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## MUHAMMAD ‘ABDUH’S REFORMISM: THE MODES OF ITS DISSEMINATION IN PRE-INDEPENDENT MALAYSIA<sup>1</sup>

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### Abstract:

Muhammad ‘Abduh (1849-1905) was a prominent scholar, pedagogue, mufti ‘alim, theologian and reformer. Though trained in traditional Islamic knowledge, ‘Abduh, who was influenced by the ideas of Jamal al-Din al-Afghani, became discontent with the existing methods of traditional Islamic learning. Based in Egypt, ‘Abduh led the late 19th-century Muslim reform to revitalize some aspects of Islamic doctrine and practice to make them compatible with the modern world. This reformist trend called for the reform of intellectual stagnation, revitalization of the socio-economic and political conditions of the ummah, and to make Islam compatible with modernity. ‘Abduh’s progressive reformism found following in various parts of the Muslim world including the Malay Archipelago. Among those influenced by ‘Abduh in the region were Sheikh Tahir Jalaluddin and Abdullah Ahmad in West Sumatra, Syed Sheikh al-Hadi in Malaya, and Kiyai Ahmad Dahlan in Yogyakarta. Though there is increasing literature on Muslim reformism, few works examine the social history of the transmission of ideas from one part of the Muslim world to another. Thus, this study analyzes how ‘Abduh’s reformism was transmitted to pre-independent Malaysia.

### Keywords:

Muslim Reformism, ‘Abduh’s Influence In Malaysia, Transmission Of Muslim Reformism, Islah In Malaysia

### Introduction

The Islamic civilization experienced efflorescence between the 7<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> century. During this remarkable period, Muslims thrived and became leaders in various endeavours – knowledge,

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science, education, commerce, medicine and so forth. However, the glorious age of Islamic civilization did not last forever and the status of Muslims as the key producers of knowledge and civilization was put under tremendous strain by the emergence of Europe as a major international power. The rise of Europe during the late 15<sup>th</sup> century posed a major challenge for the Muslim supremacy in politics, economy, and technology. This new era heralded the European conquest and domination of Asia and Africa, well known as “The Age of European Exploration and Discovery” spearheaded by Portugal and Spain. Moreover, the Muslim world, especially from the 19<sup>th</sup> century onwards, had succumbed to intellectual as well as material malaise. As a result, from 1880-1914, one after another Muslim country was either colonized or came under the influence of the major Western powers. The imposition of colonialism in the Muslim world clearly demonstrated the failure of the Muslim leaders and the supremacy of the West. This led concerned Muslim reformists such as Jamal al-Din al-Afghani and Muhammad ‘Abduh to examine the reasons behind Muslim decline and the supremacy of the West.

### **Problem Statement and Methodology**

This study examines the spread of Muhammad ‘Abduh’s reformism in pre-independent Malaysia. After providing a concise overview of Muhammad ‘Abduh’s life and reformism, it examines the transmission of ‘Abduh’s reformism to Malay Peninsula. Its main objectives are as follows:

- a. To analyse factors which made ‘Abduh’s reformism attractive to reformists in Malay Peninsula during the first half of the twentieth century
- b. To discuss the major channels in the transmission of ‘Abduh’s reformism to Malay Peninsula
- c. To examine the role of printing technology and reformist literature in the diffusion of Muhammad ‘Abduh ideas in pre-independent Malaysia.

This study adopts the methods of textual analysis and historical research through a critical examination of the primary source materials. The major primary sources used in this study are unpublished manuscripts and documents located at the the National Archives, Kuala Lumpur, reformist periodicals retrieved at the National Archives, Kuala Lumpur and the Library of Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, Kuala Lumpur.

### **Brief Profile of Muhammad ‘Abduh**

The Muslim reformism “emerged in modern form in Cairo and Damascus in the last decades of the nineteenth century. The key tenets were articulated by the Egyptian scholar Muhammad ‘Abduh (1849-1905)” (Humphreys, 1999, p. 189). Similarly, Yvonne Haddad emphasizes the significance of Muhammad ‘Abduh in the Muslim intellectual history when she writes:

“There is little doubt that anyone writing about Egypt...could imagine not acknowledging the enormous contribution of Muhammad ‘Abduh to modern Islamic thought. Scholar, pedagogue, mufti *‘alim*, theologian and reformer, he was controversial in the context in which he operated, and continues to be influential ...” (Haddad, 1995, p. 30).

