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EARLY IDEAS ON REFORM AND RENEWAL THROUGH
JOURNALISM IN THE MALAY ARCHIPELAGO:
HAMKA'S ACCOUNTS IN *AYAHKU* (1950)

*Ahmad Murad Merican*¹

Abstract

*Haji Abdul Malik Karim Amrullah (Hamka), referred to as the 'Hamzah Fansuri of the modern era,' writes about his ulama and scholar father, Haji Rasul's contribution to modernist thinking in Sumatra. This is encapsulated in Hamka's book *Ayahku (My Father)*, first published in 1950. Hamka (1908-81), an essayist, journalist, public historian, scholar, novelist, writer and ulama, was prolific in his writings. Hamka's writing activity had closely followed his participation in the pilgrimage to Mecca in 1927. This is when we see Hamka being closely involved in a principal medium for the spread of modernist ideas, namely periodicals, which were expanding rapidly through the spread of the printing presses. His writings and narratives represent a 'key factor' in modernist reformism. Hamka's works are certainly pertinent to the study of Malay society. He left us with an abundance of sources on the dynamics of culture and change in the Malay peninsula and in Sumatra, especially within the Ranah Minangkabau (Minangkabau heartland). In *Ayahku*, first published on 1st January 1950, Hamka commented that writing about his father is similar to writing on the development of Islam in Minangkabau - difficult, complex, and contradictory, reflecting a society fundamentally rooted in the encounter between "pembangunan agamanya dan kekerasan adatnya" (advancement of religion and the orthodoxy of its customs). This paper delves on Chapter six titled "Semangat Pembaharuan Islam dan Mengalirnya ke Indonesia" (The Spirit of Islamic Renewal and its Penetration into Indonesia) of *Ayahku*. Many have narrated on *al-Imam*, and its origins. This paper focuses on Hamka's views,*

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his observations and experience on the role of the press and journalism in the contexts of reform and renewal. It peculiarly illustrates the spirit and dynamics of al-Imam in the Minangkabau heartland. The significance is Hamka's engaging perspective on journalism as an instrument of reform and renewal in the Malay world is seen through the role of his father. Hamka attributes the Paris-based magazine titled al-Urwatul Wutsqa (1884) as producing the climate of "kesedaran" (awareness) among Muslims. According to Hamka, the magazine was the outcome of the engagement between Syeikh Muhammad Abduh, with Sayid Jamaludin (Al-Afghani). Both travelled to Paris due to unfavourable intellectual and political conditions in the Middle East. al-Urwatul Wutsqa contained anti-colonial narratives, instigating "kebangkitan Islam" (resurgence). To Hamka, the magazine's significance, which later inspired the al-Azhar-based al-Manar, which later influenced al-Imam and al-Munir in the Malay Archipelago, as based on the combination between the power of Muhammad Abduh's words and the depth of Jamaluddin al-Afghani's philosophy. In Ayahku, we find the critical role of the press in the circulation of ideas on modernity to the Malays.

Keywords: *al-Imam, Abdul Karim Amrullah, al-Urwatul Wutsqa, Hamka, kebangkitan Islam, semangat*

Introduction

This paper is a facet of the intellectual history of Malay periodicals and journalism. It articulates the context of early beginnings of Malay periodical journalism through Hamka's views on the reform press in the Malay Archipelago. It captures an early idea on journalism and periodicals in Malay society at the end of the 19th century and the first few decades of the 20th century. In *Ayahku*,² first published in 1950, Haji Abdul Malik Karim Amrullah (Hamka), writes about his ulama and scholar father, Haji Rasul's contribution to modernist thinking in Sumatra. This paper resonates Hamka as

² Hamka. 2015. *Ayahku* (first published in 1950). Gombak.

being closely involved in a principal medium for the spread of modernist ideas, namely periodicals, which were expanding rapidly through the spread of the printing presses. His writings and narratives represent a 'key factor' in modernist reformism. Hamka's works are certainly pertinent to the study of Malay society.

