

THE TRANSMISSION OF *AL-MANĀR*'S REFORMISM TO THE MALAY-INDONESIAN WORLD

The case of *al-Imām* and *al-Munīr*

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The spread and influence of modern Islamic reformism to the Malay-Indonesian world since the early twentieth century have been recognized by many scholars of Malay-Indonesian Islam. In a general way, scholars have delineated the influence of such reformist scholars or activists as Jamal al-Din al-Afghani, Muhammad 'Abduh, Rashid Rida, and others in reformist or modernist organizations such as the Sarekat Islam, Muhammadiyah, Persatuan Islam, or Jong Islamieten Bond. Little attention, however, has been paid to the channels of transmission of modernist or reformist ideas from the Middle East, especially Cairo and Mecca, to the Malay-Indonesian world.

There is no doubt that the printed word was the instrumental means responsible for the transmission of modernist or reformist ideas to the Malay-Indonesian world. It is within this context that we can appropriately place the reformist journal *al-Manār*, which significantly influenced the course of Islamic reformism in the region. The journal not only directly influenced the spread of Islamic reformism through its own articles, but was most influential in stimulating the publication of similar journals within the Malay-Indonesian world. This chapter is an early attempt to delineate and comprehensively discuss the transmission of Islamic reformism to the Malay-Indonesian world by means of journals, namely by the two indigenous journals *al-Imām* and *al-Munīr*.

Regarding the journal *al-Manār* itself, a brief note should be made. It is well known that the backbone of *al-Manār* was the reformist scholar Muhammad Rashid Rida. Deeply influenced by Afghani and especially by 'Abduh, his main mentor, Rida published his own magazine, *al-Manār* ("The Lighthouse"), which first appeared in 1898 in Cairo as a weekly, and subsequently as a monthly, until his death in 1935. The objectives of *al-Manār* were to articulate and disseminate the ideas of reform and preserve the unity of the Muslim umma. It was Rida

himself who edited most of the articles that appeared in *al-Manār*. Therefore, one can argue that *al-Manār* was the personal work of Rida.¹

Al-Manār and the Malay-Indonesian world

In her fascinating study of Indonesian students in Cairo, Abaza has correctly argued that, during colonial times, Cairo played an important role as a center for the publication and circulation of journals and magazines. There were a number of magazines and journals published in Cairo that were circulated in the Malay-Indonesian world. In addition to *al-Manār*, which is under discussion here, it is also known that the journal *al-ʿUrwa al-Wuṭqā*, a predecessor of *al-Manār*, was in circulation in the Malay-Indonesian world.

It is important, however, to point out that Cairo also received a number of magazines and journals published in the Malay-Indonesian world. It seems possible to find in the collection of the Cairo National Library, Dār al-Kutub, Malay-Indonesian magazines and journals such as *al-Iqbāl* (Java), *al-Hudā* (Singapore), *al-Mirʾa al-muḥammadiyya* (Yogyakarta), *al-Taḥīra al-islāmiyya*, and *al-Iršād* (Pekalongan). Considering this, Cairo is seen playing an undeniably crucial role in the mutual transmission of ideas from one region to another. In fact, Cairo was not only the center for the publication of Arabic literature, but also a center for Malay literature as well.²

The influence of *al-Manār* on the Malay-Indonesian world can hardly be overestimated. Despite Dutch efforts to ban it from entering the Archipelago, it was regularly read in various parts of the region. In fact, it has been suggested that *al-Manār* was reasonably well circulated within the Malay-Indonesian world by several means.

The first is smuggling. It appears very likely that *al-Manār* was mostly smuggled into Indonesia through certain ports where Dutch supervision was lax. Mukti ʿAlī points out that *al-Manār* was smuggled into Indonesia, or more precisely into Java, for instance, via the port of Tuban in East Java, where there was no customs supervision. According to Pijper Bluhm-Warn, the adviser to the Dutch Government for Native and Arab affairs, who was also responsible for supervising the spread of Islamic literature in Indonesia, the Dutch did not censor the shipment of *al-Manār* to Ahmad Surkati, founder of the Irshad movement in the archipelago.³

The second means by which *al-Manār* was brought into Indonesia was by way of certain hajjis who returned after their pilgrimage to Mecca and Medina, where the journal was in wide circulation. It is well known that from the early history of Islam in the archipelago, especially from the sixteenth century onwards, the pilgrimage had been an effective means of the transmission of not only Islamic ideas, but also of a large amount of literature from the Middle East to the region. It is therefore not difficult to understand why Snouck Hurgronje, the leading adviser to the Dutch colonial government on Islamic affairs, suggested that the Dutch pay special attention to supervising returning hajjis.⁴

The third means of transmission of *al-Manār* was returning students either from Cairo or Mecca and Medina. As Roff shows, the number of Malay-Indonesian students in these places grew significantly in the early 1920s.⁵ This increase allowed them to establish organizations and publish their own journals, the most prominent of which was the *Seruan Azhar*.⁶ The *Seruan Azhar* itself, as we will see later, played an important role in the continued Islamic intellectual discourse in the Malay-Indonesian archipelago.

The fourth means was through certain “appointed” agents. This is clear in the case of Sayyid Muhammad ibn ‘Aqil ibn Yahya, one of *al-Imām*’s leading associates in Singapore. In an obituary to the Sayyid, Rashid Rida mentions that he took the trouble to circulate *al-Manār* in Singapore, Java, and the entire Indonesian archipelago.⁷

The spread of *al-Manār* was not confined to the Dutch East Indies and the Straits. *Al-Manār*, and *al-Imām*, also circulated in the Kota Bharu area of Kelantan. As Nik Hassan makes clear, together with other reformist journals such as *Pengasuh* (first printed in Kota Bharu in 1918), *al-Iḥwān* (first printed in Pulau Pinang in 1926), and *Saudara* (first printed in Pulau Pinang in 1928), it played a crucial role in the spread of Kaum Muda ideas in the Kelantan region. All of these journals were among the most important sources of reformist ideas among such ulama as Haji Muhammad Yussof bin Muhammad, popularly known as Tok Kenali (1868–1933), Haji Wan Musa bin Haji Abdul Samad (1874–1939), and Haji Ahmad Manam (1834–1938).⁸