Muhammad ‘Abduh was born in a village on the Nile Delta in 1849 and died in 1905 near Alexandria (Haddad, 1995). He was born into a family renowned for Islamic learning and piety (Hourani, 1962). Around the age of thirteen, ‘Abduh was sent to study at the Ahmadi Mosque at Tanta, then the most reputable centre of Islamic learning in Egypt outside al-Azhar

University (Hourani, 1962). The young ‘Abduh was disheartened with the teaching method there, which emphasized rote learning of the classical texts. He wanted to abandon his studies but was persuaded to complete them by his maternal uncle, Syaikh Darwish, who exerted significant influence on his life before ‘Abduh’s encounter with Jamal al-Din al-Afghani (Hourani, 1962). ‘Abduh continued his studies at Al-Azhar University from 1869 to 1877, but, he was discontent with Al-Azhar’s dull and outdated system of learning:

“I thought that this [outdated] system of religious learning only existed at Tanta, but it also happened at Al-Azhar. I found that 95% of (al-Azhar) students were discontent with this type of learning system. Lecturers taught what they understood or did not understand about the subject without taking into consideration their students situations. The lecturers thought that their students understood (the subject) but they did not” (Abbas Mahmud Aqqad, n.d., p. 18; cited in Zulkifli Yusoff, 1990, p. 74).

Three years after ‘Abduh started his studies at al-Azhar University, Jamal al-Din al-Afghani came to Egypt. Then, “Abduh became the most devoted of the students who gathered around him, attending the informal classes in his house and helping to spread his ideas” (Hourani, 1962, p.132). Under al-Afghani's influence, ‘Abduh combined journalism, politics, and religious reform. ‘Abduh believed that Western domination of the Muslim world occurred because of the pollution of the “pristine Islam”, which had been corrupted by the infiltration of non-Islamic principles. Thus, ‘Abduh attempted to reinterpret “Islamic doctrine in a way that would make it meaningful and persuasive to Muslims exposed to, and in a sense mesmerized by, the dynamism of Western knowledge and institutions” (Humphreys, 1999, p. 189).

The main features of ‘Abduh’s reformism promote Islam as a dynamic religion, Islam’s compatibility with reason and science, and Islam’s adaptability with modern civilization (Riddell, 2001). According to H.A. R. Gibb, ‘Abduh’s reforms comprise five major domains: the purification of Islam from corrupting influences, educational reforms, reinterpretation of Islamic doctrines in the light of modern thought, the defense of Islam against European influences and Christian attacks, and the emulation of the positive aspects of Western sciences and advancement (Gibb, 1947). One central aspect of ‘Abduh’s thinking is his emphasis on reason. Humphreys describes the centrality of reason in ‘Abduh’s *Weltanschauung* as follows:

“What he [‘Abduh] argued was that Islam was a religion peculiarly suited to the demands of the modern world. The Qur’an commanded man to use his reason, and the life of the Prophet and his Companions demonstrated that Muslims must not be bound by time-encrusted tradition. The modern world had brought new circumstances, new challenges, new values and forms of thought. Muslims could not deal with these effectively by adhering slavishly to the teachings of medieval lawyers and theologians, however revered these might be. On the contrary, Islam’s true teachings demanded bold, original solutions to the problems of one’s time – solutions securely anchored in the Qur’an and the practice of the Prophet” (1999, p. 189).

Education was one of the most fundamental issues in ‘Abduh’s reform. ‘Abduh lived during a time when there were two opposing education systems in Egypt; first, religious education, exemplified by al-Azhar, and second, modern schools established either by the government or the private sector. Both education systems were disconnected from each other, having separate and disparate purposes and curricular. The so-called modern “Western” subjects were not offered in the religious schools, and the modern schools covered all “Western” subjects without

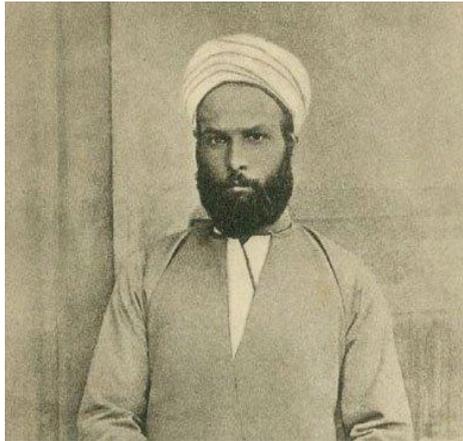
including any Islamic element (Lubis, 1993). Thus, ‘Abduh saw an urgent need to bring about educational reforms in Egypt in order to bridge the gap between the two systems of learning.

