows in the Middle East amplified and extended Abduh's idea of reform in the Indonesian and Malaysian contexts, including Syeikh Tahir Jalaluddin (1861-1957, a Muslim scholar from Minangkabau who used to study in Mecca and Egypt), Syeikh Muhammad bin Salim al-Kalali, Sayid Syed bin Ahmad al-Hadi (1867-1937), and Haji Abbas bin Muhammad Taha. They are usually referred to as *Kaum Muda*. In the Southeast Asian context, they published a magazine with a reform spirit called *al-Imam* in 1906. The name *al-Imam* was derived from Abduh's pen name. In their publication, they criticized Islamic local practices and condemned the so-called *takhayul* (in Malay, written as *tahyul*, which means false belief), *khurafat* (superstition), and *bid'ah* (illicit innovation). This criticism and condemnation can be found in the 12th issue, Volume II, June 1908.<sup>20</sup>

When Syeikh Tahir Jalaluddin resigned from the leadership of *al-Imam* after he became a state's *mufti* (Islamic legal advisor) in Perak and a teacher in Johor, his students, and other "reformist" ulama' (Islamic scholars) in Padang, West Sumatra, Indonesia published a magazine named *al-Munir* in 1911. According to Hamka (Haji Abdul Malik Karim Amrullah) in his honorary doctor speech at al-Azhar, Egypt, in 1958, there were three leading reformist ulama in Padang at that time, namely: Sheikh Muhammad Jamil Jambek (who was the oldest among them), Sheikh Abdullah Ahmad, and Sheikh Abdul Karim Amrullah. They are called "Kaum Muda (The Youth)" in Sumatra. Sheikh Muhammad Jamil Jambek was an expert in astronomy (*ilm al-falak*) and theology and lived in Bukittinggi. Sheikh Abdullah Ahmad lived in Padang, and he managed the publication of *al-Munir*. Meanwhile, Sheikh Abdul Karim Amrullah, who resided in Padang Panjang and was an expert in Islamic jurisprudence, answered Islamic legal, ritual, and ethical questions in *al-Munir*. In this regard, Sheikh Jamil Jambek and Sheikh Abdul Karim Amrullah, through their writings in *al-Munir* and speeches on different occasions, strengthened the faith of the *ummah* (Muslim community) in the oneness of God, made hearts of villagers more divinely connected in their devotion, and rejected all sorts of beliefs (*takhayul* or *khurafat*).<sup>21</sup> Although this Islamic reform and renewal movement may have led to the emergence of Islamic conservatism later in West Sumatra, the initial purpose of this rejection of the false beliefs was to purify the Islamic faith and modernize Muslim lives.<sup>22</sup> After the initial tensions with local customs leaders and Muslim traditionalists, reformist thought and movements were generally well received and adopted by Indonesian Muslims, especially in Minangkabau, West Sumatra, and Yogyakarta, Java. In Sumatra, the Muslim reformers published a magazine *al-Munir*, established reform-oriented Islamic schools such as Sekolah Adabiyah, Diniyyah School at Padang Panjang, and Sumatra Thawalib, and founded a civil society organization, PERMI (Persatuan Muslim Indonesia).<sup>23</sup> Similarly, in Yogyakarta, ideas of Islamic reform were well accepted and institutionalized in the forms of Muhammadiyah and its educational and social affiliates.<sup>24</sup>

Meanwhile, in the Malaysian context, Syeikh Tahir Jalaluddin published another magazine with an Islamic reform and renewal outlook in Pulau Pinang in 1937 after leaving *al-Imam* magazine leadership in Singapore, stepping down from its *mufti* office in Perak, and resigning teaching position in Johor. The magazine was *Saudara* (Brother), and Tahir Jalaluddin became its chief editor in 1937. After the generation of Syeikh Tahir Jalaluddin in 1970, after the independence of Malaysia, another Islamic reform and renewal figure emerged. His name is Tuan Haji Yusof Rawa (1922-2000), a scholar, journalist, entrepreneur, and politician at the same time. He was educated in secular British-style schooling when he was a student at *Penang Free School* and in Islamic traditional education when he continued his studies in Mecca. While

<sup>19</sup> Fogg, "Hamka's Doctoral Address at Al-Azhar: The Influence of Muhammad Abduh in Indonesia," 133.

<sup>20</sup> Amir, "The Influence of Muhammad Abduh in The Nusantara: From Qur'anic Exegesis to Islamic Reform Movement," 266; Hamidah Jalani, *Majalah Al-Islah dan Idea-Idea Pembaharuan* (Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, 2019), 55-56.

<sup>21</sup> Fogg, "Hamka's Doctoral Address at Al-Azhar: The Influence of Muhammad Abduh in Indonesia," 134.

<sup>22</sup> Zulfadli et al., "From Islamic modernism to Islamic conservatism: the case of West Sumatra Provinces, Indonesia," *Cogent Social Sciences* 10, no. 1 (2024): 7-9.

<sup>23</sup> Yelda Syafrina, "Fase Dalam Gerakan Pembaharuan Islam di Minangkabau: Dari Reformis ke Modernis," *Jurnal Tamaddun: Jurnal Sejarah dan Kebudayaan Islam* 9, no. 2 (2021): 813-837; Faras Puji Azizah et al., "Pembaharuan Islam di Minangkabau Pada Awal Abad XX," *Rusydiah: Jurnal Pemikiran Islam* 3, no. 2 (2022): 212-228.