It is clear that the influence of *al-Manār* went beyond journals, magazines, and reformist organizations. *Al-Manār* even inspired certain writers to write novels containing the reformist ideas that it preached. Shaykh al-Hadi, mentioned earlier, for instance, wrote a novel entitled *Farīda Ḥānum* that is set in Cairo in late 1894. Despite the fact that the work is fiction, he wished to give some sense of realism and credibility through references to “real people, places, and events.” Thus, for instance, he mentions the names of Cairo streets; he also described the Egyptian ruler, Muhammad ‘Abduh, the journal *al-Manār*, and even several Egyptian feminists. As Hooker points out, the specific reference to Muhammad ‘Abduh and the reformist journal *al-Manār* in the closing pages of the novel, locate the narrative firmly in the context of reformist Islam.⁹

Another such novel is *Hikayat Percintaan Kasih Kemudaan* written by Ahmad Kotot (b. 1894), a native Malay. This novel also included the theme of Islamic reformism preached by *al-Manār*. Although the novel was written in a Malay setting, it is distinguished by its Islamic reformist underpinnings.

***Al-Imām*: mouthpiece of reform (1906–1908)**

It is doubtless that *al-Imām* (“The Leader”) was one of the most important channels of the transmission of *al-Manār*’s ideas to the Malay-Indonesian world. In his classic study, Roff concludes that, in the first place, *al-Imām* was a radical departure from standard journals in the field of Malay publications. It was distinguished

from its predecessors both by its intellectual stature and intensity of purpose, and by its attempt to formulate a coherent philosophy of action for a society faced with the need for rapid social and economic change. Second, Roff argues that the range and orthodoxy of *al-Imām* was representative of the incipient movements, which could be seen growing in almost every aspect of Malay life.¹⁰

The fact that *al-Imām* was inspired by and modeled on *al-Manār* has been agreed upon by many scholars including Roff. It was from the Egyptian reformist movement that the writers and sponsors of *al-Imām* derived, almost in totality, their reformist ideas. Therefore, like the *al-Imām* circle in the Minangkabau area, the reformist group in Malaya that was responsible for the publication of *al-Imām* was known as “*kaum al-Manār*”, or the “*al-Manār* faction.” An examination of the contents of *al-Manār*, as detailed by Adams,¹¹ makes clear the extent to which *al-Imām* was modeled upon it; and the Malay journal contains abundant references to and excerpts from *al-Manār*.¹²

Thus, it is clear that *al-Imām* was one of the most important intellectual loci of reformist Muslims in the Malay-Indonesian world. In addition to being known as “*kaum al-Manār*,” as has been pointed out earlier, this reformist group was also popularly known as the “*kaum muda*,” the young reformist group, as opposed to the “*kaum tua*,” the old traditionalist group. The “*kaum muda*,” as one might expect, was inspired and influenced by such reformist Middle Eastern figures as Afghani, ‘Abduh, Rida, and the like, and proposed the renewal of Islam. On the other hand, the “*kaum tua*” was the proponent of the established and traditional Islam. The reformist tendency represented by the *al-Imām* group can be seen in the biography of its editors and publishers. These were Shaykh Muhammad Tahir bin Jalaluddin al-Minangkabawi al-Azhari, the first editor, Sayyid Shaykh bin Ahmad al-Hadi, a Melaka-born Malay-Arab who was a frequent and colorful contributor; Haji Abbas bin Muhammad Thaha, a Singapore-born Minangkabau, the second editor, and Shaykh Muhammad Salim al-Kalali, an Acehnese merchant who was director of *al-Imām* during its first two years.¹³

The most notable figure, not only among the editors of *al-Imām*, but also among the “*kaum muda*” was Shaykh Muhammad Tahir bin Jalaluddin al-Minangkabawi al-Azhari, who was born in Kototuo, Bukittinggi in West Sumatra in 1869. His father, Shaikh Muhammad, also called Shaykh Tahir, was a well-known ulama in his area, a son of Shaykh Ahmad Jalaluddin or Tuanku Sami, a judge of the Paderi in the Padri Movement in Central Sumatra in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.¹⁴ His father died when he was 2 years old, followed by his mother when he was 8. When he was 12 years old (c.1881), he was sent to Mecca where he stayed with his well-known cousin, Shaykh Ahmad Khatib al-Minangkabawi. Ahmad Khatib was known not only as a teacher of many Jawi students in the Holy City, but was known as the grand *imām* of the Shafi’i madhhab in the Haram.¹⁵

After studying in Mecca for about fourteen years he went to Cairo to study *‘ilm al-falak* (astronomy) at al-Azhar. It was during his four-year sojourn in Cairo that he was introduced to the teachings of the celebrated reformist Muhammad

'Abduh. It is also reported that he formed a close relationship with the most brilliant of 'Abduh's students, Muhammad Rashid Rida. It is said that later, in 1898, when Rida founded *al-Manār*, Muhammad Tahir contributed articles to its columns. If this is true, then he sent his writings to *al-Manār* from Mecca, where he lived and taught from 1897 to 1899. Whatever the case, it is clear that he was profoundly influenced by the reformist ideas voiced in the circle of *al-Manār*.

In 1899 Muhammad Tahir returned from Mecca to his homeland in West Sumatra. However, he chose Malaya instead of Sumatra as his home, and on 28 September of that year settled in Kuala Kangsar in the State of Perak, where he married a Malay girl. A year later, he was appointed religious officer by the Sultan of Perak, Idris Murshidil Mu'azzam Shah, and in August 1904 he was commissioned as a member of the council of the chiefs and religious elders of the State of Perak. Although he chose to settle in Perak, Muhammad Tahir frequently traveled to Riau-Lingga and Sumatra.

