

THE LIFE AND TIMES OF SHAYKH TAHIR JALALUDDIN

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Introduction

Writing on 'Abduh's influence in Indonesia, Abdul Mukhti Ali, a prominent Indonesian scholar, states that 'Abduh and his followers, better known as the *salafīyya*, exercised significant influence on the development of Islam in Indonesia. Moreover, Abdul Mukhti adds that *al-Manâr* not only brought the light to Egypt but also enlightened Muslims in other countries, including Indonesian students who studied in the *haramayn* and Egypt.¹ Abdul Mukhti's opinion not only holds true for Indonesia but also Malaya. The dawning of the twentieth century witnessed the emergence of a generation of reform-minded Malay-Muslim thinkers in Malaya who attempted to revitalize their society from intellectual stagnation. In so doing the reformist encountered strong resistance from the traditional ulama, who were the vanguards of the traditional and official Islam.

A prominent and leading reformist, who played a pivotal role in promoting this reformist ideas in Malaya, was Shaykh Tahir Jalaluddin (hereafter, Tahir). Indeed, a leading Southeast Asian Muslim intellectual, HAMKA regards Tahir as the pioneer and first exponent of the modern *salafīyya*² ideas in the Malay Indonesian world.³ William Roff, a leading historian of Malaysia, also recognized Tahir's preeminence when he says "Mohd. Tahir b. Jalaluddin, of all the reform group was probably the most notable in intellect and scholarly achievement."⁴ Despite Tahir's preeminence, curiously, he has not received the scholarly attention that he deserves. The primary

objective of this article is to chronicle the life of Tahir Jalaluddin from his family background in Minangkabau to his later years in the Malay world.⁵

Tahir's Family Background

Muhammad Tahir bin Shaykh Muhammad, or Shaykh Muhammad Tahir Jalaluddin al-Falaki (1869-1957) as he was popularly known, was born on Tuesday, 7 November 1869 at Kota Tua Empat Angkat, a district in Bukittinggi, West Sumatra.⁶ He was born into an established Minangkabau family with a strong tradition of Islamic learning and leadership.

Tahir's father, Tuanku Muhammad (d. 1871), better known as Tuan Shaykh Cangking, was a notable Muslim scholar. Tahir makes no reference to the standing of his father as an Islamic scholar apart from saying that Tuanku Cangking was a figure who became a source of reference in religious matters. However, it is apparent that Tuanku Cangking was a notable *'alim*, as Tuanku is one of the highest titles among the ulama in Minangkabau. A religious scholar of higher standing than Tuanku is called Shaykh.⁷

Tahir's family had been involved not only in Islamic learning, but also in Islamic reformist movement for three generations. During the pre-militant phase of the Padri Movement, Tahir's paternal grandfather and great grandfather played a leading role in reforming Minangkabau society. Tuanku nan Tua Tahir's paternal great grandfather, was a student of Shaykh Burhanuddin in Ulakan. However, Tuanku nan Tua would later form his own *surau* and contest the validity of the religious authority of the Ulakan *surau* on the ground that the latter's Islamic practices and mysticism were contrary to the *shari'a*.⁸ Thus, Tuanku nan Tua represented a trend that was more *shari'a*-oriented than the Ulakan. Tuanku nan Tua would later become the *guru besar* (chief mentor) of the Padri warriors, and the leading proponent of the reformist movement before its radicalization.⁹ As a matter of fact, Tuanku nan Renceh, Imam Bonjol, and seven other ulama that formed the radical wing of the Padri movement were students of Tuanku nan Tua.¹⁰ Tuanku nan Tua was an eminent *'alim* of his time, widely respected by many ulama from various districts of Minangkabau who looked up to him as their leader and source of reference.¹¹ Tuanku Nan Tua made a name for himself because of his expertise in *tasawwuf* (mysticism) and *shari'a*. Later, Tuanku nan Tua earned for himself the title of *Sultan 'Alim*¹² for his expertise in the *sunna* and *shari'a*.¹³

Tuanku nan Tua's position as a renowned scholar attracted a huge number of students from all the four districts in Minangkabau

to study at his religious school, *surau*, in Agam.¹⁴ Besides being a sufi locus, the Cangking *surau* also became the center for the study of the *shari'a*. Tuanku nan Tua impressed upon his disciples on how significant it was for the Minangkabau to obey the will of God. The outward manifestation of this obedience entailed adherence of the precepts of *shari'a*, such as those regulating inheritance, divorce and transactions. Tuanku nan Tua, who became well to do due to his involvement in commerce, drafted a code of rules for the correct treatment of traders, based on the *shari'a*.¹⁵ In light of the failure of the Minangkabau to fully adhere to Islam by not only neglecting Islamic obligations, but also committing unlawful acts such as practicing the matrilineal pattern of property holding, gambling, betting, rape, murder, robbery and the sale of family members for profit, Tuanku nan Tua paid special attention to examining Islamic and un-Islamic practices among the Minangkabau.¹⁶

Tahir's maternal family also occupied an important position in Minangkabau society. His maternal grandfather, Tuanku Baginda Khatib, was the former Regent of Agam, who also played a pivotal role in religious reform in Minangkabau society. Tuanku Baginda Khatib, also known as Tuanku nan Rancak, was one of the leading Padri ulama.¹⁷ Apart from Tahir, the family from his mother's side produced two other prominent figures that would play leading roles in promoting Islamic reform activities in the Malay-Indonesian world. These two eminent figures were Shaykh Ahmad al-Khatib¹⁸ and Haji Agus Salim.¹⁹

In short, Tahir's family occupied a prominent position in Minangkabau society due to their erudition in Islamic learning and contribution to society. This solid family background was important in consolidating Tahir's religious credentials and authority in the eyes of the Minangkabau people.

Tahir's Early Years in Minangkabau

Little is recorded about Tahir's early years in Minangkabau.²⁰ At the age of two, Tahir became an orphan when his father passed away. Subsequently, the young Tahir was raised by his mother until her death six years later. Then, Limbak Urai, his mother's younger sister, looked after Tahir.²¹ Tahir's relationship with Limbak Urai was very close, to the extent that Limbak addressed herself to Tahir as 'Biyai' (mother). Limbak Urai was a good Qur'an reciter, and she often put Tahir to sleep by reciting the *Yâsîn* chapter of the Qur'an. It was from Limbak Urai that Tahir first received instruction in Qur'an. As a result of that, the young Tahir could recite the Qur'an, though imperfectly, from the age of five.²² At night Tahir would further

learn the Qur'an at a nearby *surau*, and perform the congregational prayers there.

Dutch colonial authority had introduced formal modern learning in Minangkabau in the 1870s. Children who had reached the age of six could enroll in the government school called the *volkschoelen* school.²³ When Tahir reached the age of six, he enrolled in a Dutch school at his village. Tahir studied in this school for almost three years. However, during the later half of his third year in the school, Limbak received a letter from her son, Ahmad in Makkah, requesting her to send Tahir there to study.²⁴ Thus, in 1881, Tahir left for Makkah with an elderly family member.

It is not difficult to understand why Tahir was sent to pursue religious learning in Makkah. As HAMKA mentions, any religiously inclined people in Minangkabau would have a desire to do so because of the outstanding reputation of Makkah as a distinguished center of Islamic learning that would confer religious credentials for students who studied there. Second, Tahir already had a connection with Makkah where his cousin Ahmad al-Khatib resided. Therefore, any students interested to acquire higher Islamic learning had to go elsewhere for that purpose.