<sup>24</sup> Suwarno, "Dari Yogyakarta Merajut Indonesia: PerkeMbang Muhammadiyah, 1912- 1950," *Akademika* 21, no. 2 (2016): 195-212; Yeyen Subandi, "Gerakan Pembaharuan Keagamaan Reformis-Modernis: Studi Terhadap Muhammadiyah dan Nahdlatul Ulama," *Resolusi* 1, no. 1 (2018): 54-66; Mitsuo Nakamura, *The Crescent Arises over the Banyan Tree: A Study of the Muhammadiyah Movement in A Central Javanese Town c. 1910-2010* (ISEAS, 2012).

studying in Mecca, he not only learned Arabic and different Islamic legal and theological schools of thought but also encountered and was influenced by Muslim reformists, such as Jamaluddin al-Afghani, Muhammad Abduh, Hasan al-Banna, Sayid Qutb, and other Islamic Brotherhood (*Ikhwanul Muslimin*) figures. Upon his return from his studies in Mecca to Malaysia, he initiated the publication of a bi-weekly magazine named *al-Islah* in Pulau Pinang in 1970.<sup>25</sup> This magazine also promoted Islamic renewal and reform as *al-Imam* and *Saudara*, including the condemnation of false beliefs or mythical understandings (*takhayul*), superstitions (*khurafat*), and illicit innovations (*bid'ah*).

Islamic reform movements and ideas in Malaysia received both rejection and reception in the early stages of introduction; Islamic reform and renewal thoughts spread in the states of Malaka, Pulau Pinang, Perak, Selangor, Negeri Sembilan, Johor, Perlis, and Kelantan. However, due to the minimum or absence of support from political authorities, the development of the reform movement waned, except in Perlis. With the support of local political and royal authorities, the reform movement is well-received and thriving in Perlis.<sup>26</sup>

### The Role of Reason: Reason, Revelation, and *Taqḥīd*

In addition to Muhammad 'Abduh's theological worldview of rational Islam (*al-dīn al-'aql*), another basic idea of arguing for the rationalization of Islam is also based upon the harmonious relation between reason and revelation. According to Abduh, the revelation (Qur'an) encourages Muslims to employ logical procedure, rational inquiry, and intellectual investigation to comprehend manifestations and particular phenomena of the universe with a certain level of certainty.<sup>27</sup> Indeed, when somebody comes up with certain ideas, the revelation challenges them to provide accurate and valid evidence, "Say, bring your evidence if you are speaking the truth (Surah 2: 111 and Surah: 27: 64)."

According to Abduh, the irrational character of Islamic tradition, which prevents Muslims from developing and progressing, is *taqḥīd*. The *taqḥīd* can be defined as blind acceptance or imitation of a predecessor's thoughts, actions, or beliefs. He regards the *taqḥīd* as a major enemy. For Abduh, the right religion encourages human beings to move away from their clinging attachment to the world of their fathers and their legacies.<sup>28</sup> Accordingly, he promotes independent reasoning (*ijtihād*) through the liberation of thought from the chains of imitation (*taqḥīd*). It is an important foundation for the development of rational movement in Islam. By promoting reason and independent reasoning, religion is considered a true friend of science, a stimulus for inquiry, and an appeal to respect established truths. Reliance upon reason and rational understanding cultivates human spirits and reforms one's actions.<sup>29</sup> Furthermore, human beings can achieve their perfection of humanity, which is indicated by the possession of the independence of will and freedom of thought and opinion.<sup>30</sup>

This spirit of rational thinking, independent reasoning (*ijtihād*), and anti-blind imitation (*taqḥīd*) in scientific and religious affairs inherited from Abduh is widely held by Southeast Asian Muslim reformists. In Indonesia, through *al-Munir*, they continued the legacy of reform ideas published in *al-Manar* in Egypt and *al-Imam* in Singapore. One of the Islamic reformist figures, Sheikh Abdul Karim Amrullah, replied to religious questions posted to *al-Munir*, saying: "Blind obedience is as low as possible—true religion cannot be upheld as long as imitation" and "the door to *ijtihād* is forever not closed to all people of understanding who have the ability."<sup>31</sup> As an expert in Islamic jurisprudence and its principles, he explicitly opposed the idea that the gates of interpretation with independent reasoning (*ijtihād*) were closed. He also founded a madrasah in Padang Panjang to form leaders and scholars who would later take his reform and renewal teachings to the people.<sup>32</sup> *Al-Munir* was widely distributed throughout Sumatra, including Java, Sulawesi,

<sup>25</sup> Jalani, *Majalah Al-Islah dan Idea-Idea Pembaharuan*, 92-98.

<sup>26</sup> Abdul Rahman Haji Abdullah, *Pemikiran Islam di Malaysia: Sejarah dan Aliran* (Gema Insani Press, 1997), 211-22.

<sup>27</sup> Abduh, *The Theology of Unity*, 39.

<sup>28</sup> Abduh, *The Theology of Unity*, 127.

<sup>29</sup> Rashid Rida, *Tarikh al-Ustadh al-Imam as-Shaikh Muhammad Abduh*, vol. I (Matba'at al-Manar, 1931), 11-12.