In 1903 he was invited, together with his close friend Sayyid Shaykh bin Ahmad al-Hadi, to accompany a "mission" to Mecca and Cairo, which included the sons of the Sultan and Raja Muda of Riau. Two years later, in 1905, he went to Singapore, where he initially joined his friends to help organize the pilgrim brokerage on the island, a business in which he had been involved since his latest sojourn in Mecca. It was during his stay in Singapore that he met a number of ulama, wealthy people, and personalities who were knowledgeable, able, and willing to work collectively to publish a journal to be known as *al-Imām*, beginning in July 1906.¹⁶

It is important to point out that while serving as the editor in chief of *al-Imām*, Muhammad Tahir was involved in various other activities. Before and after the First World War he taught in various institutions, the most prominent of which was Madrasa al-Mansur in Penang, which was established by his friend Sayyid Shaykh bin Ahmad al-Hadi. In 1928 he visited his homeland in Sumatra and was immediately arrested by the Dutch authorities for six months on suspicion of being a leftist with Communist leanings in his religious teaching.¹⁷ After a thorough investigation, the Dutch found no evidence supporting their suspicion against him and he was freed. He then returned to Malaysia and settled in Johor until his death in 1957. Muhammad Tahir wrote several books in Arabic and Malay, dealing with religious matters in general and astronomy in particular.

As Roff argues, Muhammad Tahir seems to have combined both the reformist spirit evident among a section of the Jawi community in Mecca in the 1880s and 1890s, and something of the more sophisticated modernism of contemporary religious thought in Cairo. It is also clear that he was profoundly influenced by the Pan-Islamism of Afghani and by the reformist ideas of 'Abduh, ideas that were current in the *al-Manār* circle. Therefore, it is not surprising for him and his friends to fashion *al-Imām* in the image of *al-Manār*.¹⁸

The second intellectual figure that was closely connected with *al-Imām* was Haji 'Abbas bin Mohammad Taha, who succeeded Muhammad Tahir as editor of *al-Imām* and officially reorganized it in March 1908. Though he was born in

Tanjung Pagar, Singapore in 1885, his parents were from the Minangkabau area in West Sumatra. When he was a small boy, he was sent by his parents to Mecca to acquire religious knowledge. On returning to Singapore in 1905 he worked mainly as a teacher. In 1906 he published a book on education and its philosophy entitled *Kitab Sempurnaan Pelajaran* (the Book of Perfection in Education). When *al-Imām* ceased its publication in December 1908, he was appointed qadi of the Tanjung Pagar district, where he remained active in the reformist cause, founding and editing the weekly newspaper *Neracha* ("The Scales") in 1911, followed by its companion monthly journal *Tunas Melayu* ("The Malay Seeds") in 1913. As Roff points out, these two reformist intellectuals were dedicated to the goals elaborated by *al-Imām* in 1906. Concerned about the religious conflict that erupted between "Kaum Muda" and "Kaum Tua," Haji 'Abbas urged the formation of a special association of religious leaders. For that purpose, in 1936 he made an appeal to found the Persekutuan Ulama Kaum Semenanjung ("the pan-Malayan Association of Ulama"). In the same year he was appointed chief qadi of Singapore. He was also in close association with Burhanuddin al-Helmi, a politically orientated young reformist activist, who was also of Minangkabau origin. Together they were involved in the debate against "Kaum Tua," which inspired Haji 'Abbas to write a booklet entitled "Risalah Penting pada Masalah Jilatan Anjing di atas Empat Mazhab" ("An Important Booklet on the Case of Being Licked by a Dog According to the Four Madhhabs of the Sunni").¹⁹

The next pillar of *al-Imām* was Sayyid Shaykh bin Ahmad al-Hadi (1862–1934). Born in Malacca, his father Ahmad al-Hadi was of Hadhrami descent, and his mother was Malay. As a boy he attended for some years a well-known madrasa in Kuala Trengganu. When he was 14 years old, his father took him to Pulau Penyengat, Riau, where his father had connections with the royal house. There he was adopted by Raja Ali Kelana bin Raja Ahmad, half brother of the Sultan and also Raja Muda (then heir apparent to the Sultan), and brought up with the royal children.²⁰

As a young man, Sayyid Shaykh was put in charge of the *rumah wakaf*, the hostel in which travelers were accommodated while visiting the court. Here he had the opportunity to be on familiar term with many noteworthy ulama and to further his own religious knowledge and interests through discussions and debates. In the early 1890s he assisted in the formation of the Persekutuan Rushdiyyah, a study club similar to those set up in Singapore at about the same time, and took an active interest in its activities.²¹

His close association with the court circle can be seen from the fact that on more than one occasion he accompanied the sons of the Sultan and Raja Muda on the pilgrimage to Mecca and to Egypt and the Levant, traveling in 1903 with Muhammad Tahir, with whom he had forged a close friendship. It is perhaps because of these visits that he was reported to have studied in Mecca. But, as Roff points out, it is unlikely that Sayyid Shaykh received much formal religious education during these visits. There is no doubt, however, that he became familiar, probably through the influence of Muhammad Tahir, with the ideas current in the Middle Eastern metropolitan centers of Islam at this time.

During this period Sayyid Shaykh had already been living in Singapore; since 1901 to be precise, for that is when he was appointed by his adoptive father, Raja Ali Kelana, initially as agent and then as manager of his brickworks company. In 1906 he took a leading role in the establishment of *al-Imām*, increasingly becoming a prominent figure in the Malay-Muslim community. Even though he was not an *‘ālim* of the calibre of Muhammad Tahir, he was very sharp and eminently suited to the polemicist and propagandist role in which he cast himself. In the course of his long and varied career he was known as a shari’a lawyer, educator, merchant, and publisher; however, he is today mostly remembered in journalism and literature.

It is important to note in passing that Sayyid Shaykh’s connection with the Riau court and its intellectual circles contributed to *al-Imām*’s special importance in the Riau region, as argued by Andaya.²² According to this author, the fidelity with which *al-Imām* relayed Arabic opinion on a variety of issues assured it a high standing in the Riau court, where it was read by the Sultan himself. The interest of the Penyengat princes in *al-Imām* was also stimulated because a number of them, notably Raja Hitam and Raja Ali, were active contributors, while they personally knew the editors. In addition to Sayyid Shaykh’s special position mentioned earlier, Muhammad Tahir Jalaluddin traveled several times to the area, giving advice and religious instruction. Thus, Andaya concludes, the relationship between the founders of *al-Imām* and the Riau court meant that, as Snouck Hurgonje remarked, the journal was a “suitable place for [Raja Ali and his advisers] to publish their desires and grievances.” *Al-Imām*, which subscribed to pan-Islamism, responded accordingly to their grievances, as will be discussed later.