For the existing Islamic knowledge system, ‘Abduh wanted to revitalize the outmoded traditional Islamic learning he experienced at Tanta and al-Azhar. ‘Abduh wanted to introduce reforms at al-Azhar especially in two areas – administrative methods and curriculum content, including adding modern sciences at al-Azhar (Adams, 1933). After returning to Egypt from his exile in 1889, ‘Abduh proposed to the Rector of al-Azhar to introduce some subjects such as Ibn Khaldun’s *Muqaddimah* in the curriculum but his suggestion did not receive positive response. Thus, ‘Abduh learned that in order for his reforms to materialize he needed the Khedive’s support. When ‘Abbas Hilmi became the Khedive in 1892, ‘Abduh shared with the young Khedive his reform plans for al-Azhar. He also convinced the Khedive to set up an administrative council for al-Azhar in 1895, to bring about reforms in this institution. ‘Abduh was appointed as one of its most prominent members for 10 years (Hourani, 1962).

In this capacity ‘Abduh attempted to reform al-Azhar but his reforms achieved only partial success in improving administrative methods, enhancing the infrastructure, and increasing funding, while substantial curricular reform failed due to the opposition of the conservative ‘ulama at al-Azhar. The Khedive’s changing attitude towards ‘Abduh also prevented the implementation of ‘Abduh’s reforms of al-Azhar. ‘Abduh was appointed *Mufti* of Egypt instead of the Shaykh of al-Azhar. Salim al-Bishri who was appointed as the Shaykh of al-Azhar aborted the entire reform project proposed by ‘Abduh (Haddad, 1995).

In addition to reform of religious education, ‘Abduh was also “critical of the modern schools established by foreign missionaries as well as those set up by the government. In the former ... the student was forced to learn about Christianity and in the latter he learned no religion at all” (Haddad, 1995, p. 50). In sum, ‘Abduh was very critical of both the traditional Islamic learning system as well as blind emulation of western education. Instead, ‘Abduh championed an indigenous functional system of education for all children, both male and female. All should acquire basic skills of reading, writing and arithmetic. According to ‘Abduh, the content and duration of education should vary according to the goals and professions of the students (Haddad, 1995).

The education system in Egypt comprised of elementary, middle and higher education. For elementary school, ‘Abduh proposed that the curriculum should include: “a book which is a summary of Islamic doctrines according to the teachings of the Sunnis with no reference to sectarian differences; a brief text outlining the foundations of ethical and moral life ... a brief text on ... Prophet Muhammad, the life of the *sahaba* ... and the reasons for Islamic ascendancy” (Haddad, 1995, p. 52). ‘Abduh’s middle schools were meant for those seeking to specialize in the *shariah*, the military, medical training or government employment. Among the subjects the students should study were the introduction to knowledge, logic, reasoning and protocol of disputation and a text on Islamic doctrines.



**Figure 1: Muhammad 'Abduh**

Source: <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Muhammad-Abduh>

During his lifetime, 'Abduh "had succeeded only in developing a sketch of his new interpretation of Islam, but that was enough to break open new paths for his successors [disciples]" (Humphreys, 1999, p. 190). 'Abduh's thinking did not lead to a single direction. On the one hand, a group led by Qasim Amin promoted the liberal strand by boldly expanding women's rights and social roles, while another group spearheaded by Rashid Rida adopted a conservative orientation (Hourani, 1962; Humphreys, 1999).

Many Muslims found 'Abduh's reformism inspiring as it provided programmes to revitalize the Muslim society which lagged behind the advanced European nations. Therefore, 'Abduh's reformism found a following especially among Arab speaking nations such as Egypt and Syria, as well as countries in North Africa. Further, it also found acceptance in non-Arab speaking regions such as the Malay Peninsula, Dutch East Indies and Patani. It would be interesting to find out how these ideas were transmitted from the Arab world to other areas, especially the Malay Peninsula, during a time when sophisticated information technology was not available yet.