<sup>30</sup> Abduh, *The Theology of Unity*, 127.

<sup>31</sup> Amir, "The Influence of Muhammad Abduh in The Nusantara: From Qur'anic Exegesis to Islamic Reform Movement," 266.

<sup>32</sup> Fogg, "Hamka's Doctoral Address at Al-Azhar: The Influence of Muhammad Abduh in Indonesia," 134.

Kalimantan, and Malay. The spread of *al-Munir* affected K.H. Ahmad Dahlan (d. 1923), and later became the founder and leader of the largest Islamic reformist organization, Muhammadiyah (founded in 1912). He was a loyal reader of *al-Munir*.<sup>33</sup>

In light of the promotion of independent reasoning (*ijtihad*) and avoidance of the blind imitation attitude (*taqlid*), other reformist organizations such as Jamiat Khair (founded in 1905) and al-Irsyad (established in 1913), applied it through the integration between general and Islamic subjects in their institutions of learning. Muhammadiyah and Persis (Persatuan Islam, initiated in 1920) not only taught general and Islamic sciences in their schools to cultivate independent reasoning among students but also employed organizational policies and programs to promote it. Muhammadiyah advocated reform, including opening the gate of *ijtihad* and purification from superstitious elements through a division in Muhammadiyah called Majelis Tarjih, which was established in 1927.<sup>34</sup> However, the most militant reform movement in the advocacy of reform agendas was Persis, founded by Ahmad Hassan (1887-1958) in Bandung, West Java. Ahmad Hassan was born in Singapore. Before moving to Indonesia, he lived in Singapore, where he read publications from Muslim reformists in al-Manar, al-Imam, and al-Munir. Persis, led by Ahmad Hassan, used polemical and dialectical methods to promote reform and renewal of understanding either through direct debate with opponents (e.g., against Ahmadi Qadian missionaries, Nahdlatul Ulama members, and others) or through magazine publication (e.g. *Pembela Islam, Al-Fatwa, Al-Lisan, Al-Muslimun*).<sup>35</sup> Polemical and dialectical ability requires intellectual and independent reasoning to develop an argument and defend it from possible an opponent's refutations.<sup>36</sup>

Furthermore, the reception of Abduh's rational thought is not only limited to Islamic civil society organizations and their founders in the early twentieth century but also extended to scholars and institutions of learning in the late twentieth and twentieth centuries. Among them is Harun Nasution (d. 1998) and his rational theology taught at Islamic higher learning institutions in Indonesia.<sup>37</sup> Harun Nasution studied at Al-Azhar University and the American University of Cairo, Egypt, and immersed himself in Abduh's reform ideas while studying in both institutions. While pursuing his doctoral program at McGill University, Canada, he wrote a dissertation entitled "The Place of Reason in Abduh's Theology: Its Impact on His Theological System and Views" in 1968.<sup>38</sup> For him, Abduh's rational theology is even more radical than Mu'tazila's theology in the sense that Abduh's theology of God's unity does not allow intermediation between God and humans. The oneness of God is the basis of Islam egalitarianism since every human being is equal before God.<sup>39</sup>

After his return to Indonesia in 1969, he introduced "neo-Mu'tazila" rational theology through his involvement as a professor and then rector of the State Institute of Islamic Studies (IAIN) Syarif Hidayatullah Jakarta, which is now better known as Islamic State University (UIN) Jakarta. He wrote several books emphasizing historical, philosophical, and rational aspects of Islam that became textbooks in Indonesian universities and colleges, including the book *Islam Ditinjau dari Berbagai Aspeknya* (Islam Viewed from Various Aspects) in 1973. He also reformed the Islamic studies curriculum by introducing, among others, the subjects of the introductory study of religion, philosophy, sociology, and research methodology. He also influenced and inspired his students to become new Muslim scholars of renewal and

<sup>33</sup> Amir, "The Influence of Muhammad Abduh in The Nusantara: From Qur'anic Exegesis to Islamic Reform Movement," 267.

<sup>34</sup> Iwan Dwi Aprianto and Insanul Muttaqin, "Majelis Tarjih dan Agenda Pengembangan Pemikiran Islam dalam Konteks Perubahan Masyarakat di Yogyakarta," *Pangadereng: Jurnal Hasil Penelitian Ilmu Sosial dan Humaniora* 6, no. 2 (2020): 288-94; "Laporan Penelitian Majelis Tarjih Muhammadiyah (Suatu Studi tentang Sistem dan Metode Penentuan Hukum)," IAIN Sunan Kalijaga, 1985, accessed 14 August, 2024, <https://tarjih.or.id/sejarah-majelis-tarjih/>.

<sup>35</sup> Deliar Noer, *Gerakan Modern Islam di Indonesia 1900-1942* (LP3ES, 1994), 95-104.

<sup>36</sup> Mohammad Syifa Amin Widigdo, "Imām al-Haramayn al-Juwaynī and Jadal Theory in the Eleventh Century: A Critical Analysis of Imām al-Haramayn's al-Kāfiya fi al-jadal," *QJIS: Qudus International Journal of Islamic Studies* 6, no. 2 (2018): 271-308.