The next pillar of *al-Imām* was Shaykh Muhammad Salim al-Kalali, who was its first managing director. Though only very little information is available about him, it is known that he was an Acehnese of Hadhrami descent, and that he was a generous merchant residing in Singapore. Despite his epithet of “shaykh,” and although several major articles such as “*al-Ummah wa al-watan*” are attributed to him,²³ Roff believes that his importance to *al-Imām* was less as a scholar or writer than as a businessman.²⁴

The last figure associated closely with *al-Imām* was Shaykh Sayyid Muhammad bin ‘Aqil. When the management of *al-Imām* was commercially reorganized in March 1908, resulting in the establishment of the *al-Imām* Printing Company Ltd., Sayyid Muhammad ‘Aqil was chosen and appointed as the Company Director (“*mudir*”). Little is known about him, although he acquired a certain public fame beyond the Malay-Muslim community when he was put on trial with two others in 1908 for the murder of Sayyid ‘Abd al-Qadir al-Sagoff, another leading Singaporean Hadrami. Though the trial ended inconclusively, Sayyid Muhammad bin ‘Aqil was subsequently cleared of all blame when it was discovered that a principal witness for the prosecution had committed systematic perjury. Later, an important study found that he had a strong tendency toward Shi’ism.²⁵

What was the content of *al-Imām*? For the purposes of this paper it is worthy to cite Roff, who has delineated the realm of concern of *al-Imām*.²⁶ *Al-Imām*’s

first concern was with religion and not directly with social, even less with political change. At the same time, such a tripartite division would have in some measure been foreign to the editors and writers of the journal, who shared the traditional Islamic concept of the undifferentiated umma in which spiritual, social, and political well-being is subsumed under another criteria—the good and profitable life lived according to Divine Law.

With this in mind, it is not surprising to find that the attention of the editors and writers was to turn, in the first place, to the state of Malay society. According to Roff, almost all of the thirty-one issues of the journal contain at least one article, and often more, analyzing the ills of the community. In self criticism and condemnation, *al-Imām* reveals the backwardness of the Malays, their domination by alien peoples, their laziness, their complacency, their bickering among themselves, and their inability to cooperate for the common good.

In *al-Imām*'s analysis the root cause of the decline of the Muslim peoples from their past glory is that they have ceased, in their ignorance, to follow the commands of God as expressed through the mouth and the life of His Prophet Muhammad. As an instrument for discovering and understanding the Divine Law, man has been gifted with '*akal* (reason), an intelligence it is incumbent upon him to use and to develop. Islam is not, writes *al-Imām*, as its detractors allege, hostile to knowledge and progress as exemplified by the West. On the contrary, a proper understanding of and submission to the law and spirit of Islam is "our only means of competing successfully with those who now rule and lead us."²⁷

Proceeding with its diagnosis, *al-Imām* goes on to exhort certain groups of people to take the necessary action. It urges the rulers and traditional leaders to form associations to foster education, economic development, and self-awareness. It also urges the ulama to cleanse an Islam that had been adulterated by impurities of customs and belief derived from '*adat* and from other religions. The ulama that transmit the impure Islam should be brought to a sense of their errors and obligations. For this purpose, *al-Imām* put strong emphasis on the need to return to the Qur'an and Hadith, and to practice *ijtihad* (independent reasoning and judgment) rather than *taklid buta* (blind acceptance of intermediary authority) for their understanding.

Al-Imām pays attention not only to socio-religious matters, but also to political issues. One of the pet issues taken up by *al-Imām* relates to pan-Islamism. This is of course not surprising, since its intellectual genealogy is *al-Manār* and *al-'Urwa al-Wuṭqā*, both of which are closely related to Jamal al-Din al-Afghani, one of the most important pioneers of pan-Islamism.

Thus, when the issue of the "Caliphate" was brought forward by the Turkish Sultan Abdülhamid, *al-Imām* also took it up enthusiastically. Right from the very beginning of its existence, *al-Imām* printed news on Turkey at the same time as news on Japan. Under the heading "Turkey and Japan," *al-Imām* discusses the proposed Congress of Religion to be held in Tokyo. It is reported that Sultan Abdülhamid had sent telegrams to the Emperor of Japan and dispatched three special envoys to Japan in order to attend the Congress.²⁸

To further the Caliphate cause, *al-Imām* listed some achievements of Sultan Abdülhamid. According to the journal it is important to inform anxious readers of the latest news on Turkey. *Al-Imām* gave detailed accounts of the capability of a Turkish warship complete with its capacity, arms, and speed "for those who would like to read it."²⁹

Despite this seemingly powerful Turkish army, however, *al-Imām* reminds the Ottomans to continue their effort to improve their military strength, for the Empire is surrounded by mighty enemies. *Al-Imām* was convinced that only with the modernization of its army could the Ottoman Empire be on par with other European powers. Again, *al-Imām* expects that the readers are satisfied with its news and accounts of Ottoman military development.³⁰

Al-Imām's attachment to the Caliphate question appears to have led it to lavishly praise Sultan Abdülhamid. In its reports *al-Imām* describes the Sultan as a caring ruler whose main concern was rebuilding the Empire's infrastructure by building schools, railways, and other means of communication. According to *al-Imām*, the noble efforts of the Sultan were challenged by the formidable West. In facing this challenge, the journal hoped that the Turks would be more resilient and prayed that they would be protected until the end.³¹

It may seem strange that the editors of *al-Imām* were not aware that the Sultan was the subject of strong criticism in Turkey and the Middle East. *Al-Imām*, in an innocent way, believed that Sultan Abdülhamid was sincere in his efforts to revitalize the old Ottoman Empire. It asserts that there was no other existing Islamic government than that of the Ottoman Empire. *Al-Imām* thus deplored unfavorable reports about the Empire by the Western press, which, it believed, were part of the conspiracy to undermine it.³² According to Othman, however, when Sultan Abdülhamid was deposed from the throne by the Young Turks in 1908, *al-Imām* changed its attitude and now shifts its admiration in support of the Young Turks, which it viewed as the patrons of Islam.³³

As indicated earlier, in connection with the biography of Sayyid Shaykh, *al-Imām* paid special attention to the destiny of the Riau court suffering under the encroachment of the Dutch. In an editorial published in September 1906, *al-Imām* pondered the fate of those countries that had lost their independence and preserved nothing else than "a collection of texts and stories."³⁴ Furthermore, as Andaya argues, a number of *al-Imām*'s articles clearly reflected the resentment felt by Riau toward the changes in court protocol introduced by the colonial government, and above all toward the abolition of the Yamtua Muda post.