The introduction of the Dutch *volkschoelen* delivered another blow to the *surau*. The village school proved to be very attractive to many sections of Minangkabau society. The interaction of these factors contributed to the decline of the traditional religious learning in Minangkabau, and this probably served as an additional factor motivating those aspiring to pursue religious learning to go to Makkah.

Tahir's Days in Makkah

While in Makkah, Tahir stayed with his older cousin, Ahmad al-Khatib (d. 1916). Before describing Tahir's experiences in Makkah, it is pertinent to include some information about Ahmad al-Khatib. Ahmad was born in Bukittinggi ca. 1860.²⁵ He went to Makkah in 1871 and devoted his first nine years there to Islamic learning. HAMKA states that after ten years in the Holy City, a Kurdish merchant named Shaykh Salih who was impressed by Ahmad's behavior and knowledge married him to his daughter in 1879.²⁶

According to HAMKA, Ahmad's rise to prominence can be attributed to the influence of his father-in-law. It is said that Salih was well connected to the palace and it was through that connection that Ahmad was introduced to the palace and ulama, which eventually paved the way for his appointment as the Imam for the Shafi'i Muslims in the Grand Mosque, to preach during the Friday prayer, and the

permission to teach in the compound of the Grand Mosque.²⁷ The specific date of Ahmad's appointment to that position is unknown. Snouck Hurgronje's detailed account of the Jawah community in Makkah makes no mention of Ahmad's name. Thus, Roff states "It is curious that Snouck Hurgronje, who was in Makkah at this time (1884-85), does not include him among the well-known Indonesian ulama there."²⁸

One possible explanation for his exclusion of Shaykh Ahmad in his study was because the two were not on good terms while Snouck Hurgronje was there.²⁹ Karel Steenbrink offers a more balanced assessment of this conflicting account. His contention is that Hurgronje probably excludes Shaykh Ahmad in his report (1884-1885) because Ahmad had yet to become a prominent *'âlim* around 1884-1885. Karel Steenbrink adds that ten years later (1894), Snouck Hurgronje wrote for the first time about Ahmad in his report, and in another report in 1904, Snouck Hurgronje describes Ahmad as "a person of Minangkabau origin regarded by the Jawi community in Makkah as the most talented and the most knowledgeable among them. All the pilgrims from Indonesia visited him in Makkah."³⁰ Karel Steenbrink adds that Snouck Hurgronje's report downplayed Ahmad's position as the Imam in the Masjid al-Haram as insignificant, with only the duty to act as *imam* of the five daily for prayers for Shafi'i Muslims.³¹ Karel Steenbrink disagrees with Snouck Hurgronje's belittling statement and contends that Ahmad's appointment as the *imam* was prestigious because it was rare for non-Arabs to be promoted to this post.³² Ahmad was appointed the Imam of Shafi'i Muslims in the Masjid al-Haram before the Wahhabis conquered Makkah in 1924. Before that time, the Sharif had recognized the four major schools of law and appointed an imam for each school.

Tahir's Religious Learning in Makkah

In order to understand intellectual forces that influenced Tahir's world-view it is crucial to examine closely the learning that he experienced. In Tahir's case, we are informed that his serious Islamic learning started when he went to Makkah in 1881 and spent long years in this Holy City. It is unfortunate that the existing studies provide very little information about the nature of learning that Tahir acquired in Makkah.³³

The task of constructing Tahir's educational experience in Makkah does not stand on a firm ground because the sources at our disposal do not shed much light on the subject. In constructing Tahir's learning in Makkah, we are relying on whatever little information is available from Tahir's personal papers and the meticulously detailed

account about the religious life in Makkah at the end of the nineteenth century by Snouck Hurgronje. The latter sheds much useful light about the nature of learning in Makkah and the Malay-Indonesian community there. Aside from his detailed account on religious life in Makkah, Snouck Hurgronje's work has another obvious merit in that his observation was based on his experience there in 1884-85, which coincided with Tahir's stay.³⁴ This work also provides meticulous information about the Jawi community and their learning experiences in Makkah.

Snouck Hurgronje notes that seekers of knowledge in Makkah filled their days and evening by attending lectures in the Grand Mosque or at the houses of scholars. They studied both religious and secular subjects— law, theology, grammar, logic and mysticism. The lectures were open to the public and were free of charge. Despite that there were certain rules to be observed. For example, as regards the lectures on positive law one should study with a teacher from the same *madhhab* while in the principles of jurisprudence they were free to study with any teacher regardless of his *madhhab*.³⁵

As for non-Arab students, before being able to attend and understand lectures in the Masjid al-Haram , they would have to devote their attention to the study of Arabic language first. Snouck Hurgronje clearly describes this process as follows:

"The great majority of the students come from abroad, and if their mother tongue is not Arabic, must go through long preliminary study in that language before they are ripe for instruction in the Haram. Few have attained in their Javanese, Malay, Malabar, or other home such a knowledge of Arabic to enable them to follow the lectures; most come very young or very imperfectly prepared in that respect. In such cases, after having made some progress in reciting the Quran , they go for some years to school to a learned fellow-countryman living in Mekka, who explains to them the easier texts in their mother tongue".³⁶

Snouck Hurgronje describes the learning experiences of the Malay Indonesian students even more meticulously. He notes that Arabic grammar was the single most important subject at the elementary level. In doing so the Malay-Indonesian students had to understand the Arabic table of declensions where a student "...writes every form of declension the Arabic termini, and the most detailed translation into Javanese (or Malay). Thus he writes e.g., over the word *fa'ala* (past tense): *fi'l madi mufrad mudhakkar ghaib* (singular masculine third person) " ³⁷ Having comprehended the basic Arabic word forms, students would study a first manual of grammar. Their

emphasis on studying the grammar manual at this stage was not so much in mastering the complicated grammatical rules, but to analyze the various words in the manual. After the completion of the first manual of grammar, students started to study jurisprudence texts in a similar fashion. In Makkah almost all Jawah teachers used this method.³⁸

After having overcome the difficulties of learning Arabic, the Malay-Indonesian students would normally study religious subjects with scholars from their own country for some more years before having the confidence and talent to attend lectures by prominent scholars in the Masjid al-Haram.³⁹

As regards the method of learning in the Haram for Shafi'i students, Snouck Hurgronje writes:

"As we look at the Shafi'ite students... we are first of all struck by the great difference of ages; in the same circles sit greybeards and beardless boys, striplings and grown men... The law lectures have become to a great extent stereotyped. In the period of the fifth to the seventh century after the Hijrah, that is, just when stiff uniformity succeeded lively conflict in the world of Moslim learning, some Shafi'ite pundits of the highest rank (especially Abû Shujâ' [born, ca., 1042], Rafi'î [d.1226], and Nawawi [d.1277]) expounded the whole Law in their great works, and posterity has regarded these textbooks with almost as much reverence as they themselves regarded the works of Shâfi'î [d.820] and his first disciples... The scholars learnt them by heart so as to get secure landmarks in following the course of lectures. In later times learned men like Ibn Hajar [d. ca., 1449], Sharbini [d. ca., 1567] and Ramli [d.1595] have fixed in literary shape the commentaries on these texts and their commentaries are still to-day essentially the foundation of all Shafi'ite lectures on the Holy Law... A Professor of to-day has thus to choose one of the following methods: 1) to recite to his scholars one of the above-mentioned commentaries with the glosses of a famous bygone professor, so that the sole advantage of oral instruction consists in precise vocalisation and occasional clearing up of small difficulties, 2) to make the reading of the commentary fruitful by oral exposition which he derives from several of the best glosses, or 3) to make and publish out of those glosses a new compilation".⁴⁰

Based on Snouck Hurgronje's account, we can deduce that Islamic learning was primarily organized around the *halqa* (circle) system where students would form a circle round the master. The lectures were open and free, and anyone interested might attend the

study circle. Students, beginner, and advanced, young, and old, were mixed together irrespective of their age and level of knowledge.