The writings certainly form a significant contribution to the intellectual history of Malay society. In that sense, Hamka left us with a body of works on the study of Malay attitudes, behaviours, and sentiments in engaging with modernity and colonialism. Apart from the writings of Abdullah Abdul Kadir, or Munsyi Abdullah (1796-1854) and Jose Rizal (1861-1896), the works of Hamka lend to us an alternative source in developing a tradition for the study of Malay society in the Malay Archipelago, especially the dynamics of culture and change in Malaysia and Sumatera. If Sociology as a field of study was the progeny of the crisis in modern Europe, as articulated through the likes of Emile Durkheim, Georg Simmel, Max Weber, and Karl Marx – Hamka was one of the Muslim thinkers in the modern period who saw such a crisis in the Muslim/Malay world. He cast a long shadow on the history of Islamic reform. He created an endogenous sociological tradition (not in the academic sense) that can help us problematise, conceptualise, and theorise Malay society fairly over the last 200 years.

There is one other significant contribution out of this which had earlier escaped our attention, i.e. the use of history as a tool for change and reform. Hamka writes history, and is widely read in the Malay World. Chapter six of Khairudin Aljunied's book *Hamka and Islam: Cosmopolitan Reform in the Malay World* (2018)³ titled 'History as a Tool of Reform', notes that Hamka's corpus includes themes such as the global history of Islam, great Muslim personalities and the history of spiritual movements in Indonesia. These themes were reprinted several times. Significantly, Hamka's works have now become a source for professional historians in the Malay world, said to have vastly exceeded the influence of academic works, and are acknowledged as a source of reference for both the public and scholars. Hence, Hamka sought to make history accessible to the general public. Hamka is conscious of personal experiences

³ Singapore: ISEAS Publishing.

and the collective memories of others. He fuses them with his historical narratives. He is intimate with his subjects. Hamka knows history and what it can do to society. He believes and practices it in his consciousness to reconstruct the minds of ordinary Malay-Muslims across both sides of the Strait of Melaka. Hamka's writings brings forth the legacy of cosmopolitanism embedded in the various Malay traditions.⁴

My reading of *Ayahku* is framed within the said context. In the biography, Hamka criticises his father's stance on Islam, in the wake of Minangkabau history and its *adat perpatih* (matrilineal custom). *Ayahku* suggests Hamka's use of history as an instrument of change and the larger cosmopolitan reform. This paper delves on Chapter six titled '*Semangat Pembaharuan Islam dan Mengalirnya ke Indonesia*' (The Spirit of Islamic Renewal and its Penetration into Indonesia) of *Ayahku*, focussing on Hamka's views, his observations and experience on the role of the press and journalism in the contexts of reform and renewal.⁵

Hamka (1908-81)

Haji Abdul Malik Karim Amrullah has been referred to as the 'Hamzah Fansuri of the modern era.' Hamka was born in the ranah Minangkabau in what is now West Sumatra facing the shores of Danau Maninjau (Lake Maninjau), one of the two significant lakes in the Minangkabau region. He was the son of Haji Rasyul, one of the key figures in introducing modernist ideas to the Minangkabaus. Haji Rasul's contribution to modernist thinking in Sumatra is well encapsulated in Hamka's *Ayahku*.

Hamka was an essayist, journalist, public historian, scholar, novelist, writer, and ulama. He was prolific in his writings. At the age of twenty, he published his first novel in Minangkabau. The following year, he published a series of books on Islamic subjects, covering such issues as the role of omens in religion, traditional custom and Islam, and a range of other matters. According to Riddel Hamka's writing activity had closely followed his participation in the

⁴ Hamka (1990). *Tasauf Moderen*. Jakarta: P.T. Pustaka Panjimas. P. 19.

⁵ See pages 161-192.

pilgrimage to Mecca in 1927 and during the pilgrimage and in the years which followed he served as a correspondent for several daily and weekly publications, writing on a variety of Islamic subjects. This is when we see Hamka being closely involved in a principal medium for the spread of neo-modernist ideas, namely periodicals, which were expanding rapidly through the spread of the printing presses (2001: 217).⁶

Riddell pertinently notes that his most famous role was as editor and writer for journals. This was when Hamka served as editor for the periodical *Pedoman Masyarakat* from 1936 until the period of the Japanese occupation during the Second World War. Much of his expository writings for the periodical was later published in book form as *1001 Soal-Soal Hidup* in 1961. In his book, he addresses such issues as the relationship between children and parents, attitudes to prostitution, friendship, etc. These resonate his concerns in applying Islam to modern life, which Riddle identifies as “a key factor in modernist reformism” (p. 217)

Hamka also wrote a number of popular novels. His novels were to be acclaimed as significant contributions to the development of modern Indonesian literature. The same works led to controversy because some Islamic scholars claimed that it was inconsistent for a leading Islamic figure like Hamka to engage in the writing of popular novels.