In 1906 Tengku Osman, the Sultan's eldest son and Raja Ali's son-in-law and protégé who had been at school in Cairo during the crisis over the 1905 Treaty, returned. In its November issue, *al-Imām* published verbatim his speech to the Rushdiyyah Club: "I think, sirs," he said, "You must all be very worried and sad to see what has recently occurred in our beloved homeland."³⁵ *Al-Imām* also published an article by Sayyid Shaykh, which accused foreigners of placing Eastern peoples under slavery, of showing duplicity and disrespect to Eastern rulers, and of closing the doors to knowledge.³⁶

How large was the extent of *al-Imām*'s influence? To answer this question, one may first look at its circulation. Roff admits that, although its subscribers may have been few in number, *al-Imām* also came into the hands of religious teachers, particularly those in the new style madrasas (modern religious schools). For them *al-Imām* was an invaluable source in dealing with such diverse and controversial questions such as the validity of certain hadiths, payment for burial prayers, certain practices associated with *tarekat* such as the Naqshbandiyya, the wearing of European clothing, and interest on loans from savings bank. Roff concludes that though there is no clear evidence of the size and nature of its audience, there is little doubt that a majority of its readers came from the intellectually and socially more sophisticated elements of the towns, and from those who were religiously educated and had received some introduction to Muslim polemics from their pilgrimage to Mecca.³⁷

It is important to note that *al-Imām* also had representatives (*wakil*) in many Malay states, and that some of its most cogent contributions came from Malay correspondents in Johor, Perak, and Pahang. Though perhaps the bulk of its readership was within British Malaya, there is no doubt that *al-Imām* was also in circulation in other parts of the Malay-Indonesian archipelago. In fact, a high proportion of its correspondence came from the Dutch East Indies, particularly Sumatra. It is well known that Shaykh Muhammad Tahir Jalaluddin, the founder of the journal, sent copies to his friends and pupils in Minangkabau. As a result, as Hamka testifies, *al-Imām* exercised considerable influence on reformist thought and led directly to the establishment of a similar journal in 1911, *al-Munīr*.³⁸

As Daya points out, *al-Imām* was a source of pride for the Minangkabau Muslims; it was established by one of their best-known ulama, and an intense correspondence linked certain Minangkabau ulama with Shaykh Tahir Jalaluddin. Furthermore the travels of Minangkabau *perantau* (migrants) who brought *al-Imām* with them, Daya argues, practically made *al-Imām* a possession of Minangkabau Malays. There was a good number of agents, subscribers, and correspondents of *al-Imām* in this area; and a number of articles written by Minangkabau ulama were also published in *al-Imām*. All of those related with *al-Imām* in one way or another were collectively called "*kaum al-Manār*" (the *al-Manār* group). It is therefore not surprising if, when *al-Imām* ceased its publication, it was lamented by Minangkabau reformist ulama; and this led to the increasing need for publication of their own journal, *al-Munīr*.³⁹

It is clear that the impact of *al-Imām* was not confined to giving rise to new similar journals in the Malay-Indonesian world. As Roff points out, it is in its impact on the new type of education, embodied by its encouragement of the more ambitious and elaborate new kind of madrasa (religious schools), that the immediate impact of the reformist group may be most clearly seen. *Al-Imām* also encouraged the formulation of a system of education that, ideally, was to take account of the need not only for a purified Islam but for modern secular knowledge as well.⁴⁰ Thus, what *al-Imām* basically proposed was a reformed system of religious education in which, upon a sound basis of doctrinal instruction, Arabic, English, and modern educational subjects would be taught.

Al-Imām not only paid much attention to matters regarding education, it also seems to have had specific educational aims. There were at least five of them promoted by *al-Imām*: first, to convince the Muslim community that knowledge is the first thing enjoined by God in the Holy Qur'an, and that the Qur'an contains all knowledge that is necessary for human progress;⁴¹ second, to introduce a new system of education based on the Qur'anic doctrine;⁴² third, to establish educational institutions with a sound curriculum and syllabus;⁴³ fourth, to encourage and assist Muslim youths in advancing their studies abroad;⁴⁴ fifth, to urge the rulers, traditional chieftains, and knowledgeable ulama, to take immediate action to enhance the system of Islamic education in the country.⁴⁵

There are also *al-Imām*'s other numerous exhortations on education, ranging from reiteration of the benefits of education, explanations of the different types of education, warning of the danger of ignorance, to suggestions to parents not to allow their children to sleep during daytime. The concern of *al-Imām* was indeed wide-ranging. Furthermore, *al-Imām* was interested not only in ideas, but also in the establishment of institutions that would support the spread and maintenance of these ideas. The most important of the institution that *al-Imām* helped to establish was the Madrasa al-Iqbal al-Islamiyya founded in Singapore in 1908. Run by an Egyptian, 'Uthman Effendi Raffat, this madrasa borrowed much from modernism in Egypt and the West. It was undoubtedly the forerunner of many others organized in similar lines throughout the Malay Peninsula and other parts of the Malay-Indonesian archipelago during the next few years.