As regards the way in which Islamic jurisprudence subjects were taught in Makkah, Snouck Hurgronje tells us that the Shafi'i teachers did not generally promote independent thought. Rather, they would adopt a certain book produced by the leading Shafi'i scholars such as al-Nawawi (d. 1277) as a text and would then elaborate the text to his students. This system is popularly known in the Malay world as "mastering the book."⁴¹ This method was deemed effective because the religious texts were written in a peculiar way where words and terms have meanings that are different from their common denotations. Sentences in those books are constructed in such way that they need to be closely studied. For that reason ordinary people could not properly understand these texts on their own. Thus, during a learning session the teacher would explain the meanings of the texts, provide elaborated explanation on aspects such as rhetoric and grammar, while students jot down the commentary on the margin beneath the text.

Tahir's personal papers only listed the name of his teachers and a partial list of the books that he studied, without overtly suggesting any chronological order. The order of the teachers as appear in his notes is Shaykh Abdul Haq, Sayyid Umar Shata', Sayyid Bakri Shata', Shaykh Muhammad Al-Khayyat, Shaykh Husain Zaid and Muhammad Anbabi.⁴² Tahir mentions that he studied Qur'an and *tajwid* (the method of the recitation of Qur'an) from Shaykh Abdul Haq of Madrasa Shaykh Rahmatullah. The name Shaykh Rahmatullah appears in Snouck Hurgronje's account. Shaykh Rahmatullah is described as an exile from British India who used to receive students in his house. He was a highly independent and revered 'âlim and the author of a polemical writing against Christians, *Izhâr al-Haqq*.⁴³

According to Azra, Shaykh Rahmatullah had founded the Madrasa Saulatiah in 1874. This madrasa was the locus of Malay-Indonesian students where many studied directly under Shaykh Rahmatullah.⁴⁴

After completing his Quranic studies, Tahir started learning book first from a certain Sayyid 'Umar Shata' and Sayyid Bakri Shata', the latter was also Shaykh Ahmad's teacher.⁴⁵ Snouck Hurgronje describes Sayyid Bakri Shatta' as a man of middle age whose father immigrated from Damieta to Makkah. He had a large circle of students.⁴⁶ Bakri Shatta' is further described as having a reputation for orthodoxy and adhering to the Shafi'i school of law.⁴⁷

The next teacher mentioned in Tahir's personal paper is Shaykh Muhammad Al-Khayyat who began teaching in Makkah in 1908. According to Snouck Hurgronje, Muhammad was a Makkan who once lived in Malaya and occasionally visited East Sumatra.⁴⁸ Two

other teachers from whom Tahir learned Islamic astronomy were Shaykh Husain Zaid and Muhammad Anbabi. Unfortunately, we are unable to obtain information about these two scholars.

Apart from those mentioned above, the individual most responsible for Tahir's early education in Makkah was none other than his older cousin and guardian, Ahmad al-Khatib. As a young child who could hardly understand Arabic, Tahir devoted most of his time to studying with Ahmad, who had already established a reputation as a prominent Malay scholar in Makkah. Ahmad's reputation attracted a huge number of Malay-Indonesian students whose native languages were not Arabic. Together with other students from the Malay world, Tahir studied Arabic grammar, jurisprudence, and other religious subjects that were taught in Indonesian at the beginner's level, and only when they had advanced in their knowledge were they taught in Arabic.⁴⁹ Tahir was reported to be a bright student. Thus, Ahmad openly praised Tahir's intelligence and urged those students encountering difficulty in their study to consult with Tahir. Soon after, Tahir was appointed assistant to Shaykh Ahmad to help the latter in teaching his students.⁵⁰

During his twenty years in Makkah, Tahir also took opportunities to work as a pilgrim broker and pilgrim guide for the Malay-Indonesian Muslims performing the *hajj*.⁵¹ During his long stay in Makkah, he made three brief visits to Sumatra and Malaya. Tahir's first return to the Malay world took place in 1886 when he visited relatives in Minangkabau. After spending time with his relatives in his hometown, Tahir made a trip back to Makkah in the subsequent year. His second trip to the Malay world occurred in 1890 where he visited Penang, Medan, and Minangkabau. It seems that Tahir's second trip was primarily for business purposes to accompany the pilgrims to Makkah in his capacity as a pilgrim broker. Tahir made another trip to the Malay world in 1892. During this trip he stopped in Penang and took this opportunity to sell books, which he brought from the Middle East. He also visited east Sumatra and Minangkabau, his native land. In the month of December 1892 Tahir sailed to Egypt via Singapore to further his religious education in Cairo.⁵²

Tahir's Years in Cairo

We have little information about Tahir's experiences in Cairo. Tahir's personal papers about his life provide only scanty information about his sojourn in Cairo, the subjects he studied and his living quarters.⁵³ From 1893 to 1897 Tahir studied at the al-Azhar mosque. While in Azhar he stayed at the *riwâq al-haramayn* (the quarters of the two Holy Sanctuaries). Among the subjects that Tahir studied were Arabic

language, Islamic law, and Islamic astronomy, and after completing his studies, Tahir received the *'ilmiyya* degree from the university.⁵⁴ The learning system that Tahir experienced in al-Azhar was probably quite similar to what Charles Adams described in his description of the al-Azhar learning system around the mid-nineteenth century, and subsequently what 'Abduh underwent in the 1870s. Adams argues that around the mid-nineteenth century, al-Azhar mosque adopted the "traditional" method. Elaborating on this, Adams states that the primary goal of Islamic learning at al-Azhar was not to encourage the development of these Islamic disciplines, but merely to transmit them as they had been handed down by the early established ulama, without any change or deviation.⁵⁵ In brief, the educational system at al-Azhar adhered to the established opinions of the early scholars of Islam and did not open the way for independent judgment of the sources of Islam.⁵⁶

The learning method was centered on lectures given by the shaykhs in the large hall of the mosque. These lessons were based on the texts of established ulama. The students were required to memorize books by the earlier scholars of Islam, most of the time without having been helped to understand them. Under this learning system students were not encouraged to develop a critical understanding of Islamic texts. Rather their task was primarily confined to uncritical memorization of the established texts. As Charles Adams describes the process:

"...the student set himself to memorize by rote the commentary (sharh) of some later writer upon the original text, or the glosses (hashiyah) of a still later writer upon the commentary, or still further superglosses and notes (ta'likat, takarir) upon this... if a student succeeded in memorizing the text of one of these commentaries or glosses he considered that he understood the subject".⁵⁷

In brief, the learning system at al-Azhar was unimaginative and uninteresting, and cultivated un-critical and non-analytical attitudes among students.

Tahir considered his years in Cairo as a pivotal phase in his intellectual formation because it opened his eyes to new ideas and it was out of his love for this institution that he added al-Azhari to his name.⁵⁸ However, his exposure to the progressive *salafiyya* ideas could not have been possible through al-Azhar, which practiced uncritical learning. Therefore, it may be safe to assume that Tahir's exposure to the *salafiyya* ideas was not through formal studies at al-Azhar. As Hamzah, Tahir's disciple, notes, while in Cairo Tahir not only attended formal classes at al-Azhar, but he also frequented many

lectures delivered by Egyptian reformers and reportedly even had direct contact with 'Abduh.⁵⁹ Another of Tahir's disciples, Bachtiar Djamily, concurred with Hamzah that it was in Cairo that Tahir became strongly influenced by the reformist movement spearheaded by Afghani, 'Abduh and Rida, to the extent that he would buy any reformist writing written by these leading Middle Eastern reformists.⁶⁰ However, unlike Hamzah, Bachtiar and HAMKA was less certain whether Tahir had any direct contact with 'Abduh during his sojourn in Cairo.