### **The Dissemination of 'Abduh's Ideas to Malaya**

Given the resonance of 'Abduh's reformism, it is not surprising that it made its way to the Malay Peninsula. The transmission of 'Abduh's thought occurred as a result of a combination of various factors. Physically, the opening of the Suez Canal in 1869 significantly shortened the distance between Southeast Asia and Egypt, thus facilitating travel and increasing interaction between the two parts of the Muslim world. The first movement in this historical process was the role of Egypt (the Egyptian influence) in the diffusion of 'Abduh's reformism in Malay Peninsula.

### ***The Egyptian Influence***

Egypt exercised great influence on the Malay Peninsula due to its prominent status in Muslim society. This land of the Prophets captured the imagination and minds of the Malays because the Qur'an tells stories about the Prophets who hailed from or were based in Egypt such as Yusuf, Musa, and Harun (Abu Hanifah Haris, 2018). Though Malay trade relations with Egypt are claimed to have existed since the time of Julius Caesar and Cleopatra over 2,000 years ago, their close relations only became apparent during the late nineteenth century.

The key reason for this was the presence of one of the oldest universities in the Muslim world, Al-Azhar University, founded by the Fatimid dynasty in 970. The reputation of Al-Azhar University attracted students from various parts of the Muslim world, including the Malay archipelago, to pursue religious learning at this prominent Islamic educational institution. Malay students were already in Egypt since the second half of the nineteenth century; this is supported by the existence of a small *jāwi riwāq* (Malay-Indonesian students' residence hall) during this period at al-Azhar University. The situation at the *jāwi riwāq* was described as follows:

“The *riwaq al-Jawah* was located to the right of the old mosque, between the *salmaniyyah riwaq* and the *riwaq al-shawam*. It was small and only provided eleven loaves every two days. There were very few people living in the *riwaq al-Jawah*, and the Shaykh responsible for its supervision was Shaykh Ismail Muhammed al-Jāwi.” (Zakariya, 2007, p. 130).

However, the number of the Malay students during that time was very small. To overcome this shortage of students Shaykh Wan Ahmad made efforts to encourage Malay students, especially those who were in Makkah, to study at al-Azhar. Once the Malay students arrived and studied in Egypt, they would find their stint in the country enriching. Their sojourn in this land of *anbiya'* familiarised them with major trends and issues and introduced them to the contemporary intellectual circles of the Muslim world. In brief, Egypt played an important role in the formation of the religious worldview of the Malay students (Zakariya, 2007).

Sheikh Muhammad Tahir Jalaluddin (henceforth, Tahir), an al-Azhar alumnus, is widely regarded as the first exponent of 'Abduh's ideas in the Malay world. After a long sojourn in Makkah, Tahir pursued his studies at al-Azhar from 1894-1897. Tahir stated that “his years in Cairo opened his eyes, and were therefore pivotal to his intellectual formation. Due to his love for the institution, he later added al-Azhari to his name. During his years in al-Azhar, he stayed at *riwaq al-haramayn* and earned an *'alimiyyah* degree” (Zakariya, 2007, p. 131). Tahir also attended many lectures by Arab reformists and is claimed to have had contact with 'Abduh (Hamzah, 1991). While there is no evidence demonstrating Tahir's contact with 'Abduh, there are several documents and correspondences between Tahir and 'Abduh's closest associate, Rashid Rida (Zakariya, 2005). Thus, it seems probable that Tahir's years in Egypt were crucial in the formulation of his reformist thought and expansion of his networks with reformists from various parts of the Muslim world.

After returning to the Malay world circa 1899, Tahir played a leading role in the diffusion of 'Abduh's reformism in the region. Tahir's extensive experiences in both Makkah and Cairo prepared him well to spearhead reforms. Hailing from Minangkabau, Tahir married a local Malay from Kuala Kangsar and opted to reside in the Malay Peninsula. Tahir along with other reformists promoted reformist ideas through the publication of *al-Imam*. Tahir's strong credentials in Islamic studies and wide experiences in West Asia enabled him to mentor many Malay reformists who were initially not fully familiar with West Asian intellectual trends. One major example was Syed Sheikh Ahmad al-Hady (hereafter, al-Hady). According to Roff (1967), it is highly probable that Al-Hady was first introduced to 'Abduh's thought by Tahir. After initial exposure to reformist ideas, Al-Hady's travels to West Asia further strengthened his grasp of and passion for reformist thought.