This was in spite of the fact that these novels generally centred upon strongly Islamic themes. In this way, Hamka furthered the long tradition of Malay Islamic scholars using narrative as a device in theological exposition (Riddle, 217).

Hamka expanded his influence beyond the Minangkabau region throughout the Malay Archipelago. In 1924, he had gone to central Java, where he had closely observed the emergence of various Islamic movements. He began to have close contacts with the Muhammadiyah. The organization was established in response to the modernist ideas coming to the Malay Archipelago – principally

⁶ Peter Riddell. 2001. *Islam and the Malay-Indonesia World*. Singapore: Horizon books.

Malaya, Sumatra and Java, from Cairo and the Hejaz. Hamka studied with the leading Islamic nationalist of the period, Tjokroaminoto. In the early 1930s, he moved to Makassar, where he taught until 1935, before returning to Sumatra. During the Japanese occupation he continued to write, and produced a large number of essays on various fields of Islam. These include theology, philosophy, history, and Sufism. Hamka also wrote many essays and books on Islamic mysticism, including *Tassawuf Perkembangan dan Pemurniaannya* (The Development and Perfecting of Mysticism) and *Tasawuf Modern* (Modern Mysticism). Riddel describes Hamka's mystical inclinations coloured much of his approach to Islamic teaching.

However, his was not the voice of Sufism which dominated the Malay Islamic stage during the 16th to the 19th centuries. Rather, his was the voice of modernizing Sufism, and in his *Tasawuf Modern* (1939), he parried the anti-Sufi statements of modernists by advocating a type of Sufism shorn of its perceived un-Islamic practices but still maintaining a solid mystical core (Riddel, 218).

Thus, Hamka was seen as a moderate, widely respected among the various schools of Islamic teachings and thought in post-colonial Indonesia. His works are certainly pertinent in the study of Malay society. He left us with an abundance of sources on the dynamics of culture and change in the Malay peninsula and in Sumatra, especially within the *Ranah* Minangkabau (Minangkabau heartland).

In *Ayahku*, first published on 1st January 1950, Hamka wrote about his father, Syeikh Abdul Karim Amirullah (or Dr. H.A.K. Amrullah), an ulama and scholar. Hamka acknowledges that writing about his father is similar to writing on the development of Islam in Minangkabau – difficult, complex, and contradictory, reflecting a society fundamentally rooted in the encounter between ‘pembangunan agamanya dan kekerasan adatnya’ (advancement of religion and the orthodoxy of its customs).

The Genesis of the *Semangat* (the spirit) in Exile

In Chapter six titled ‘Semangat Pembaharuan Islam dan Mengalirnya ke Indonesia’ (The Spirit of Islamic Renewal and its Penetration into

Indonesia), Hamka discusses on the role of the press and journalism. The chapter provides useful insights into the dynamics and origins of the periodical *al-Imam* (1906-08). The figure most associated with *al-Imam* was Syed Shaikh al-Hady. Notwithstanding that *al-Imam* has been the most studied Malay periodical before the Second World War what would be new is engaging in Hamka's perspective on journalism relating to reform and renewal in the Malay-Minangkabau narrative.⁷