Even though there is no documented evidence substantiating Tahir's contact with 'Abduh, we do have evidence to substantiate Tahir's direct contact with 'Abduh's closest associate, Rida. This is attested by Tahir's book entitled *Kitab Ta'yîd Muttabi' al-Sunna fî al-radd 'alâ al-Qâ'l bil-sunniyyatal-rak'ataîn qabla al-Jum'at* [The book of rejection of those who argue for the Supererogatory Prayer before the Friday Prayer), which, Muhammad Rashid Rida introduced as follows:

"I have examined this work written by my old friend and loyal associate the respected Ustaz Shaykh Muhammad Tahir Jalaluddin. This book ...is a translation of his work from Malay into Arabic and establishes the truth on the issues discussed with concrete and convincing Islamic evidences".⁶¹

However, the sources at our disposal do not inform us when exactly Tahir came into contact with Rida. It is probable that this contact was established in 1897 before Tahir's departure from Cairo to Makkah.⁶² After completing his studies at al-Azhar mosque at the end of 1897, Tahir returned to Makkah, and spent the two subsequent years teaching there.

Tahir in the Malay World

After spending long years in the Middle East Tahir made a permanent return to the Malay world in 1899.⁶³ Intriguingly, Tahir did not return to his native land, Minangkabau. Instead, he traveled to the various parts of the region and eventually decided to settle in Kuala Kangsar, Perak. The sources at our disposal provide no information concerning Tahir's reason for immigrating to Malaya. The immigration of the Minangkabau and Sumatran people in general had already been taking place since the seventeenth century. Large-scale migration intensified in the 1870s after the opening up of the western states and the encouragement of settlement by providing land grants and loans to immigrants.⁶⁴

By the late nineteenth century, there were already sizable settlements of Minangkabau people especially in the Malay state of Negeri Sembilan. Apart from that, Minangkabau and most Sumatran people in general had close cultural affinities with the Malays in Malaya.⁶⁵ It has been argued that for centuries, the Straits of Malacca did not form a dividing line between the peninsula and Sumatra but served as a corridor linking the two areas. In the case of Tahir, Deliar Noer posited that Tahir's decision to settle in Malaya was influenced by his aversion to the customary matrilineal system that was so well entrenched in Minangkabau.⁶⁶ Thus, Tahir's choice of Malaya as his domicile makes sense.

Perak, the Malay state in which Tahir decided to settle at this time, was under British indirect rule. Theoretically, the head of the state was the king, known as the Sultan, and he still held ultimate power in the realm of religion and Malay custom. The Malay ruler of Perak at this time was Sultan Idris (d.1916). The Sultan, who recognized Tahir's reputation and expertise in Islamic astronomy, commissioned Tahir to examine all mosques and *suraus* (prayer halls) in the state in order to ensure that they were correctly oriented toward Makkah. It is unclear whether this job was a permanent position within the state religious bureaucracy or not. Whatever the case, Tahir's appointment attested to the fact that his reputation and expertise had been noticed and even gained recognition by the Sultan of Perak.

In 1901, Tahir married a local Malay woman named Aishah Haji Mustafa.⁶⁷ In 1902, Tahir ventured into the textile business in the capital city of the state, but after one year it was forced to close because the business suffered losses. From 1903 to 1905, Tahir spent his time traveling to various parts of the Malay world and the Middle East. His travel took him to various islands in the Malay Archipelago: Java, Bali, Sembawa, and Celebes in 1903.⁶⁸ In August of 1904, Tahir received an opportunity to travel to the Middle East. This opportunity came from the royalty of the Kingdom of Riau that invited Tahir to accompany the members of the family for their admission to an Egyptian school. Tahir, who was very familiar with Cairo, was the right person to carry out this duty. Thus, in the month of August 1904, Tahir along with his reformist colleague al-Hadi accompanied members of the Riau royalty to Cairo. Having completed his duties in Cairo, Tahir remained in the Middle East to perform the pilgrimage and returned to Malaya around September 1905.⁶⁹

Tahir's Years in Singapore

In the subsequent year (1906), Tahir moved to Singapore. Singapore then not only served as a great commercial center, it also acted as metropolis for the whole Malay Archipelago. Indeed, Singapore had functioned as a center of Islamic activities and learning since the late nineteenth century. Snouck Hurgronje notes that students from all over the archipelago, aspiring to pursue their studies in theology or law, went either to Makkah or the Straits Settlements, where they met and sat at the feet of traveling scholars from the Hadhramaut, and from Patani, Aceh, Palembang, and Java –most of whom had themselves studied in Makkah.⁷⁰ Singapore thus stood at the center of communications network that fed a constant stream of revived "orthodox" Muslim thought from Hijaz into the peninsula and archipelago, embodying its rigorous criticism of the syncretism and eclecticism of indigenous religious life. It formed the nucleus of an urban, mercantile community of Muslims.

Singapore as a British Crown colony enjoyed relative freedom of thought in comparison to other Malay states. In the Malay states, the reformists could not freely spread their reformist ideas as the religious establishment controlled by the Malay aristocrats in alliance with the traditional ulama did not tolerate such ideas, which they considered harmful and threatening to the forms of Islam being practiced in Malaya. Thus, Tahir's decision to move to Singapore was a logical move. This phase of Tahir's life was a crucial one in his contributions to Islamic reform in Malaya in particular and Malay-Indonesian world at large because it was in Singapore that the reformists could exercise their reformist ideas and programs more freely.

Along with certain friends, Tahir formed the pilgrimage brokerage in Singapore. Tahir also took the initiative to publish the mouthpiece of Islamic reform. Along with a number of wealthy people and concerned reformists who were willing to work collectively, the reformists published a periodical in the mold of *al-Manâr*.⁷¹ The founding members of the reformist periodical *al-Imam* were Tahir, Sayyid Shaykh al-Hady, Sayyid Muhammad Aqil, Haji Abbas, Sayyid Muhammad Salim and Shaykh Awad. Its first issue was published on 23 July 1906 and registered under Tahir's name.⁷² Tahir, who served as its first chief editor, noted in the editorial that *al-Imam* represented the first Islamic periodical published in the region whose contents encompassed various kinds of knowledge and information.⁷³

While Tahir was in Singapore, an important development in Islamic education took place in 1907 with the establishment of a new kind of Islamic educational institution known as Madrasah Iqbal Islamiyya. Tahir's name is associated with the school. According to Bachtiar the school was established by Raja Haji Ali bin Ahmad and

Tahir.⁷⁴ Another writer, Alwi (al-Hadi's son), asserted that his father was the founder of the school. We do not have clear information concerning the founders of the school and what roles the reformists played in its establishment and administration. Though *al-Imam* printed an article praising the school and describing the general curriculum of the school, it did not mention that those who established the school were associated with *al-Imam*. Thus, Bachtiar's claim that Tahir was one of the founders of the school is probably incorrect, since Tahir's name does not appear either as a founding member, staff or teacher of the school. What is probably true was that Tahir and other reformists were impressed with the vision and curriculum of the school, which was relatively "modern" in contradistinction to the way Islamic learning was traditionally taught in Malaya then. It is unfortunate that apart from sketchy articles that appeared in *al-Imam*, we have no other sources that describe the curriculum and nature of this school.