Tahir made profound contributions in the spread of Islamic reformism not only in the Malay Peninsula, but also in West Sumatra. Tahir's connection with Minangkabau reformists were three West Sumatran students who studied with him in Makkah circa 1897-1899. These

students were Haji Abdul Karim Amrullah, Haji Abdullah Ahmad, and Shaykh Djami1 Djambek. Upon their return to West Sumatra, these students emerged as prominent reformist scholars and played a major role in the spread of 'Abduh's reformism in Minangkabau (Zakariya, 2005). Tahir's indirect role in Minangkabau has been described as follows:

“These three prominent Minangkabau scholars, who studied with Tahir in Makkah, played a leading role in promoting Islamic reforms in West Sumatra during the early twentieth century. Undoubtedly, Tahir played some role in their exposure to the *salafiyyah* ideas, which they promoted vigorously after returning to West Sumatra. Through his famous students, Tahir played an indirect role in promoting the reformist ideas to the Minangkabau world” (Zakariya, 2005, p. 51).

The number of Malay students in Egypt increased significantly after World War One. During the 1920s, there were about eighty students from the Malay Peninsula in Cairo and two hundred from Indonesia (Roff, 1967). This rapid increase occurred due to a boom in rubber production in Malaya along with general economic improvement which enabled more students to pursue education in Cairo (Zakariya, 2007). Furthermore, education and life experiences in Egypt were more enriching than in Makkah because Egypt provided religious learning, political experience, and freedom. The advantages that the Malay-Indonesian students in Egypt had were plenty.

Thus, the Malay students in Egypt not only could study the subject matters they specialized in, but they could also participate in other activities. Among those activities were printing businesses, journal and magazine publications, and involvement in associations. The existing facilities and technologies in Egypt during this period facilitated the establishment of printing companies by the Malay students. One of the most successful printing companies was established by Muhammad Idris al-Marbawi, the founder of *al-Matba'ah al-Marbawiyyah* in 1927 (Abu Hanifah Haris & Othman, 2013).

The dramatic increase of Malay students led to the formation of a student association called The Welfare Association of Malay Students at al-Azhar in 1923. Its establishment was crucial in exposing the Malay and Indonesian students in Cairo to hands-on organizational skills and student politics. Consequently the *Jawi* students there, in comparison with the students in Makkah, became more politically-conscious (Zakariya, 2007). The involvement in the *jam'iyya* also provided the students with experience in journalism as the association published its own journal, the *Seruan Azhar* (The Call of al-Azhar). It discussed religious issues as well as overt political themes affecting them, especially Pan-Islamism, Pan-Malayanism (union between Indonesia and Malaya), and anti-colonialism (Roff, 1966). This Cairo-based periodical was circulated in Malaya but was banned in the Dutch East Indies.

We may conclude that Egyptian influence was pivotal in the diffusion of 'Abduh reformism in the Malay Peninsula. The Malay graduates who studied in Egypt played a crucial role in this process. After being exposed to and inspired by 'Abduh's reformism, upon their return to the Malay Peninsula they promoted such ideas in their homeland through various means.

### **Printing Press**

The advent of print culture played an important role in the transmission of knowledge by facilitating mass-production of printed materials. This empowered society with knowledge. Indeed, the printing press functioned as a significant means of disseminating ideas to a broader Muslim audience in various parts of the world. The advent of print enabled West Asian

reformists to promote their ideas through printed books and periodicals. This helped to make reformist ideas accessible to reform-minded Muslims in various parts of the Muslim world, including in the Malay archipelago. Two reformist periodicals, *al-'Urwah al-Wuthqā* and *al-Manār*, contributed significantly in disseminating 'Abduh's currents to the Malay archipelago. While *al-'Urwah al-Wuthqā* (The Indissoluble Link), a weekly anti-colonial newspaper, was jointly published by Jamal al-Din al-Afghani and Muhammad 'Abduh, *al-Manār* (1898-1935) was published in Cairo under the editorship of Muhammad Rashid Rida, 'Abduh's closest associate and disciple (Azra, 1995; Adams, 1933).