***Al-Munir* (1911–1916): the Kaum Muda type of reformism**

When *al-Imām* ceased to publish, the Kaum Muda, especially those in Sumatra, must have felt that they had lost an important mouthpiece. They soon sought to publish a new journal that could succeed it. Prominent leaders of Kaum Muda in West Sumatra, who founded the journal *al-Munir* ("The Illumination"), finally took the initiative. As Adams correctly points out, if one takes into account its intellectual genealogy, it was only natural that *al-Munir* should take over the role of *al-Imām* in spreading Kaum Muda teachings and opposing all enemies of Islam.⁴⁶

According to Yunus, *al-Munir* was the first Islamic journal published in Padang in 1 Rabi' II 1329/April 1911. *Al-Munir*, however, did not last long; it ceased its publication in 1916 because, according to Yunus, its printing press was burned down.⁴⁷

The founder of *al-Munir* was Haji 'Abdullah Ahmad, one of the most important scions of Islamic reformism in the Minangkabau area in the early twentieth century. Before providing his brief biography, it is important to point out that 'Abdullah Ahmad's idea to publish a journal similar to *al-Imām* came to his mind during his visit to Singapore in 1908. It was on this occasion that he learned about questions related to the journal's publication, management, and editorship. In addition, he also took the opportunity to gain insights from *al-Imām*'s experience in establishing the Madrasa Iqbal al-Islamiyya.⁴⁸ As soon as he returned, he

established his well-known school, “Sekolah Diniyyah al-Islamiyyah.”⁴⁹ In the case of *al-Munir*, however, it was only three years later that he was able to establish the journal.

Most scholars agree that ‘Abdullah Ahmad was the sole pioneer of *al-Munir*. Though their statements are different, Hamka, Alfian, and Djaja agree that it was ‘Abdullah Ahmad who took the initiative to publish *al-Munir*.⁵⁰ Benda, however, asserts that in addition to ‘Abdullah Ahmad, ‘Abdul Karim Amrullah was also an initiator of *al-Munir*, although this does not seem to be supported by any sources.⁵¹ In its first issue, ‘Abdul Karim Amrullah is referred to as a contributor from Maninjau. Furthermore, there is not a single writing of his in this first issue; most of the writings were by ‘Abdullah Ahmad.⁵² In addition, Hamka, the son of ‘Abdul Karim Amrullah, points out that “his father moved from Maninjau to Padang in early 1912 to help Abdullah Ahmad in his school, since the latter was already very busy with it.”⁵³

Born in Padang Panjang in 1878, he came from an ulama family; his father Haji Ahmad was an ulama and a textile trader. After finishing his elementary education, he traveled to Mecca in 1899 where he studied with Shaykh Ahmad Khatib al-Minangkabawi, a leading Jawi ulama in the Holy City at the time. He returned to Indonesia in 1905 and devoted himself to teaching and *dakwah* activities in Padang Panjang. Here he began to establish himself as an ardent reformist by opposing *bid‘a* (unwarranted innovation) and *khurafat* (delusion). Around 1906 he moved to Padang, the capital city of West Sumatra, to succeed his uncle as a teacher. Later he established the Jama‘ah Adabiyah, the seed of a school that he would later found. With the financial support of Muslim traders he founded the Adabiyah Diniyyah School in 1909.⁵⁴

‘Abdullah Ahmad made use of the Adabiyah institution as the organization that was responsible for the publication of *al-Munir*. As for the Jama‘ah Adabiyah itself, it consisted mostly of traders who were the backbone of Adabiyah activities, including the publication of *al-Munir*.⁵⁵ *Al-Munir* was published fortnightly, using the Malay language with Arabic characters. Most of the issues consisted of sixteen pages. From its very first edition, *al-Munir* proclaimed itself as “a journal of Islamic religion, knowledge, and information” (*Majalah Islam, Pengetahuan dan Perhabaran*).

What was the mission of *al-Munir*? In the first issue, the editors explain the meaning of *al-Munir* itself. In the first place, “*al-Munir*” means “candle,” or other things that illuminate their environment. Within the context of this meaning, *al-Munir* wished to be the candle and light of the Muslim umma in the Dutch East Indies, which were suppressed by the Dutch. In a more detailed manner, the editors of *al-Munir* explain the goals of the journal. First, to lead and bring the Muslim umma to progress based on Islamic injunctions; second, to nurture peace among nations and human beings; third, to light the Muslim umma with knowledge and wisdom.⁵⁶

It is important to note that in its explanation of the function of an Islamic journal, *al-Munir* highlights that an Islamic journal is like a teacher who gives to its readers

guidance in the right path, reminds them of their wrongdoings in the past, consoles those in grief, helps those suffering from misery, awakens them to virtues, and sharpens their reason. As Ali writes, this explanation is reminiscent of *al-Imām*'s ideas, and is a further indication that *al-Munīr* was eager to continue *al-Imām*'s mission.⁵⁷

The publication of *al-Munīr* was warmly welcomed by many readers, as shown by the number of letters of congratulation from its readers. For example, a letter from Sayyid Hasyim bin Thahir was sent from Palembang. The letter, in addition to congratulating the editors for their noble efforts, expected them to manage the journal in a wise manner, and to continually provide their readers with balanced information from all segments of Muslim society.⁵⁸ However, *al-Munīr* received not only favorable responses, but also negative reactions when it made mention of an unidentified "trouble maker" (*tukang kacau*). It is likely that the "trouble maker" was among the Kaum Tua who opposed Kaum Muda as represented by *al-Munīr*, although the root cause may run deeper. Tamar Djaja argues that there was also criticism of *al-Munīr*, because some critics believed that preaching by means of a journal was a Western innovation, and adopting the Western way was *bid'a* (unwarranted innovation).⁵⁹

Al-Munīr's spirit of reform can be clearly seen in its insistence on the importance of organization as a vehicle to further the Muslim umma. According to *al-Munīr*, organization is a means for channeling the spirit of reform, encouraging enterprising, vigor, and enhancing the nobility of knowledge (*kemuliaan ilmu*). It is a way of cultivating brotherhood of mankind and nations.⁶⁰

Like *al-Manār* and *al-Imām*, *al-Munīr* was radical in its religious orientation. It published articles on subjects that had hitherto been considered taboo by the Kaum Tua. For instance, the wearing of neckties and hats, and the taking of photographs, which had been considered *haram* (unlawful, forbidden) by the Kaum Tua, were openly discussed in *al-Munīr*, which informs its readers that such things had never been forbidden by the Qur'an and Hadith. *Al-Munīr* also taught that the Friday *khutba* (sermon before prayers) could be delivered in a language that the congregation could understand. Furthermore, according to *al-Munīr*, Muslims should not blindly follow (*taklid*) a specific Islamic legal school, and it insists that the Shafi'i school of law, which is adhered to by most Indonesian Muslims, is not the only valid interpretation of Islamic legal precepts. Even, the Shafi'i madhhab can draw upon the three other Sunni legal tradition, that of the Hanafi, Maliki, and Hanbali schools of Islamic legal thought.⁶¹

Conclusion

It is hard to be certain which came earlier, reformist magazines and journals or Salafi-oriented organizations. It seems that in the case of Indonesia, the appearance of these reformist journals and magazines took place at almost the same time as the rise of Salafi organizations, such as the Muhammadiyah, Persatuan Islam, and others. The publication of magazines and journals only stimulated the further expansion of Salafi organizations in Indonesia. As a result,

Salafi-oriented organizations had strong ideological support, which contributed to their ever-increasing influence in Indonesian Muslim society.