It began with the magazine *Al-Urwatul Wutsqa* published in Paris in 1884. According to Hamka, the magazine was the outcome of the engagement between Syeikh Muhammad Abduh, who was exiled in Beirut for three years, with Sayid Jamaludin (Al-Afghani). Both travelled to Paris due to unfavourable intellectual and political conditions in the Middle East. The publication of the magazine was to create *kesedaran* (awareness) among Muslims of their *harga diri* (self-worth), and to remind them of the dangers threatening Islam if Muslims continue to be forgetful. *Al-Urwatul Wutsqa* lasted through 18 issues. In less than a year it ceased production. Hamka explains that this was not because of the lack of support. The magazine was much welcomed and well received throughout the Muslim world. Seeing its anti-colonial narrative, the magazine was banned from being circulated in English colonies. Its writings and commentaries were much awaited – such as those on calls for *kebangkitan Islam* (resurgence of Islam), *membentaras jumud* (hindering narrow-mindedness) and *merangsang untuk berfikir* (catalyst for thinking). Hamka sees the combination between the power of Muhammad Abduh's words and the depth of Jamaluddin's philosophy.

Al-Urwatul Wutsqa brought about the spirit of reform and renewal, which to Hamka, was accepted by every soul that yearns for independence. The periodical was to be feared by *musuh Islam* (the enemies of Islam). It was widely circulated in India, Iran, and the Malay Archipelago. It was also read in Mekah and Madinah. Hamka

⁷ Aljunied (2018) scarcely mentions Hamka as a journalist and involvement in the press, which otherwise would have enhanced the role of journalism and newspapers as a significant instrument for cosmopolitan reform in the Malay world.

says that whenever he re-read the magazine that saw its demise some eight decades back, he was reminded of the *semangat* (spirit) regurgitated in its message.

Al-Urwatul Wutsqa also attracted another figure in Islamic reform and renewal. This was Sayyid Muhammad Rashid Ridha. He appeared at the time when Syeikh Jamaluddin died in 1896 in Istanbul, and Muhammad Abduh who was exiled in Paris. Muhammad Abduh was given a pardon by the Khadewi Abbas Helmi, the ruler of Egypt. He then returned to Egypt in 1896. The year after Rashid Rida moved to Cairo with the intention of starting a newspaper under the leadership of Abduh. Hence *Al-Manar* appeared in 1898 in Cairo.

Al-Manar was the continuation of *Al-Urwatul Wutsqa* in Islamic reform and renewal. It carried Abduh's Quranic interpretation. According to Hamka, *al-Manar* was circulated throughout the Muslim world. Seen as the *Kaum Muda* (Young Faction), the *al-Manar* ideology was in opposition to the conservative ulama. *Al-Manar* was staunchly critical of the stagnation and regression facing the *Ummah*. *Al-Manar* was also seen as the voice of Muhammad Abduh. Seeing the threat posed by *al-Manar*, Khadewi threw his support behind the conservative ulama and used them to spread slander and hatred against Abduh and Ridha. Both were ridiculed and slandered by the conservative ulama and the establishment in Egypt. Despite challenges and obstacles, and incidence of burning the newspaper, *al-Manar* survived until 1937. It ended with the death of Rashid Rida himself.

From *Al-Manar* to *Al-Imam*

The first name mentioned by Hamka in relation to *al-Imam* was the Singapore-based Arab philanthropist by the name of Syeikh Muhammad bin Salim Alkalili (also described as Syed Mohamad Salim al-Khalali) He was earlier influenced by the organization Jami at Khair in Java; and this in turn was induced by the journalism of the reformist periodicals *Al-Urwatul Wutsqa* and *Al-Manar*, published respectively in Paris and Cairo. *Al-Imam* (1906-08) was conceived partly under those conditions.

A close friend of Alkalili was the Minangkabau Cairo-trained ulama Syeikh Muhammad Taher bin Muhammad Jalaluddin Al-Azhari (variably described in related sources as Sheikh Tahir Jalaluddin and Sheikh Tahir Jalauddin al-Azhari). Together, they produced the monthly magazine *al-Imam*. Its maiden issue appeared in July of 1906, led by Alkalili who was said to be the publisher and financier. The magazine's second issue published in August, was edited by Sheikh Tahir Jalaluddin (Sheikh Tahir is the father of Kuala Kangsar-born Tun Hamdan, the sixth Yang di Pertua Negeri Pulau Pinang [1989-2001], and former vice chancellor of Universiti Sains Malaysia).