<sup>37</sup> Ahmad Farouk Musa and Piet Hizbullah Khaidir, "The Philosophical Sufism of Harun Nasution: A Phenomenological-Historical Investigation of The Influence of Neo-Mu'tazilism," *Intellectual Discourse* 31, no. 2 (2023): 325-344; Imron Rosidi, "Harun Nasution's influence on shaping Muslim intellectual's development in Indonesia," *Contemporary Islam* 17, no. 3 (2023): 391-409.

<sup>38</sup> Muh. Subhan Ashari, "Teologi Islam Persepektif Harun Nasution," *An-Nur: Jurnal Studi Islam* X, no. 1 (2020): 73-96; Musa and Khaidir, "The Philosophical Sufism of Harun Nasution: A Phenomenological-Historical Investigation of The Influence of Neo-Mu'tazilism."

<sup>39</sup> Musa and Khaidir, "The Philosophical Sufism of Harun Nasution: A Phenomenological-Historical Investigation of The Influence of Neo-Mu'tazilism," 332.

reform-mindedness, such as Azyumardi Azra, M. Din Syamsuddin, Mulyadhikertanegara, Komaruddin Hidayat, and Bachtiar Effendi.<sup>40</sup>

In the Malaysian context, the reformist movement is usually called *the Islah*, *Kaum muda*, or *Sunnah* movement.<sup>41</sup> The advocacy for the *ijtihad* and the rejection of *taqlid* manifest in the *fatwās* of *Sunnah* ulama' and the opinions of *Islah* figures. One of the important centers of *the Sunnah* movement is Perlis. Abu Bakar al-Ashaari, a graduate of al-Azhar (1925-1932) and *imam* of the Masjid Alwi in Perlis, believed that "everybody is entitled to his *ijtihad*." He issued novel products of *ijtihad* (i.e., *Fatwās*) that challenged traditional religious orthodoxy and triggered controversy during the re-enhancement period of the *Sunnah* in Perlis between 1945 and 1960s. Among al-Ashaari's controversial *fatwās* were the *fatwa* that permitted organ donation from a cadaver to a living person based on *maṣlahah* (public interest) argument and another *fatwa* that allowed Muslims to pay *zakat* (alms) with money instead of crops and fruits. These *fatwās* were initially heavily refuted by traditional *mazhab*-oriented ulama' (*kaum tua*), and al-Ashaari was accused of being a heretic. Still, they are "widely accepted and practiced by Muslims in Malaysia."<sup>42</sup>

Tuan Haji Yusof Rawa, a leading *islah* scholar and politician of PAS (Partai Islam se-Malaysia), appropriated Abduh's reform and renewal project through *al-Islah*. He advocated a rational attitude and exploration and, at the same time, attacked intellectual closed-mindedness: "The coming of Islam is to melt the frozen thinking. Many teachings of Islam stimulate us (humans) to use (intellectual) reflection, contemplation, and thinking of every God's creation for the benefit and betterment of humans."<sup>43</sup> In the educational setting, Tuan Haji Yusof Rawa also emphasized that the teaching of science and technology should include intellectual and character education so that humans do not fall into intellectual, spiritual, and moral deficiency.<sup>44</sup> Furthermore, he promoted critical thinking and respected different opinions and independent judgment. He wrote, "...what we need now is that when criticizing ourselves or toward any party, there must be mutual respect between one party, and the other for the thoughts or opinions of each party and above all, the criticism or reprimands must be based on a proper measure or consideration. Moreover, of course, for us Muslims, it is the Islamic faith that we must strike a balance of consideration in everything. Hopefully, the work of *Islah* (reform) continues."<sup>45</sup>

## Human's Deed

While Weber employed a form of rationalization regarding doctrinal conduct, Islamic reformers understood it as the rationalization of doctrine. This rationalization is important and useful for creating a valid understanding of human deeds. If human acts were viewed from the perspective of fatalism (*jabariyah*) or pre-determinism, all human deeds were fully under God's direction and control. Thus, there is no notion of freedom and power of human will in acting. According to Abduh, this understanding of human will is inimical to the sacred law.<sup>46</sup> Using a progressive understanding of religious sources, Abduh argues that religion brings together freedom of thought and intellectual independence.<sup>47</sup> Indeed, the capacity for thought and the ability to choose actions are the most distinguishing features by which humans are different from other animals.<sup>48</sup>

Human beings' natural disposition leads them to believe in predestination (*qaḍā'* and *qadar*). While the Protestant doctrine of predestination holds that God has already chosen certain people to be saved or damned, Islamic Puritanism maintains that human deeds in the world are the only criteria by which God

<sup>40</sup> Rosidi, "Harun Nasution's influence on shaping Muslim intellectual's development in Indonesia," 391-409.

<sup>41</sup> Malik and Mat, "The Historical Development of the "Sunnah" Reform Ideology in the State of Perlis, Malaysia," 2. See also Hafiz Zakariya, "Major Trends in the Historiography of Muslim Reformism in Pre-Independent Malaysia," *Intellectual Discourse* 27, no. 2 (2019 2019): 531-54.

<sup>42</sup> Abdullah, *Pemikiran Islam di Malaysia: Sejarah dan Aliran*; Malik and Mat, "The Historical Development of the "Sunnah" Reform Ideology in the State of Perlis, Malaysia," 4-5.