The *al-Manār* had wide circulation in the Malay archipelago. Although it was banned in the Dutch East Indies, it had managed to penetrate this colony. *Al-Manār* was also well-circulated in Malay Peninsula. Its readership was not confined to the Straits Settlements, but it also penetrated Kelantan, a north-eastern Malay state (Azra, 1999). Though *al-'Urwah al-Wuthqā* was possibly not as widely circulated as *al-Manār*, it had indeed reached the Malay audience. A prominent reformist from Kelantan, Haji Wan Musa, subscribed to both *al-Manār* and *al-'Urwah al-Wuthqā* (Mustajab, 1975; Zakariya, 2007).

*Al-Manār's* relatively wide circulation in the Malay world was facilitated by several means. Some Malay pilgrims and students obtained personal copies of *al-Manār* during their sojourn in West Asia. In turn, they hand carried the periodical to the Malay archipelago. The original copies of *al-Manār* were probably not readily available to most readers in the region. Therefore, handwritten extracts were made and distributed to interested readers in the region (Bluhm, 1997). Sayyid Muhammad 'Aqil of Singapore played a crucial role in circulating *al-Manār* in the region (Zakariya, 2007). In Indonesia, the reformist writings were smuggled through certain ports where Dutch supervision was lax (Azra, 1999).

In rare cases, Muslims in the region obtained the journal through direct subscription. For instance, Tahir Jalaluddin subscribed to *al-Manār* from the inception of its publication and ordered many other reformist writings directly from the publisher in Cairo. Tahir's correspondences with Dar al-Manār are available in the National Archives, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia in the collection known as Sheikh Tahir's Personal Papers. In one letter to the publisher, Tahir complained to Rashid Rida that he often received the *al-Manār* journal and several other books that he ordered directly from the publisher late although he had been a regular subscriber of the journal since its inception (National Archives, SP10/E.758; Zakariya, 2007).



Figure 2: Al-Manār periodical

Source: [https://www.wikiwand.com/en/Al-Manar\\_\(magazine\)](https://www.wikiwand.com/en/Al-Manar_(magazine))

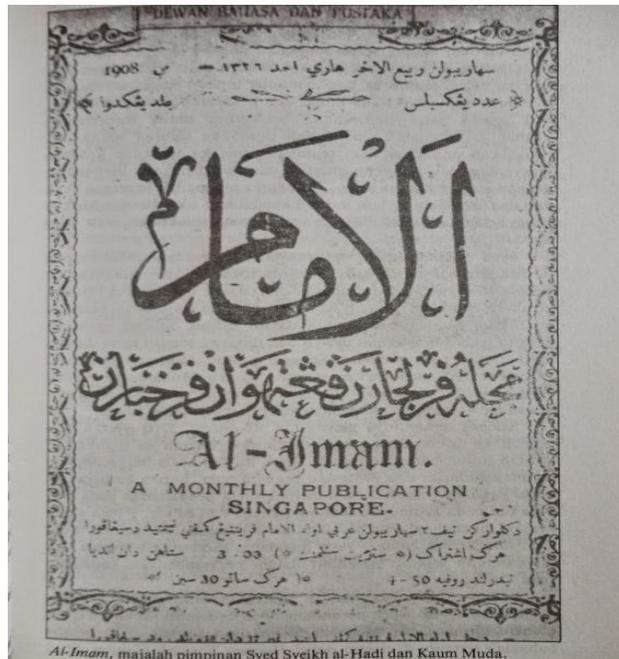
What was the nature of the relationship between the Malay reformists and their colleagues in West Asia? Did the *Jawi* Muslims only become passive readers of the Egyptian reformist writings? According to Juta Bluhm, the Malay readers from various parts of the region participated actively in the religious discourse and they interacted with *al-Manār* through writing, seeking advice and offering opinions on a broad range of topics including theological questions, economic and environmental problems, technological advances, issues of current political concern such as patriotism, and other matters (Juta Bluhm, 1983; Zakariya, 2007).

One major example was Muhammad Basuni b. ‘Imran (henceforth, Basuni) who was born in Sambas, West Kalimantan. His family served as ‘ulama to the court of the Kingdom of Sambas and his father Muhammad ‘Imran was the state’s Chief Imam. When he was 17 years old, Basuni went to Makkah to study Islam. In 1906 he returned to Sambas and began to subscribe to *al-Manār*. Impressed with *salafīyya* thought, he went to Cairo to study with Rashid Rida at Madrasah Dar al-Da’wa wa-al-Irshad.