In the case of the Malay Peninsula, on the other hand, the spread of reformist journals and magazines seems to have had only a limited impact on the expansion of Salafi ideas. Even though the publication of *al-Imām* preceded that of *al-Munīr*, reformist organizations never struck deep roots in Malay society in general. Islamic reformism was still a long way from gaining momentum in Malay society. This is due to both the domination of states in Islamic institutions and the interpretation of Islam by Malaysian Muslims, who still hold fast to what in Indonesia is called “Islamic traditionalism.” Only in the late 1970s did Islamic reformism begin to get a firmer hold in Malaysia.

Notes

- 1 Emad Eldin Shahin, “Rashid Rida, Muhammad,” in John L. Esposito, ed., *The Oxford Encyclopedia of the Modern Islamic World* 3 (Oxford: Oxford University, 1995), 412; J. Jomier, *EP*², s. v. “Al-Manār.”
- 2 It initially seems that a certain number of works by early Malay-Indonesian scholars such as al-Raniri, al-Sinkili, al-Makassari, Muhammad Arsyad al-Banjari, and al-Palimbani were printed in Istanbul. Subsequently, however, their works were also printed in Cairo, Mecca, and Medina.
- 3 See Jutta Bluhm-Warn, “*Al-Manar* and Ahmad Soorkattie. Links in the Chain of Transmission of Muhammad ‘Abduh’s Ideas to the Malay-Speaking World,” in Peter G. Riddell and Tony Street, eds, *Islam: Essays on Scripture, Thought and Society* (Leiden: Brill, 1997), 296–297.
- 4 Azyumardi Azra, *The Transmission of Islamic Reformism to Indonesia: Networks of Middle Eastern and Malay-Indonesian Ulama in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries* (PhD dissertation, Columbia University, 1992).
- 5 William Roff, “Indonesian and Malay Students in Cairo in the 1920’s,” *Indonesia* 9: (1970).
- 6 See Mohammad Redzuan Othman, “Call of the Azhar: The Malay Students’ Sojourn in Cairo before World War II,” *Sejarah* 3 (1994–1995): 95–110.
- 7 Bluhm-Warn, “*Al-Manar* and Ahmad Soorkattie,” 297.
- 8 Nik Hassan, “Nik Abdul Aziz bin Haji,” in *Islam di Kelantan* (Kuala Lumpur: Persatuan Sejarah Malaysia, 1983), 16–17, 27.
- 9 Virginia Matheson Hooker, “Transmission through Practical Example: Women and Islam in 1920s Malay Fiction,” *JMBRAS* 67 (2): 96–97; cf. William Roff, *The Origins of Malay Nationalism*, 2nd ed. (Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press, 1967), 82–83.
- 10 Roff, *The Origins of Malay Nationalism*.
- 11 Charles C. Adams, *Islam and Modernism in Egypt* (London: Oxford University Press, 1933).
- 12 Roff, *The Origins of Malay Nationalism*, 59.
- 13 In the case of the Malay Peninsula, Roff has discussed debates and conflicts that took place among the “*kaum muda*” and “*kaum tua*.” See Roff, *The Origins of Malay Nationalism*, 56–90. As for Indonesia’s case, see, among others, Deliar Noer, *The Modernist Muslim Movement in Indonesia 1900–1942* (Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press, 1973); Taufik Abdullah, *Schools and Politics: The Kaum Muda Movement in Indonesia (1927–1933)* (Ithaca, IL: Cornell University, 1971); and Burhanuddin Daya, *Gerakan Pembaharuan Pemikiran Islam: Kasus Sumatera Thawalib* (Yogyakarta: Tiara Wacana, 1995).