<sup>43</sup> Jalani, *Majalah Al-Islah dan Idea-Idea Pembaharuan*, 190.

<sup>44</sup> Jalani, *Majalah Al-Islah dan Idea-Idea Pembaharuan*, 197.

<sup>45</sup> Hamidah Jalani, Nor Adina Abdul Kadir, and Nang Naemah Nik Dahalan, "Pemikiran Islah Yusof Rawa dalam Majalah al-Islah," *Journal of Islamic Philanthropy & Social Finance (JIPSF)* 3, no. 2 (2021): 26.

<sup>46</sup> Malcolm H. Kerr, *Islamic Reform; Political and Legal Theories of Muhammad Abduh and Rashid Ridha*, Berkeley and Los Angeles (University of California Press, 1966), 113.

<sup>47</sup> Abduh, *The Theology of Unity*, 40.

<sup>48</sup> Abduh, *The Theology of Unity*, 65.

determines whether someone will be saved or damned. In this context, the deeds of an intelligent agent are never pointless or idle.<sup>49</sup> All their actions are accounted for. God knows that at such and such a moment, man will perform an action that will be good and for which he will be rewarded, or some other action that will be evil and for which he will be punished. Due to humans' possession of free will and independent thoughts and actions, their salvation depends on their actions in the world.

In addition, if the Weberian rationalization of conduct resulted in self-discipline, rational calculation, and individualism, the rationalization of Islamic Puritanism brings about a positive outlook toward worldly activities. Worldly life is no longer considered a prison for believers. Conversely, there are God's blessings in this world, and human beings are encouraged to gain those blessings through an active quest for material progress. Abduh conceives that the Muslim's best way to express gratitude towards God is to use his mind to pursue material progress.<sup>50</sup> However, this material orientation is not for bodily pleasure or worldly satisfaction. Worldly activities, such as an accumulation of wealth, are evaluated as bad or good not based on raising bodily pleasures but on the benefit that accrues from them or the harm they entail.<sup>51</sup> If wealth accumulation gives advantages to other people, it would also be regarded as a good. However, if pleasurable things in worldly affairs are found to be bad in consequence, like excess food and drink, perpetual listening to music, and free rein indulgence in passion, the deeds would also be considered bad. They are deleterious to health. They waste intellect and dissipate wealth, causing feebleness and ignominy.<sup>52</sup> In short, in the mind of Abduh, God has already determined that good people are saved and bad people are damned, but the thing that distinguishes the quality and status of human beings in the face of God is their deeds.

This positive outlook toward worldly life, free will, and good deeds, as Abduh understood it, has been translated by Muslim reformists in Southeast Asia into their historical settings. In Indonesia, after K.H. Ahmad Dahlan subscribed to Abduh's intellectual, educational, and social reforms, as expressed in *al-Urwatul Wutsqa* and *al-Manar* as well as Indonesian reformers as published in *al-Munir*, he was inspired and influenced to apply ideas of reform and renewal in a social and educational setting. Kyai Haji Ahmad Dahlan (1868-1923) founded an Islamic da'wah and social organization called Muhammadiyah on 18 November 1912 (8 Dzulhijjah 1330). Muhammadiyah was (and is) the largest Islamic reform movement, and K.H. Ahmad Dahlan was considered the soul and spirit of activism from the 1912 period.<sup>53</sup> With a thorough understanding of Islamic law (*fiqh*) and principles of Islamic jurisprudence (*uṣūl al-fiqh*), Ahmad Dahlan has issued audacious Islamic legal opinions (*fatwās*). Some of these include permitting prayer in Javanese for those who are not well-versed in Arabic, establishing the *halāl* (lawful) status of a thing with *ru'yat bil 'ain* (observation with an eyesight), and altering the direction of the qibla of the Grand Mosques of Yogya and Kauman by adding white lines to each row, based on the scientific measurement.<sup>54</sup> He and his successors in Muhammadiyah leadership also have been appropriating the idea of a positive outlook toward worldly life, free will, and good deeds through Muhammadiyah's intellectual, social, educational, and philanthropic works in Indonesia in the forms of building institutions of learning (i.e. schools and universities), providing healthcare services (i.e. polyclinics and hospitals), establishing Muslim women organizations (Aisiyiah), charitable institutions for orphanage and the needy, and philanthropic and humanitarian institutions as well.<sup>55</sup> The Muhammadiyah's acceptance of Pancasila and the 1945 Constitution (UUD 1945) also reflects such a positive outlook towards worldly life in which Muhammadiyah perceives Indonesia with its state ideological and constitutional foundation as *dār al-'ahd wa al-shahādah* (the land of consensus and witness).<sup>56</sup>

<sup>49</sup> Abduh, *The Theology of Unity*, 59.

<sup>50</sup> Muhammad Abduh, *Al-Islām wa al-naṣrānīyah ma'a al-'ilm wa al-madaniyah* (Dār al-Ḥadāthah, 1988), 77-79.

<sup>51</sup> Abduh, *Al-Islām wa al-naṣrānīyah ma'a al-'ilm wa al-madaniyah*, 69.

<sup>52</sup> Abduh, *Al-Islām wa al-naṣrānīyah ma'a al-'ilm wa al-madaniyah*.