After returning from Cairo he established his own reformist school in Sambas. Through this school, Basuni propagated reformist ideas. Moreover, he translated many of the *salafīyya* works into Malay. Basuni passed away in 1953 (N. Hanis, 2017). Basuni’s intellectual acumen was reflected through compelling question he posed to *al-Manār*: Why are the Muslims in a state of weakness and decline and why are non-Muslim nations advanced? To answer Basuni’s question, Shakib Arslan wrote a series of articles in *al-Manār*, which were later published as a book *Why are the Muslims backward and why are others advanced?* (Cleveland, 1985; Zakariya 2007).

The Malay-Muslims who were inspired by *al-Manār* in turn published writings promoting ‘Abduh’s reformism in the Malay world. This was facilitated by the advent of hand lithograph presses in Singapore at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century (Roff, 1967; Zakariya, 2007). With this printing method, the reformists promoted their ideas through periodicals, the most important of which was of *al-Imam* (1906-1908), published in Singapore. *Al-Imam* played a significant

role in transmitting 'Abduh's reformism not only in the Malay Peninsula, but also in the Dutch East Indies. This was made possible by *al-Imam's* wide circulation and readership in various parts of the Malay world (Noer, 1973). Therefore, "this reformist periodical played a pivotal role as cultural brokers, translating the new purity, rationalism, and vitality of Islam into the Malay language - the Archipelago's *lingua franca* - and also into terms relevant to a local, Malay-Indonesian frame of reference" (Zakariya, 2007, p. 138).



**Figure 3: Al-Imam periodical**

Source: <https://s-pores.com/2015/07/ideology-and-utopia-in-al-imam-by-fairoz-ahmad/>

Having been denied from spreading 'Abduh's reformism in the Malay states, the reformists became creative and utilized journalism and writing as a suitable ground to launch their criticism against the traditional Malay elite and 'ulama. Through this channel, they managed to promote 'Abduh's reformism to a wider audience, introducing and contextualising the progressive ideas in terms relevant to the local Malay frame of reference.

### Conclusion

Islamic intellectual development in Malay Peninsula did not occur in isolation from the rest of the Muslim world. Rather, there were increasing interactions between the Malay world and West Asia, especially from the late nineteenth to the early twentieth centuries. During this period, Muslims throughout the world were facing the new challenges of colonialism and modernity. Since the West was more advanced than the Muslim nations, some Muslims were caught in a dilemma on whether it was permissible to emulate Western advancement in technology, and would the adoption of Western institutions compromise their Muslim belief? The Muslim's responses to this dilemma can be divided into three. First, total rejection of the West; second, the middle ground, selective imitation of good things from the West; and third, the indiscriminate acceptance of the West.

Muhammad 'Abduh's stance resembled the second category. He neither totally reject nor fully accept the West uncritically. 'Abduh encouraged Muslims to embrace the positive dimensions of Western civilization and did not see it as compromising Muslim belief. For 'Abduh, the positive aspects of Western civilization, which are not contradictory to the shariah are the

universal values, which are beneficial for humanity as a whole. It is probably this progressive nature of 'Abduh reformism which resonated with reform-minded Muslims throughout the world. These reform-minded Muslims became the agents for the transmission of reformist ideas to the Malay world.

One important group was the *Jawi* Muslims who sojourned in Egypt and were inspired by 'Abduh's reformism, and they in turn, brought the reformist ideas home. The second important vector examined in this study was the role of printing press in the dissemination of Muslim reformism. The West Asian reformist spearheaded by Rashid Rida, 'Abduh's closest associate, utilized the printing press to promote reformist ideas to other parts of the Muslim world. Two periodicals, *al-Manār* and *Urwah al-Wuthqa*, and other reformist writings such as *Tafsir al-Manār*, played an important role in this process. Inspired by the West Asian reformist periodicals, the Malay reformists published their own reformist journals such as *al-Imam*, *al-Ikhwān*, *Saudara* and *al-Munir* to promote 'Abduh's ideas in the language and terms familiar to the local audience

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