Al-Imam has correspondents in various parts of the Malay Archipelago. The periodical was not localized within where it was published. *Al-Imam* was regional and cosmopolitan in outlook. According to Hamka, the second issue stated clearly that they were led by Sayid Muhammad bin Abdurrahman bin Syahab in Betawi (Jakarta), and Haji Abdul Karim bin Tuanku Kisai in Danau, Sumatera. In the biography of his father, *Ayahku*, Hamka's accounts on *al-Imam* mainly highlighted on questions and queries on religious practice and rituals by Malays. One question was on *riba* (interest), which was raised in its 11th issue.

In Hamka's view, the dominant figure in *al-imam* was Sheikh Taher Jalaluddin. He was very much a follower of Muhammad Abduh and had been subscribing to *al-Manar* until the journal ceased publication in 1936. Syeikh Taher was said to be travelling back and forth to Mekah and Egypt. He was a close friend of Sayid Muhammad Rashid Ridha. In his absence, he would delegate his editorial to his student, Haji Abbas Taha. At certain times, *al-Imam*'s Leader and commentaries were penned by Sayyid Syeikh al-Hadi, and assisted by Sayyid Muhammad bin Agil. It would be instructive to recall that in the discourse on *al-Imam* encountered, al-Hadi was the dominant figure. Some have argued that the representation of al-Hadi in driving *al-Imam* was that he was a more brilliant writer compared to Syeikh Taher.⁸ In its June 1908 issue, *Al-Imam* firmly expressed that "*Al-Imam* is the fierce enemy of all innovation and superstition

⁸ See William R. Roff. 1967. *The Origins of Malay Nationalism*. Kuala Lumpur: University of Malaya Press.

(*karut-karut*), blind following and custom introduced in religion” (“*Al-Imam* adalah musuh yang amat bengis bagi sekalaian bid’ah dan khurafat [karut-karut] dan ikutan-ikutan dan adat yang dimasukkan orang pada agama”).⁹

Hamka in revealing Syeikh Muhammad Al-Kalali as *al-Imam*’s financier, also acknowledges Sayid Muhammad bin Agil and Sayid Syeikh al-Hadi as responsible for facilitating a capital of 20,000 ringgit. But *al-Imam* subsequently suffered from competition. The expressive and radical nature of *al-Imam* spurred a new excitement in journalism among the Malay-Muslims in Singapura and in other parts of the Peninsula. *Al-Imam* had to contend with competition. According to Hamka, the magazine ceased publication in 1909 (to be exact 1908). Hence that ended the beginning of a series of periodicals on reform and Islam that were to thrive through the decades before the Second World War.

To Hamka, the end of *al-Imam* spelt the disruption in the voice of reform and renewal. He expresses concerns on the continuing vibrancy of debates in the reform press in the “*Alam Minangkabau sendiri*” (Minangkabau world) as well as in other areas under colonial conditions (referring to the English and the Dutch).

But the demise of *al-Imam* saw the emergence of *al-Munir* in Padang. The periodical, published between 1911 and 1915 was the outcome of initiatives by Syeikh Taher and Syeikh Ahmad Khatib in Mekah. *Al-Munir* was supported by some well-known Minangkabau ulamas, namely Syeikh Muhammad Jamil Jambek, Syeikh Muhammad Thaib bin Haji Umar Batu Sangkar, Hamka’s father Haji Abdul Karim bin Syeikh Muhamad Amrullah Danau and Haji Abdullah bin Haji Ahmad at Padang Panjang.

Haji Abdullah was a skilful writer who conceived *al-Munir* as the continuation of *al-Imam*. From Padang Panjang on the Minangkabau highlands on the road to Bukittinggi where he lived, he moved to the coastal town of Padang, now the capital of West Sumatra. There he published the first issue of *al-Munir*. This was on 1 April 1911. Hamka lists the staff of *al-Munir* as comprising Haji Abdullah himself as director and Haji Marah Muhammad bin Abdulhamid. The others are Haji Sutan Jamaluddin Abu Bakar,

⁹ *Ayahku*, p. 170.

editorially assisted by Haji Abdul Karim Amrullah Danau, Muhammad Dahlan Sultan Lemak Tuah, Haji Muhammad Thaib Umar Batu Sangkar, and Sultan Muhammad Salim Hoofdjaksa.