<sup>53</sup> Amir, "The Influence of Muhammad Abduh in The Nusantara: From Qur'anic Exegesis to Islamic Reform Movement," 269.

<sup>54</sup> Amir, "The Influence of Muhammad Abduh in The Nusantara: From Qur'anic Exegesis to Islamic Reform Movement," 270.

<sup>55</sup> Noer, *Gerakan Modern Islam di Indonesia 1900-1942*, 84-95; Haedar Nashir, *Muhammadiyah A Reform Movement* (Muhammadiyah University Press, 2015); Haedar Nashir, *Understanding The Ideology of Muhammadiyah* (Muhammadiyah University Press, 2015).

<sup>56</sup> Mohammad Syifa Amin Widigdo and Awang Azman Awang Pawi, "'Reason' of political and religious moderation in the book of Ghiyāth al-Umam by al-Juwaynī and its contemporary Southeast Asian context," *Cogent Arts & Humanities* 10, no. 1 (2023): 8.

In the Malaysian setting, the reform movements employed primarily religious and political means to embody Muhammad Abduh's positive attitude toward life, free will, and orientation toward good deeds. They believed that the betterment of society and the adjustment to modernity could be achieved through the application of reform agendas, such as the return to the Qur'an and Sunnah, upholding a pure oneness of God, maximizing the use of reason, and having a positive attitude toward life through practicing good deeds. The reformist efforts to translate these reform agendas into practice can be seen, among others, in the *Sunnah* practice and movement in Perlis, Malaysia. According to Malik and Mat, there are six phases of how the reformist movement in the form of *Sunnah* Perlis persuaded the state of Perlis to adopt and implement *islah* (reform) agendas: the period of establishment (1920s-1930s), stagnation (1941-1945), re-enhancement (1945-1960s), crisis (1960s), recovery-revival (1980s), and golden periods (2000s, under Shahidan Kasim). The success of the *Islah* or *Sunnah* movement in Perlis was generally due to compelling persuasion from the reformist movement and political support from royal political authorities, such as the King of Perlis, Raja Alwi, who in 1927 accepted the reformist's proposal of *zakat* collection and distribution and King Syed Sirajudin served as King of Perlis, who in the 2000s appointed a Muslim reformist (Datuk Seri Dr. Shahidan Kasim) become *Menteri Besar* (Grand Minister of Perlis) and Dr. Mohd Asri Zainul Abidin (MAZA) as the *Mufti* of the state of Perlis.<sup>57</sup>

The religious approach in the state of Perlis closely aligns with the Islamic reformist thought advocated by Muhammad Abduh, a prominent figure of the *Islah* (reform) movement in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Abduh emphasized the necessity for Muslims to return to the primary sources of Islam—namely the Qur'an and the Sunnah—interpreted through sound reasoning (*'aql*) and an active spirit of *ijtihad*. He firmly opposed blind adherence (*taqlid*) to specific schools of jurisprudence or traditions that no longer resonated with the realities of the contemporary world. These very principles form the foundation of Perlis's religious renewal, which since the early 20th century, has been notably influenced by the intellectual legacy of Abduh and his student, Rashid Rida. In accordance with Abduh's reformist ethos, Perlis rejects rigid sectarianism and adopts an open attitude toward all major legal schools (*madhāhib*) within *Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jamā'ah*. Legal opinions in Perlis are determined through the method of *tarjih*, which involves evaluating the strength of evidence and its relevance to current contexts. This approach mirrors Abduh's advocacy for *ijtihad* and legal reform (*taḥdīth al-fiqh*) to meet the evolving challenges of modern Muslim societies. In issues such as the appointment of women as judges, payment of *zakāt* in monetary form, and the interpretation of triple divorce (*ṭalāq ṭhalāth*), the Perlis stance reflects rational boldness—an essential trait in Abduh's thought, which championed reason as a vital tool in reevaluating interpretative rulings.<sup>58</sup>

Moreover, Perlis's rejection of religious fanaticism, *takfīr* (excommunication), and extremism underscores its commitment to the principles of moderation (*wasatiyyah*) and tolerance—central themes in Muhammad Abduh's preaching and intellectual framework. Abduh envisioned a Muslim society characterized by knowledge, civility, and resistance to manipulation in the name of religion. This vision underpins Perlis's stance against superstitions (*khurāfāt*), occult practices, and Sufi rituals that contradict authentic Islamic principles. Additionally, Perlis's refusal to declare legitimate differences of opinion (*ikhtilāf muktabar*) as heretical, and its openness to scholarly dialogue without resorting to derogatory labeling, strongly reflect Abduh's emphasis on ethical discourse in theological debates and his prioritization of Muslim unity. In this regard, Perlis effectively actualizes Abduh's reformist aspirations—an Islam grounded in knowledge, openness, rationality, and liberation from deception and sectarian rigidity. In conclusion, the religious practice in Perlis represents a living continuation of Muhammad Abduh's reformist ideals: a return to the pure sources of Islam, guided by balanced reasoning, and a clear rejection of blind conformity, extremism, and divisiveness within the Muslim community.