This school, Madrasah Al-Iqbal, one of the first modern style Islamic schools in Malaya, was established in Singapore on 21 November 1907 under the patronage of Raja Haji Ali. In an opening speech, Abdul Jalil Raja Abdul Rahman, the Riau Prince says that "today is the beginning of the new Hijrah year of 1326; and today also is the opening day of this Islamic school, thus it engulfs two historical events: the beginning of the new year and also the revival of knowledge through a new system of education."⁷⁵

The headmaster in charge of the school was a certain Shaykh Othman Efendi from Egypt and most of its teachers were from Egypt. The Al-Iqbal school differed from the traditional Islamic school in Malaya in that it had a better organized and more comprehensive curriculum. While the traditional religious schools (*pondok*) only offered Islamic subjects *per se*, the al-Iqbal school offered a curriculum covering both Islamic studies and modern learning. Its syllabus as published in the reformist periodical covered the following subjects: the method of Qur'anic recitation, composition, reading and writing, ethics, worship and rituals, Arabic grammar, geography, history, mathematics, town planning, Arabic linguistics, and English.⁷⁶

While the traditional Islamic education provided no proper facilities for its students, the al-Iqbal school provided its students with hostel and free medical facilities. However, the fees for those staying in hostel were quite expensive, \$300 dollar per annum and \$40 dollar for those staying off the school. Third, while in the traditional Islamic schools (*pondoks*) students were not required to sit for an examination, al-Iqbal was more organized and had its own academic calendar. Each academic year was divided into two terms with the first nine months devoted to schooling, the following one month for revision, and the remaining two months of the year were

for school holidays.⁷⁷ In spite of its lofty goal and organized curriculum and organization, the school was forced to close in 1908 due to lack of public support and was subsequently transferred to Riau.

Tahir's Services in Perak and Johore

In the Malay states, which were controlled by the Malay rulers in alliance with the traditional ulama, it was very difficult for the reformist ulama to gain any position in public office. Tahir, whose reputation was recognized even by the traditional ulama, was an exception. He was appointed to public offices in two Malay states: Perak and Johore. As mentioned earlier, Tahir's stature as a scholar was recognized by the ruler of Perak as early as 1900 where he was asked to check the proper direction (*qibla*) of prayer in all mosques in Perak. In his appointment letter, Sultan Idris referred to Tahir as "a learned scholar in Islam and Qiblah [*ilm al-falak*] ...and [I] empower him to go about and examine all mosques and other places of Islamic worship in Perak and correct the Qiblah wherever it is incorrect."⁷⁸ In 1909, Tahir was called to serve as a consultant to the Magistrates' Courts in Taiping and Ipoh to help them in *shari'a*-related cases.⁷⁹

Tahir's service in public office further extended to the Malay state of Johore. Among the Malay states, Johore was one of the first to undertake a program of modernization. Johore's modernization was owed to its ruler, Sultan Abu Bakar, who ruled the state from 1885 to 1895. Having received his education at a missionary school in Singapore, Abu Bakar realized the significance of introducing modern bureaucracy in Johore. Abu Bakar sought British help in advancing Johore's economy, promulgating the modern constitution, and introducing modern infrastructures such as police stations, hospitals, and modern schools. In the realm of the justice system, a dual system of justice, with western as well as the *shari'a* courts, was introduced in Johore. In light of Johore's relative modernization and systematic bureaucracy, it was logical that Tahir's service was sought by the state so that its administration of Islamic law could be strengthened.

In order to consolidate the administration of law in Johore, in July 1909, the Chief Judge of the state of Johore requested Tahir to teach Islamic law to the judges and magistrates of Johore. He is reported to have assumed this position on 11 July 1909. Apparently, the traditional ulama did not object to his appointment because the post solely involved teaching duties and Tahir had no authority to influence the administration of Islam in the state.⁸⁰ In May 1911, Tahir took a three month leave in order to accompany the Sultan Idris of Perak as a religious adviser to attend the coronation of King George

V in London on 22 June 1911. After six years of teaching the judges and magistrates in Johore, Tahir tendered his resignation on 3 July 1912, and returned to his hometown in Perak.

Tahir's tenure as a teacher for the judges in Johore helped to consolidate his reputation as an able Islamic scholar in Johore. Thus, in 1914, Tahir was offered a teaching position at a religious school in Johor Baharu, the capital of Johore. Apart from teaching obligations, he was also appointed the state Inspector of religious schools whose primary duty was to ensure the teaching effectiveness and quality of the curriculum in religious schools in Johore. The posts of the teacher and inspector of schools that Tahir occupied did not give him a powerful religious authority to introduce far-reaching changes in Johore. Thus, HAMKA states that during Tahir's stint in Johore, he attempted to obtain the post of the mufti of the state, but to no avail.⁸¹ Having worked in Johore for four years, Tahir resigned from his post in 1918 to return to his hometown, Kuala Kangsar.

Having stayed and operated in Perak, Singapore, and Johore, Tahir moved to Penang in the second decade of the century. Penang, a British crown colony in northern Malaya, provided some degree of freedom for reformists to express and implement their ideas more freely as it was outside of the control of Malay aristocrats and the traditional ulama. Penang during the early twentieth century was also a conducive environment for the development of more cosmopolitan brand of Islam. This was due to several factors. Penang was then a busy cosmopolitan metropolis that was home to a number of indigenous and migrant communities. The Malay-Muslims in the colony were very much aware of the local and international developments in the Muslim world at the time. The Aceh war in neighboring Sumatra was a major political event that was always a favorite subject for discussion. Other developments abroad such as the collapse of the Caliphate in Turkey and the development of the Caliphate movement in India were also brought to the attention of the Muslims in Penang.

Another important factor, which shaped the worldview of Muslims in Penang was the fact that Georgetown was a port city of considerable importance then. Penang was the final stop for thousands of Malayan and Indonesian Muslims who were traveling to Makkah on the yearly pilgrimage, and the area around Lebu Aceh and Masjid Melayu was known as the "mini Makkah" where pilgrims, religious teachers and traders would congregate.⁸²

Before Tahir arrived in Penang in 1920, al-Hadi, Tahir's reformist colleague, had already migrated there in 1916. Subsequently, al-Hadi was appointed the principal of an Islamic school, Madrasah Masyhor in Penang in 1918. Al-Hadi played a crucial role in enhancing the school academically. During al-Hadi's tenure as its principal, students

registration reached three hundred. Arabic was used as the medium of instruction of the school, and accordingly Arabic textbooks were extensively used. The school offered courses in traditional Islamic learning such as Islamic jurisprudence, Quranic exegesis, and Arabic. The only non-religious subject taught there was English.⁸³ In order to expand the influence of reformist ideas in the school, al-Hadi invited Tahir to teach at the school in 1920. Thus, Tahir spent the next three years in Penang.⁸⁴ During his tenure at the school, Tahir did not hold any administrative position. Rather, he only served as a religious teacher. After the end of the school session in 1923, Tahir quit from the school in order to visit Sumatra.⁸⁵

After being away from Minangkabau for so long, Tahir visited his native land in 1923. The return of this renowned Minangkabau scholar was received warmly by the ulama there.⁸⁶ During his sojourn in Minangkabau, Tahir toured various parts of West Sumatra to deliver speeches promoting the reformist ideas. Unlike his grandfather who collaborated with the Dutch, Tahir demonstrated his dislike of the colonial rule. During his visit to various parts of Minangkabau, he delivered speeches often contained fiery words condemning Dutch colonial rule.⁸⁷ During his stint in Minangkabau, Tahir married a local woman from Pandang Panjang and thus, practiced polygamy. Before returning to Malaya, Tahir stayed in Minangkabau for six months.