In its first issue, *al-Munir* explained that the name means torch, or that brings light of enlightenment. *Al-Munir* also brings the meaning of leading and advancing the children of Malays and Islam towards the religion. The name also means peace and prosperity among men toward life and loyalty toward the ruler. *Al-Munir* described itself as the light leading to certainty of knowledge toward truth and reality.

The maiden issue carried the slogan “Usaha Orang Alam Minangkabau” (The Enterprise of the people of Minangkabau). *Al-Munir* was seen a portent vehicle that has “menggoncangkan fikiran yang selama ini tertidur” (jolt thinking that has so far been in slumber). Hamka considers Haji Abdullah Ahmad as the first *Jurnalists Islam* (Islamic journalist) in Sumatra who was willing to introduce new vocabularies and meanings in not being influence by the Bahasa Melayu translation from Arabic, according to “kita-kitab lama karangan Arsyad Banjar atau yang lain” (religious books authored by Arsyad Banjar or by others). Hamka commended the prose of Haji Abdullah which was “enak dibaca kerana bahasanya yang bersih” (nice to read because the language is clean). But in religion, Hamka says Haji Abdullah was not as learned as his father, Haji Abdul Karim. When *Al-Munir* ended, its organizers had already formed Percetakan Al-Munir (Al-Munir Printing). The printing press was then used to publish books, especially the works of Haji Abdul Karim Amrullah with titles like ‘*Aiqazun Nijam*’, ‘*Usul Fikah*’ and others. The men behind the periodical had not given up. In 1916, due to popular sentiments, with the hope of reviving *al-Munir*, Haji Abdul Karim visited Malaya, and Java the year after. The support however was not forthcoming.

The attempt to revive a periodical also under the same name ‘*Al-Munir*’ happened after the formation of the Sumatera Thawalib society in Padang Panjang in 1918. That name was joined by the name *Al-Manar* to be *Almunirul Manar*. under the leadership of Zainuddin Labai Leyunusi, with Tahrir bin Abdulhamid Hakim Tuanku Mudo as editor assisted by A.R. Sultan Mansur, H. Datuk

Hakim Tuankuthers. The magazine managed to survive for four years, through 1922.

Hamka's Father in *al-Munir*

The aura and influence of Haji Abdul Karim Amrullah could not be contained in remote and isolated Maninjau. He then was invited to Padang to continue his larger struggle. This was upon the insistence of his companions and students. When Hamka's father moved to Padang, some of his students followed suit, fearing separation from their teacher. Among them was Abdulhamid Hakim, who was later known as Angku Mudo, and A.R. Sutan Mansur, who later was married to H. Abdul Karim's daughter, Fathimah.¹⁰ According to Hamka, beside resuming his teaching activities, his father led the editorial of *Al-Munir*, especially in managing the column on questions and answers on Islam, a popular genre then that has "shaken the world of thinking among Muslims at that time" (menggoncangkan alam fikiran Islam pada masa itu). *Al-Munir* was circulated widely throughout Sumatera, Java, Sulawesi, Kalimantan and Malaya. The periodical was consumed amongst the intelligentsia throughout the Archipelago. Together with *Al-Munir* pioneer Haji Abdullah Ahmad in Padang, – and apart from writing and editing the periodical – they were also active in teaching and *dakwah*.

The task of organising the question-and-answer column in *al-Munir* was Haji Abdul Karim and H.M. Thaib Sungayang. Some of the issues raised were on the expression of *niat* (intention) before prayers; holding a *kenduri* (feast) at the house of the deceased, *meratap* (lamenting) over person who has died, and the practice of the counting the days as is in the words of Hamka "mentiga hari, mengempat hari, menujuh hari, mengampat puluh hari and meneratus hari" (third day, fourth day, seventh day, fortieth day and one hundredth days). His father replied that the practice be abolished.