Another positive outlook toward life is revealed by reformist figures who promote political reform ideas. They believe that social and religious progress can be achieved through political (in addition to intellectual and educational) means. The first Muslim reformist to enter politics was probably Dr. Burhanuddin al-

<sup>57</sup> Malik and Mat, "The Historical Development of the "Sunnah" Reform Ideology in the State of Perlis, Malaysia," 7-10.

<sup>58</sup> "Perlis Paling Harmoni, Mari Kita Berdialog: Respon Kepada Pertubuhan Tarekat AMIN," Jabatan Hal Ehwal Agama Islam Perlis - JAIPs, 2016, accessed 10 June, 2025, <https://www.facebook.com/JAIPs01/posts/perlis-paling-harmoni-mari-kita-berdialogrespon-kepada-pertubuhan-tarekat-aminol/1663195273994448/>.

Helmi (1911-1969). He was born in Changkat Tulang, Taiping, Perak, to parents of Minangkabau and of Arab descent. After learning foundational Islamic studies in Perak, he was exposed to the influence of reformist ideas and movements when he attended a modern Islamic school in Pulau Pinang, Madrasah al-Mashor al-Islamiyyah. In this school, he was influenced by *Kaum Muda* member Hj. Arshad al-Bawayih introduced Islamic reform thinking along with the principles of the madrasah, Sheikh Abu Bakr al-Rafie, and prominent writer Ashiran Yaacob. After graduating from Madrasah al-Mashor, he continued studying at Aligarh Islamic University in India, which he completed in the 1930s.<sup>59</sup> In this country, he had an opportunity to read *al-Manar*, *al-Fath*, *Usul Fiqh*, *Usul al-Ahkam*, *Madhahib al-Arba'ah*, Ibn Taymiyyah books, and other Muslim reformist authors as well.<sup>60</sup> In addition, he was not only well-grounded in the study of Islam but also well-versed in medicine and philosophy since he held a doctoral degree and professional certificate in the following fields: Doctor of Naturopathy from the School of Naturopathy, London, Doctor of Divinity from International Academy Canada, and a professional certificate from Ismaeliah Medical College in Hyderabad, India. His political involvement started when he joined KMM (Kesatuan Muda Melayu, Malay Youth Union), KRIS (Kesatuan Rakyat Indonesia Semenanjung, Indonesian Union at Malay Peninsula), PKMM (Parti Kebangsaan Melayu Malaya, Malay National Party), PRM (Parti Rakyat Melayu, Malay People Party), and PAS (Malay Islamic Party) in the period from 1938 to his death in 1969. However, his most important political contribution was when he became the leader of PAS and won a parliament seat representing PAS from 1959 to 1964. One of his important contributions was his persuasive argument in insisting on recognizing Islam as the official religion in Malaysia through The Supply Bill of 1963. When he was in the leadership of PAS, he addressed the critiques: "In our struggle (PAS) to achieve independence, we have and continue to fight for the Malay as a nation for the country of Malaya based on the noble ideology of Islam."<sup>61</sup> Dr. Burhanuddin al-Helmi's integration of Islamic reform with political activism reflects the influence of Muhammad Abduh's reformist thought, particularly in advocating for Islam's relevance in modern governance and nation-building. Like Abduh, Burhanuddin emphasized the compatibility of Islam with rationalism, political engagement, and national progress, positioning Islamic principles as the foundation for social justice, independence, and modern statehood.

The other important reformist figure involved in political activities was Tuan Haji Yusof Rawa. In addition to his seminal role in disseminating *islah's* thoughts through the publication of the magazine *al-Islah*, he was also engaged in political life in Malaysia. He joined PAS (Islamic Political Party of Malaysia), ran for a parliamentary seat, and defeated Mahathir Muhammad from UMNO in the 1969 election. He was called a giant killer. He served in the Tun Abdul Razak cabinet as Deputy Minister of Primary Industries (*Timbalan Menteri Perusahaan Utama*) and Malaysian Ambassador to Iran, Afghanistan, and Turkey in 1978. After serving in governmental offices, he held several leadership positions in PAS, ranging from the speaker (Yang DiPertua) to President and Spiritual Leader (Mursyidul Am) from 1982 to 1989.<sup>62</sup> In the party congress on 10 April 1987, Yusof Rawa addressed the attendees, emphasizing the relationship between politics and *dakwah* (Islamic mission): "Our political activities must be related to the role of *dakwah*. The same holds for the *dakwah* path. We must manage Islamic political activities, gaining people's sympathy and support by upholding the ideals of Islam that our members adhere to. It is because of politics and political activities related to public support. Therefore, effective Islamic political activities must reject the idea of isolation from the public. If the Islamic community, in its political activities, takes an attitude of isolation from the public and does not plan to create good relations with all levels of society. In that case, the community is doing something contrary to Islamic political principles. Political activity should be understood as an art that brings people together, the art of influencing the public, controlling people's support, and directing them to achieve the goal of (Islamic) community."<sup>63</sup> Yusof Rawa's political thought underscores the intrinsic link between *dakwah* (Islamic proselytization) and political engagement, asserting that Islamic struggle must involve active participation in public life rather than retreating into isolation. He conceptualized politics as the art of influencing and guiding society toward Islamic objectives. This

<sup>59</sup> Mohammad Muzammil Mohammad Noor, *Pemikiran Politik Islam: Perbandingan antara Pemikiran Dr. Burhanuddin Al-Helmi dengan Muhammad Natsir* (Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, 2015), 8-30.