Tahir's whereabouts and activities immediately after his return from Minangkabau in 1923 are unclear. It is probable that he spent those years in his main Malayan residence, Kuala Kangsar, Perak. In 1925, Tahir went to Johore to accept a teaching position at a private Islamic school in Muar, Johore, named Madrasah Haji Taib. This school grew out of English and religious schools that were established in 1920. In the subsequent year, the two separate streams of education (religious and English) were shut down and integrated into a common school named Madrasah Haji Taib.⁸⁸ Thus, the schools offered both courses in Islam as well as English language. There were differences of opinion concerning Tahir's role in the school. According to Bachtiar, during his tenure at the school Tahir served as its principal and was responsible for the introduction of the teaching of English at the school. Bachtiar probably exaggerates Tahir's role at the Islamic school, as Sarif, who examines this school thoroughly states that Tahir was only appointed as a religious teacher, and thus, was not responsible for introducing English as a subject in the school, for the subject had already been taught even before Tahir's appointment as a teacher.⁸⁹ While serving as a teacher at this madrasah, Tahir took the initiative to promote the reformist ideas in Alor Gajah, a district in Malacca. This was realized through Tahir's visit to Alor Gajah in 1926 and 1927. During these visits, Tahir interacted with the people

of the district and delivered public speeches encouraging them to adopt reformist ideas.⁹⁰

In 1927, Tahir made another trip to Minangkabau to visit his family and to take his wife back with him. Given Tahir's fiery campaign against the Dutch during his visit in 1923, his second visit was treated with greater caution and suspicion. On his arrival in Bukittinggi, Tahir was immediately arrested and charged with having once been a communist conspirator.⁹¹ The Resident of West Sumatra proposed Tahir be exiled to New Guinea. The arrest created a legal problem, because Tahir was a protected British subject. Moreover, this arrest offended the majority of Minangkabau ulama because Tahir was held in high esteem there. During the eighteenth Muhammadiyah Annual Congress in Solo, the ulama voiced their anger against Tahir's arrest. A participant at the congress by the name of Tuan Anis spoke to the audience and expressed his anger at the arrest of a respected scholar of Tahir's stature, who was wrongfully accused as being a communist conspirator.⁹² As a result of the legal complexity and the strong protest from the Minangkabau ulama, the charges against Tahir were dropped due to lack of evidence and he was released on August 22, three days after the Muhammadiyah congress in Solo.⁹³

Tahir left West Sumatra immediately and returned to Malaya and resumed his teaching career at the Madrasah Parit Jamil, Johore, a position which he held until early 1930 before returning to his home in Perak.⁹⁴ After serving as a teacher in Johore, Tahir did not take up any appointment either as a teacher or religious official anymore. Instead, he devoted his time to writing, promoting his reformist ideas and defending the purity of Islamic creeds against various forms of deviant sects. One such sect was the *Ahmadiyah* movement, which influenced a small number of Western-educated Malays. As a strong defender of the faith of *Ahl al-Sunna wa al-Jama'a*, Tahir became the most vocal opponent of this religious sect. This led to the publication of his work entitled *Perisai Orang Beriman Menentang Madhhab Qadiani* (The Shield of the Believers against The Qadiani) in 1932. In addition to this polemical work, Tahir also produced several other works during this period.⁹⁵ Among those were *Natijat al-Ummi li ma'rifat al-awqât al-khamsa* (The work of the Illiterate Man in Determining the Times of Five Daily Prayers), *Jadâwil al-Lughârithmât* (Mathematical Tables) and *Pati Kiraan pada Menentukan Waktu yang Lima dan hal Qiblat dengan Logaritma* (The essence of calculation for five prayers and the direction of prayer through logarithm).

In addition to producing religious works, in his capacity as an experienced reformist and reputable Islamic scholar, Tahir continued to provide guidance and advice to Muslims in Malaya. As reported by Bachtiar, numerous ulama and leaders often frequented Tahir's

home in Kuala Kangsar, Perak seeking his advice and opinion on various issues ranging from religion to politics.⁹⁶ Indeed, Tahir's stature as an *'alim* not only attracted Muslims in Malaya but also encouraged reformist leaders in Sumatra to seek his advice. A case in point was a Muhammadiyah leader in Sumatra, Yunos Abdul Hamid, who contacted Tahir soliciting his advice concerning the development and improvement of Muhammadiyah schools in Medan, Sumatra.⁹⁷ Tahir did not go to Medan personally, rather he provided advice and suggestions to Yunos through correspondences.

In 1934, Tahir assumed the editorship of a reformist periodical, *al-Ikhwān*. *Al-Ikhwān*, a successor of *al-Imam*, was founded by his colleague, al-Hadi in 1928. Tahir's appointment as its editor was made due to the death of al-Hadi in February 1934. Despite Tahir's solid credentials in Islamic learning, he was not a good writer in Malay. During his short tenure as an editor the circulation of *al-Ikhwān* declined rapidly. This was primarily due to Tahir's writing style, which made the paper less interesting to the Malay reading public. His style was strongly influenced by Arabic grammar and vocabulary, which could not be easily understood by those without knowledge of Arabic. Subsequently, Tahir relinquished the post of editor to Syed Alwi in September 1934.⁹⁸

Tahir was also involved in religious polemics against Haji Bakar, a former *Mufti* of Johore concerning the issue of the supererogatory prayer before the Friday prayer. As a result of this conflict, Tahir published a book to refute Haji Bakar's opinion entitled *Ini Huraian Yang Membakar: Taman Persuratan Haji Bakar* [The Burning Proof: (Refuting) the Book of Haji Bakar]. This book was printed by a publisher in Cairo in 1953, during Tahir's visit to the Middle East.⁹⁹ Tahir's other major work was *Risalah Penebasan Bid'ah*, published to refute the opinion of the traditional ulama on *khilâfiyyat* (minor) matters. After devoting his life to the cause of Islamic reform, Tahir died in Kuala Kangsar, Perak in 1956.

Conclusion

Tahir was born in Bukittinggi, West Sumatra in a family of outstanding religious reputation and respected for their crucial role in the Padri movement, the position which consolidated Tahir's religious credentials and authority in the eyes of the Minangkabau people. Tahir experienced a difficult childhood when he lost his father at the age of two and six years later he lost his mother as well. Tahir went to Makkah at the age of twelve to study in with his older cousin, Ahmad al-Khatib there. Moreover, Tahir pursued Islamic learning at the famous al-Azhar University in 1893. After completing his studies

in Cairo, he returned to Makkah and taught Malay-Indonesian students there before eventually making a permanent return to the Malay world in 1899

Tahir made profound contributions to the development of Islamic reform in Malaya and West Sumatra. Indeed, he is considered as the first exponent of the *salâfiyya* ideas to the region. Armed with his experience in Cairo, familiarity with Rida's works, and even friendship with the editor of *al-Manâr*, Tahir played a pioneering role in the publication of *al-Imam*, and served as its first founding editor to promote reformist ideas.

Tahir also became the foremost spokesperson for the Malayan reformists in their confrontation against the traditional Muslim scholars. Although the reformists possessed many other eloquent and effective writers in their fold such as al-Hadi, Tahir possessed something that many other reformists lacked, namely, his solid credentials in Islamic learning as a graduate of the famous al-Azhar University and the Islamic learning centers in Makkah. Despite disagreement with Tahir's ideas, the traditionalists still had to take the reformist ideas seriously as they did not just come from any ordinary Muslim, but from a scholar of reputable stature. Tahir's role in the purification of Islam was not limited to his confrontation against the traditional Islam; he also acted as the defender of the faith of *Ahl al-Sunna wa-al-Jamâ'a* in denouncing the doctrines posing a threat to it.