- 14 For further accounts of the Padri Movement see, among others, Christine Dobbin, *Islamic Revivalism in Changing Peasant Economy: Central Sumatra 1784–1847* (London: Curzon Press, 1983).
- 15 Roff, *The Origins of Malay Nationalism*, 60–63; Abu Bakar Hamzah, *Al-Imam: Its Role in Malay Society 1906–1908* (Kent: University of Kent at Canterbury, 1981; Kuala Lumpur: Pustaka Antara, 1991).
- 16 Hamzah, *Al-Imam*, 124–127; Roff, *The Origins of Malay Nationalism*, 60–61.
- 17 At this time West Sumatra was experiencing a rise in Communist unrest.
- 18 Roff, *The Origins of Malay Nationalism*, 61; Hamzah, *Al-Imam*, 127.
- 19 Roff, *The Origins of Malay Nationalism*, 63–64; Hamzah, *Al-Imam*, 132–137.
- 20 Pulau Penyengat already had a reputation as a center of Malay learning, largely due to the literary works of Raja Ali Haji, born Raja Ahmad, and to other members of his family. It was by this time a frequent stop on the itinerary of traveling religious scholars. For further details see Roff, *The Origins of Malay Nationalism*, 44–46; Winstedt, "A History of Malay Literature," *JMBRAS* 31 (1958); and S. H. Tan, *The Life and Times of Sayyid Shaykh al-Hadi* (thesis, History Department, University of Singapore, 1961).
- 21 Roff, *The Origins of Malay Nationalism*, 63–64; Hamzah, *Al-Imam*, 137–142. It is important to note that most of the Bugi princes in the area joined this Rushdiyyah Club, and among its prominent leaders was Raja Ali Haji's own son, Raja Khalid Hassan, better known as Raja Hitam, who militantly opposed the presence of the Dutch in Riau. For further information, see Barbara W. Andaya, "From Rome to Tokyo: The Search for Anti-Colonial Allies by the Rulers of Riau, 1899–1904," *Indonesia* 24 (1977): 123–156.
- 22 Andaya, "From Rome to Tokyo," 139–140.
- 23 This article was in fact written by a certain Muhammad Murtaji.
- 24 Roff, *The Origins of Malay Nationalism*, 64; Hamzah, *Al-Imam*, 120–121.
- 25 Roff, *The Origins of Malay Nationalism*, 64; Hamzah, *Al-Imam*, 123–124; Werner Ende, "Schiitische Tendenzen bei sunnitischen Sayyids aus Hadhramaut: Muhammad bin 'Aqil al-Alawi," *Der Islam* 50 (1973): 1. For a further account of the case of Sayyid Muhammad bin 'Aqil, see William Roff, "Murder as an Aid to Social History: The Arabs in Singapore in the Early Twentieth Century," paper delivered at the *International Workshop on Arabs in South-East Asia (1870–c.1990)*, Royal Institute of Linguistics, and Anthropology (KITLV): Leiden, 1997.
- 26 Roff, *The Origins of Malay Nationalism*, 56–57.
- 27 Cited in Roff, *The Origins of Malay Nationalism*, 56.
- 28 *Al-Imām* 1/1 (July 23, 1906); Mohammad Redzuan Othman, "The Malay Perspective and the Ottoman Response," *Sejarah* 4 (1996): 97–108. The Caliphate question was of course a big issue in Indonesia. For a further discussion see Martin Van Bruinessen, "Muslims of the Dutch East Indies and the Caliphate Question," *Studia Islamika: Indonesian Journal for Islamic Studies* 2/3 (1995): 15–40.
- 29 *Al-Imām* 1/2 (August 21, 1906): 63; Othman, "The Malay Perspective," 102.
- 30 *Al-Imām* 1/7 (January 16, 1907): 211; Othman, "The Malay Perspective."
- 31 *Al-Imām* 1/9 (March 16, 1907): 281–284; Othman, "The Malay Perspective."
- 32 *Al-Imām* 2/5, 7 (November 1907): 101–102; Othman, "The Malay Perspective."
- 33 Othman, "The Malay Perspective," 103.
- 34 *Al-Imām* 1/3, 19 (September 1906): 77; cf. Andaya, "From Rome to Tokyo," 140.
- 35 *Al-Imām* 1/5, 17 (November 1906): 77.
- 36 *Al-Imām* 1/6, 18 (December 1906): 170–172.
- 37 Roff, *The Origins of Malay Nationalism*, 64, 66.
- 38 Roff, *The Origins of Malay Nationalism*, 66–67; Ajahku Hamka, *Riwayat Hidup Dr. Abd. Karim Amrullah dan Perjuangannya Kaum Agama di Sumatera* (Djakarta: Widjaja, 1958), 48.
- 39 Daya, *Gerakan Pembaharuan Pemikiran Islam*, 118–119.

- 40 Roff, *The Origins of Malay Nationalism*, 66.
- 41 *al-Imām* 2/12 (June 4, 1908): 279; 2/3 (September 9, 1907): 84–89; 1/1 (July 23, 1906): 1–6.
- 42 *al-Imām*, 2/11 (May 3, 1908): 338.
- 43 *al-Imām*, 3/3 (August 29, 1908): 104.
- 44 *al-Imām*, 2/10 (April 3, 1908): 356.
- 45 *al-Imām*, 2/3 (September 9, 1907): 84–89; cf. Hamzah, *Al-Imam*, 57.
- 46 Adams, *Islam and Modernism in Egypt* [*supra* n. 11], 140.
- 47 Mahmud Yunus, *Sejarah Pendidikan Islam di Indonesia* (Jakarta: Hidakarya Agung, 1996), 79; Mahmud Yunus, *Sejarah Islam di Minangkabau* (Jakarta: al-Hidayah, 1971), 48.
- 48 Noer, *The Modernist Muslim Movement in Indonesia 1900–1942*, 39.
- 49 *Al-Munīr* 5 (1915): 68; cf. Amir Syahrudin, *Pemikiran dan Usaha-usaha Abdullah Ahmad terhadap Pembaharuan Pendidikan Islam* (Masters thesis, Post-Graduate Programme, IAIN Syarif Hidayatullah, Jakarta).
- 50 Hamka, *Riwayat Hidup Dr. Abd. Karim Amrullah dan Perdjuaan Kaum*; Alfian, *Muhammadiyah: The Political Behavior of a Muslim Modernist Organization under Dutch Colonialism* (Yogyakarta: UGM Press, 1989), 108; Tamar Djaja, *Pusaka Indonesia: Riwayat Hidup Orang-orang Besar Tanahair*, 2 (Jakarta: Bulan Bintang, 1966), 700.
- 51 H. J. Benda, “South-East Asian Islam in the Twentieth Century,” in P. M. Holt, A. K. S. Lambton, and B. Lewis eds, *The Cambridge History of Islam*, 2A (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 189.
- 52 Syamsuri Ali, *Al-Munir dan Wacana Pembaharuan Pemikiran Islam 1911–1915* (Master thesis, Post-Graduate Program, IAIN Imam Bonjol, Padang, 1997), 26.
- 53 Hamka, *Kenang-kenangan Hidup I* (Jakarta: Bulan Bintang, 1974), 14.
- 54 Noer, *The Modernist Muslim Movement in Indonesia 1900–1942*, 38–39; Sanusi Latief ed., *Riwayat Hidup dan Perjuangan 20 Ulama Besar Sumatera Barat* (Padang: Islamic Centre Sumatera Barat, 1981), 107–111.
- 55 *Al-Munīr* 1/1 (1911): 1; Noer, *The Modernist Muslim Movement in Indonesia*.
- 56 *Al-Munīr*, 1/1 (1911).
- 57 Ali, *Al-Munir dan Wacana Pembaharuan Pemikiran Islam 1911–1915*, 53.
- 58 *Al-Munīr* 1/2 (1911): advertisement page.
- 59 Djaja, *Pusaka Indonesia: Riwayat Hidup Orang-orang Besar Tanahair* 2: 701.
- 60 *Al-Munīr* 2/1 (May, 1912).
- 61 Yunus, *Sejarah Islam di Minangkabau*, 47; Adam, *Islam and Modernist in Egypt*, 140.