<sup>60</sup> Noor, *Pemikiran Politik Islam: Perbandingan antara Pemikiran Dr. Burhanuddin Al-Helmi dengan Muhammad Natsir*, 231.

<sup>61</sup> Noor, *Pemikiran Politik Islam: Perbandingan antara Pemikiran Dr. Burhanuddin Al-Helmi dengan Muhammad Natsir*, 219.

<sup>62</sup> Badlihissham Mohd Nasir and Abdur Razzaq, "Ketokohan dan Pemikiran Dakwah Tuan Haji Yusof Rawa (1922 – 2000) di Malaysia," *Wardah: Jurnal Dakwah dan Kemasyarakatan* 26, no. 1 (2020): 4-6.

<sup>63</sup> Nasir and Razzaq, "Ketokohan dan Pemikiran Dakwah Tuan Haji Yusof Rawa (1922 – 2000) di Malaysia."

perspective aligns with the reformist paradigm of Muhammad Abduh, who rejected the dichotomy between religion and public affairs and emphasized the necessity for Muslims to engage actively in political, educational, and social reform. Both thinkers framed Islam as a transformative force capable of steering societal progress through rational, strategic, and inclusive approaches.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, the project of Islamic rationalization of Abduh relied on three foundational ideas. First, Abduh advocated liberating religious life from magical and miraculous elements by emphasizing causal explanations for seemingly mystical and inconceivable events. It is a rational attitude towards the Islamic doctrine of the oneness of God (*tawhīd*). This has been translated in the Southeast Asian context by a generation of Muslim scholars called *Kaum Muda*. They introduced and promoted puritanism forms of Islamic reform in Indonesia and Malaysia in the realm of foundational belief of Islam (*'aqidah*), represented by figures such as Syeikh Tahir Jalaluddin (in both Indonesia and Malaysia), Sheikh Muhammad Jamil Jambek, Sheikh Abdullah Ahmad and Sheikh Abdul Karim Amrullah (in Indonesia), and Syeikh Muhammad bin Salim al-Kalali, Sayid Syed bin Ahmad al-Hadi, and Haji Abbas bin Muhammad Taha (in Malaysia).

Second, by emphasizing the importance of independent reasoning and the power of reason, Abduh fought against tendencies of imitation and uncritical attitude toward the tradition (*taqlīd*). Muslim reformists brought this spirit of rationalism to Indonesia and Malaysia, which has significantly impacted the region's social, educational, intellectual, and political constellation. Many Islamic civil society organizations with a reformist orientation, such as Muhammadiyah, Jamiat Khair, al-Irsyad, and Persis, were established under the influence of Abduh's reform projects. They instituted modern institutes of learning that teach "secular" and Islamic subjects to promote independent reasoning in addition to other social justice-oriented activities in Indonesia. Harun Nasution even introduced a "neo-Mu'tazila" rational theology to Indonesian higher education after encountering Abduh's rational approach to Islamic theology. Meanwhile, reform ideas have been adopted in Malaysia into religious and political life in Perlis and other states. In Perlis, this movement is called *Sunnah* Perlis, and scholars such as Menteri Besar and Mufti hold important positions. They influence the social and religious lives of Perlis people. Similarly, Tuan Haji Yusof Rawa from Pulau Pinang published an Islamic reform magazine *al-Islah*, which was widely read in the Malay Peninsula, to promote rational attitudes and reform ideas.

Third, Abduh rejected to accept the idea that God determines human deeds. Instead, his rational attitude led him to the concept of free will and various forms of inner-world asceticism. Indonesian and Malaysian Muslim scholars and activists have appropriated the ascetic and positive outlook toward worldly affairs in their respective contexts. In Indonesia, Muhammadiyah applied reform agendas in education, women's emancipation, philanthropy and humanitarianism, intellectual advancement, social works, and policy advocacy. In Malaysia, the positive outlook toward possibilities of worldly reformation was shown in the movement of *Sunnah* or *Islah* Perlis, which succeeded in persuading religious leaders, kings, and state officials to implement Islamic reform ideas and agendas. Meanwhile, two leading reformist figures, Dr. Burhanuddin al-Helmi, and Tuan Haji Yusof Rawa, contextualized Islamic reform projects through political means at a national level. Through their involvement in PAS (The Malaysian Islamic Party) and service as parliament members, deputy ministers, and ambassadors, they have played an important role in shaping Malaysian nationalism based on Islamic values and principles.

In short, Abduh's theological, intellectual, and attitudinal reform and renewal in understanding Islam and Muslim societies have significantly impacted Muslims in Indonesia and Malaysia. In Indonesia, the impacts can be seen in the social, educational, and intellectual reforms that occurred through the role played by civil society organizations such as Muhammadiyah, Persis, Jamiat Khair, and al-Irsyad. The agendas of Islamic reform and renewal are received by civil society without necessarily the support of political authorities in Indonesia. Meanwhile, in Malaysia, such ideas of reform and renewal might have spread in many states, but the success of their reception depended on political authorities' approval and support. The establishment of PAS as a political party at the national level and the adoption of Islamic reform ideas in Perlis are

examples of the necessity of political support for the successful reception of Abduh's spirit of reform and renewal in Malaysia.

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