Indeed, Tahir stands as the most eminent reformist Muslim scholar of his generation. One principle underlying his religious reform was his insistence on adherence to the pristine teachings of Islam. In order to promote the "pristine" Islam, he wrote and engaged in debates against the traditional *ulama* who he believed were promoting Islamic ritual laws, some of which deviated from the principles of the *Qur'an* and the *Sunna*. Although the *salafi*-form of Islamic law (non-adherence to the *Shafi'i madhhab*), which Tahir promoted was not accepted and even condemned by the traditional *ulama*, his expertise in other areas of Islam such as Islamic faith and especially Islamic astronomy was universally recognized by Muslims in Malaya. In light of his immense contribution to the field of astronomy, he is regarded as the father of Islamic astronomy in Malaya. In appreciation of his immense contribution to the field, the observatory center that was officially launched in Penang, in 1991, was named *Shaykh Tahir's Astronomy Center*.

Throughout his residency in Malaya, Tahir attempted to promote Islamic reform from within as well as outside of the system. During the early phase of his life in Malaya he participated in Islamic bureaucracy serving as *Qiblat inspector* in Perak, an advisor to the *Magistrate* in Taiping and accompanying the Sultan to London as a

religious advisor. Apart from serving in Islamic civil bureaucracy in Perak, he also served in Johore teaching Islamic law to judges and magistrates in the state and serving as a supervisor of the Islamic schools in Johore. However, these positions were minor ones, and did not enable him to promote his reformist ideas more effectively. Despite Tahir's solid credentials as an Islamic scholar with *al-'alimiyya* degree from al-Azhar, the high public offices in Islamic bureaucracy such as Qâdî (Islamic Judge) and Muftî (the highest religious official at the state level who could issue a religious ruling) remained inaccessible to him. It is obvious that Tahir was well qualified for these high posts, but, he was denied these positions due to his adherence to reformist ideas that were considered a threat to the religious establishment. Consequently, it constricted Tahir's role in bringing about wider and far-reaching change in the Malay society.

Notes

- ¹ Abdul Mukhti Ali, *Alam Fikiran Modern di Indonesia*, Jogjakarta: Yayasan Nida, 1971, p. 9.
- ² Without delving into further details of the terminology debates, I will be referring to 'Abduh-led intellectual trends as the *salafiyya*. Technically, the word *salafiyya* is derived from its Arabic root, *salafa*, which means to precede. In Arabic lexicon, the noun *salaf* refers to the virtuous forefathers, and the *salafi* is a person who relies on the Qur'an and *sunna* as the sole sources of religious rulings. While most Muslim scholars agree that the first three generations of Muslims are *salaf+s*, the issue of who is considered a member of the *salaf* after those earlier generations remains contested. 'Abduh's stream of thinking is designated as the *salafiyya* because it has become known so. Furthermore, it called for a return to the practices of the pious ancestors (*al-salaf al-sâlih*). For further details, see *Oxford Encyclopedia of the Modern Islamic World*, s.v. "Salafiyya".
- ³ HAMKA, *Pengaruh Abduh di Indonesia*, Jakarta: Tintamas, 1961, pp. 16-17.
- ⁴ William R. Roff, *The Origins of Malay Nationalism*, New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1967, p. 60.
- ⁵ Although Tahir's Personal Papers are deposited at the National Archives, there is no detailed manuscript about his life. Consequently, we do not have a complete biographical data of Tahir. For example, Tahir's personal papers provide us very sketchy information about his activities in Penang from 1920-1923. Similarly, there is very little information about his activities in Johore and Malacca after returning from Minangkabau in 1927. To complicate the matter, secondary sources also throw very little light on these subjects. Consequently, we face a serious impediment in our reconstruction of Tahir's biography. According to William Roff, Tahir did have a longer manuscript/memoir that he intended to publish. This manuscript was submitted to a printer shortly before his death, but was subsequently lost. The only known published contemporary account about Tahir's biography is a short autobiographical article, which appeared in the Malay magazine *Al-Taqwi*, I Taiping, October 1947, pp. 6-8. This article was condensed from a much longer manuscript that was lost. William R. Roff, *The Origins*, p. 60. Tahir's ideas and works have purposely been left out of this article as it has been discussed elsewhere. For further details, see Hafiz Zakariya, "Islamic Reform in Malaya: The Contribution of Shaykh Tahir Jalaluddin," *Intellectual Discourse*, Vol. 13 No. 1 2005, pp. 49-72.
- ⁶ M. Tahir Jalaluddin, "Tahir's Notes on His Life," MS, Tahir's Personal Papers, National Archives, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia (listed as SP 10/199).
- ⁷ HAMKA, *Ayahku: Riwayat Hidup Dr. Haji Abdul Karim Amrullah dan Perjuangan Kaum Agama di Sumatra*, 4th ed., Jakarta: Umminda, 1982, p. 26.

- ⁸ Fakih Saghir, *Surat Keterangan Syekh Jalaluddin*. Translated and edited by Kratz, E. Ulrich and Adriyetti, Amir. Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, 2002, 22; Azra, "The Surau and The Early Reform Movements in Minangkabau," *Mizan: Indonesian Forum for Islamic and Social Studies* 3 1990, p. 71. Furthermore, while the Ulakan *surau* followed *Shattriyya* sufi order, the Cangking *surau* followed *Naqshbandiyya* order.
- ⁹ HAMKA, *Ayahku*, p. 274.
- ¹⁰ Christine Dobbin, *Islamic Revivalism in a Changing Peasant Economy: Central Sumatra, 1784-1847*, London: Curzon Press, 1983, p. 122; HAMKA, *Ayahku*, p. 274
- ¹¹ HAMKA, *Ayahku*, p.14.
- ¹² This religious title was normally given to a person who distinguished himself as the most prominent scholar in Minangkabau.
- ¹³ Fakih Saghir, *Surat Keterangan*, p. 27; Azra, "Surau and the Early Reform," p. 71.
- ¹⁴ Fakih Saghir, *Surat Keterangan*, p. 23.
- ¹⁵ Christine Dobbin, *Islamic Revivalism*, p. 125.
- ¹⁶ Azyumardi Azra, "Surau and the Early Reform," p. 72.
- ¹⁷ Akhria Nazwar, *Syekh Ahmad Khatib: Ilmuan Islam di Permulaan Abad Ini*, Jakarta: Panjimas, 1983, p. 5.
- ¹⁸ More information on Shaykh Ahmad will be provided below.
- ¹⁹ Agus Salim was also born in Bukittinggi and played a leading role in the reformist movement in Indonesia. Intriguingly, Agus Salim, Ahmad and Tahir who were related by blood and figured prominently in the reforming the Malay-Indonesian society primarily operated in the *alam rantau*, the areas outside of Minangkabau : Shaykh Ahmad al-Khatib in Makkah; Shaykh Tahir in Malaya; and Agus Salim mainly in Java. While both Ahmad al-Khatib's and Tahir's contributions primarily contributed to the social and religious reform through writing and teaching, Agus Salim was involved in Indonesian national politics and even became its Foreign Minister for some time. For more information on Haji Agus Salim, see especially *Seratus Tahun Haji Agus Salim*, ed., Committee of 100 Years Commemoration of Agus Salim, Jakarta: Sinar Harapan, 1996.
- ²⁰ Tahir's personal papers do not provide us much information about his early years in Minangkabau. Thus, in constructing Tahir's early years, I am primarily relying on the work of Bachtiar Djamily. Bachtiar formed a close relationship with Tahir during the later part of the reformer's life. Furthermore, as a Malaysian of Minangkabau origin, Bachtiar had intimate knowledge of the intricacies of Minangkabau customs and practices.
- ²¹ Limbak Urai was Shaykh Ahmad al-Khatib's mother, and the younger sister of Tahir's mother.
- ²² Bachtiar Djamily, *Riwayat Hidup dan Perjuangan Syekh Tahir Jalaluddin Al-Falaqi Al-Azhari*, Kuala Lumpur: Asmah Publisher, 1994, p. 18.