Another issue is on *talqin* (literally to teach or explain a point to the deceased). We would see this practice immediately after a burial at the site of the grave. Haji Abdul Karim through the *al-Munir* column urged the practice be stopped. He said it was better to

¹⁰ *Ayahku*, p.174.

whisper to the ears of the person about to leave this world the *syahadah*, *La ilaha illal Lah* (There is no God but God). It seems that the people in what is now West Sumatra were much concerned with problems of dressing and attire. In the 1920s, Padang was stormed with debates on being similar in appearance to the non-Muslim (Hamka phrases it as "...apa yang menyerupai orang kafir). The educated younger generation, advocated and defended the use of the *samping*, described by Hamka as "kain sarung diluar seluar panjang dilipatkan sebagai tanda orang Islam" (a piece of cloth folded around long pants as a sign of a Muslim). According to Hamka, even when travelling by train, not wearing a *samping* was deemed as a foreigner, and be charged the same fare as a European or Chinese.

The larger concerns asked by *al-Munir*'s readers was on *tasyabbuh* (mimicking or resembling). To this, Haji Abdul Karim opined that *tasyabbuh* referred to using or putting religious signs, such as the Christian cross. The issue of attire and fashion, such as the use of caps and other headgears, did not come under *tasyabbuh*. Haji Abdul Karim was also of the view that *hisab* (calculations) was preferred to *rukayah* (observing the moon for Ramadan). *Al-Munir* would also raise issues on the permissibility of erecting tombstones, blind following, and celebrating the birthday of the Prophet, the Maulid. According to Hamka, opinions on Islam, erstwhile feared and tabooed were spewed, "tersembur" as Hamka describes it, from the mouths of the editors of *al-Munir*. The editors were accused of blasphemy, not conforming to any jurisprudential school (*mazhab*) within the *Ahli Sunnah Wal Jemaah*. They were labelled as *Mu'tazilah*, *Wahabi*, *Khawarij*, also as *zindiq* (generally heretics and extreme religious infidelity to Islam).

Apart from *al-Munir*, a similar periodical was *Al-Akhbar*, led by a young skillful writer by the name of Zainuddin Labai. Hamka reveals that the peak of debates and polemics on Islam occurred between 1914 and 1918. *Al-Munir* had many followers, a large number comprised students of renowned ulama Syeikh Ahmad Khatib. Under him was Syeikh Ibrahim Musa Parabek, Syekh Abbas and his relative Syeikh Mustafa at Padang Panjang. There was also Syeikh Rasyid Maninjau. On the other side was Syeikh Khatjib Ali

Padang, Syeikh Saad Munka, and Syeikh Bayang. The latter was slighted because their *tariqat* was interrupted.

It was the conflict between the *Kaum Muda* (Young Faction) and *Kaum Tua* (Old Faction). The sentiments opposing *al-Munir* led to the publication of *Suluh Melayu*, to defend conventional thinking and to allay accusations against Islam and its rituals. Hamka did not describe further on *Suluh Melayu* in the biography on his father. It must be remembered that *al-Munir* was not localised to Padang, or to Padang Panjang and Bukittinggi in the Minangkabau heartland. It was circulated and read throughout most of the Archipelago. The legacy of *al-Munir*, and similarly the *Kaum Muda* periodicals published in Singapura and Pulau Pinang during the first half of the last century, are still felt to this day.

Concluding Remarks

The discourse on Islamic history mainly falls short of the Malay Archipelago. Significantly in this context, Hamka sought “to reform the self-identity of Malay-Muslims into a feeling of belonging to a millennium-old civilisation.” Hamka’s work is part of a wave of writing “new Muslim histories” in the wake of the emergence of new nation states, and the post Second World War in the empowerment from colonialism. In *Ayahku*, we find Hamka as a public historian in his biographical approach in instructing his readers on Minangkabau society, placing the reform press and Malay journalism in that context.

In the Malay Archipelago, the earlier introduction of the printing press, the publication of periodicals and newspapers in the dynamics of Malay journalism beginning the middle 1800s, and the mass production of books some decades later in the century ushered the writing of Muslims histories. Hamka portrays the challenge to the colonial order and modernity; at the same time illustrating journalism as purveyors of social change and renewal. Hamka writes in the vernacular language and exposed his readers to immediate challenges, locating it between the past and the future. He challenges the dominant historiography and discourse, in that Malay-Islamic thought is not peripheral to the larger story of the spread of Islam in world history.

AL-SHAJARAH

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