- ²³ The duration of study of school is three years. Azyumardi Azra, *Pendidikan Islam: Tradisi dan Modernisasi Menuju Milenium Baru*, Jakarta: Mizan, 1999, p. 97
- ²⁴ Bachtiar Djamily, *Riwayat Hidup*, p. 22.
- ²⁵ There are conflicting accounts concerning Ahmad's date of birth. According to HAMKA, Ahmad was born on 26 May 1860. Deliar Noer, on the other hand, suggested that Ahmad was born in 1855. While Noer does not provide his information source, HAMKA has noted that much of his information about Ahmad is based on his conversation with Ahmad's contemporaries, most notably, his own father, Haji Rasul who studied with Ahmad during the early years of the twentieth century. HAMKA, *Ayahku*, pp. 271-274; Deliar Noer, *The Modernist Muslim Movement in Indonesia, 1900-1942*, Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press, 1972, pp. 31-33.
- ²⁶ It is said that Salih became acquainted with Ahmad through the latter's frequent visit to the former's bookstore in Makkah. Furthermore, Salih received a positive account about Ahmad from Sayyid Zayn al-Dakhlan, Ahmad's teacher. Akhria Nazwar, *Ahmad Khatib*, p. 27. Ahmad's son, Abdul Hamid, provides a more detailed account of his father's encounter with the palace. Hamid states that Ahmad along with his father-in-law attended breakfast occasions at the palace on the invitation of the Sharif. After having breaking their fast, the Sharif and the invited guests performed a congregational prayer in which Ahmad corrected the error in Quranic recitation that the Imam made during the prayer. According to Hamid's sentimental account, this incident led the Sharif and ulama to have a positive impression of Ahmad, which eventually led to his appointment as the Imam. HAMKA, *Ayahku*, p. 231.
- ²⁷ HAMKA, *Ayahku*, p. 193.
- ²⁸ William R. Roff, *The Origins*, p. 60.
- ²⁹ Hadji Agus Salim, Shaykh Ahmad's cousin and a prominent leader of Muhammadiyah movement, during his seminar at Cornell University on 4 March, 1953 states that Sheikh Ahmad was a very outspoken opponent of Dutch colonial authority. Deliar Noer, *Modernist Muslim Movement*, p. 31.
- ³⁰ C. Snouck Hurgronje, *Adviezen 's-Gravenhage* vol. 1, Amsterdam: Martinus Nijhoff, 1959, p. 717, cited in Karel Steenbrink, *Beberapa Aspek tentang Islam di Indonesia Abad ke-19*, Jakarta: Bulan Bintang, 1984, p.140
- ³¹ Ibid.
- ³² Ibid., p.141.
- ³³ For example, Roff, HAMKA, Sarim, and Noer only mentioned that one of Tahir's major teachers in Makkah was Shaykh Ahmad Khatib. However, apart from that passing reference, none of the writers offers further information on the subject. The lack of information about Tahir's learning experiences in Makkah is probably due to the fact that whatever little information we have about the subject is contained in the fragments of

Tahir's personal papers that are not well organized. In order to obtain such tiny information such as the name of his teachers, one has to sift through thousands of Tahir's personal papers in the National Archives, Malaysia.

- ³⁴ Tahir went to Makkah ca.1881 and remained there for six years before returning to West Sumatra in 1886 for a short visit.
- ³⁵ C. Snouck Hurgronje, *Mekka in the Later Part of the 19th century: Daily life Customs and Learning of the Moslims of the East-Indian-Archipelago*, trans., J.H. Monahan, 1970 ed., Leiden: E.J.Brill, 1888, pp.181-182.
- ³⁶ Ibid., p. 187.
- ³⁷ Ibid., p. 265.
- ³⁸ Ibid.
- ³⁹ Ibid., p. 187.
- ⁴⁰ Ibid., pp. 186-188.
- ⁴¹ In Malaya, this method is known as *menadah kitab*, which literally means opening the book.
- ⁴² M.Tahir Jalaluddin, "Tahir's Notes," AMs, Tahir's Personal Paper, National Archives, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.
- ⁴³ C. Snouck Hurgronje, *Mekka in the Later Part*, p. 173.
- ⁴⁴ Azyumardi Azra, *Pendidikan Islam*, pp. 154-155. We do not have the exact figures of students at this madrasa at this time. Based on 1912 figures, Malay Indonesians constituted 178 out of the total 537 students at this madrasa. The fact that Shaykh Rahmatullah was a hanafi did not prevent Malay students to study at his madrasa. This was probably because Malays did not find it objectionable to study Qur'an and *tajwid* with scholars outside of their *madhhab* as opposed to studying Islamic positive law.
- ⁴⁵ Akhria Nazwar, *Ahmad Khatib*, p. 23.
- ⁴⁶ C. Snouck Hurgronje, *Mekka in the Later Part*, p. 185.
- ⁴⁷ Ibid., p. 188.
- ⁴⁸ Ibid.
- ⁴⁹ Bachtiar Jamily, *Riwayat Hidup*, p. 23. This description is consistent with Snouck Hurgronje's account, which points out that it was customary for non-Arab students to study with teachers from their own countries before they could fully understand Arabic. C. Snouck Hurgronje, *Mekka*, p.187.
- ⁵⁰ M.Tahir Jalaluddin, "Travel Itineraries," AMs, Tahir's Personal Paper, National Archives, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia (listed as SP.10/26)
- ⁵¹ Ibid.
- ⁵² Ibid.
- ⁵³ M.Tahir Jalaluddin, "Travel Itineraries," AMs, Tahir's Personal Paper, National Archives, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia (listed as SP.10/26). Therefore, in constructing Tahir's experience in Cairo I am also relying on secondary sources such as the testimonies of Tahir's disciples and

scholarly works on Islamic learning at al-Azhar University during the later part of the nineteenth to the early twentieth century.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Charles C. Adams, *Islam and Modernism in Egypt: A Study of the Modern Reform Movement Inaugurated by Muhammad 'Abduh*, New York: Russell & Russell, 1968, p.28.

⁵⁶ Ibid., p.27.

⁵⁷ Ibid., p.29.

⁵⁸ Anonymous, "Untitled Article," *al-Imam*, 1 (7 November, 1906): p.160.

⁵⁹ This information is based on oral confirmation that Tahir made to his disciple, Abu Bakar Hamzah in 1955. See Abu Bakar Hamzah, *Al-Imam and Its Role in Malay Society 1906-1908*, Kuala Lumpur: Antara Press, 1991, p. 221. However, HAMKA is less certain whether Tahir became 'Abduh's student or otherwise when he says: "However, I cannot establish with certainty whether Tahir who was still young then (during his years at al-Azhar), had become a student of 'Abduh." HAMKA, *Pengaruh Abduh*, p. 16.

⁶⁰ Bachtiar Djamily, *Riwayat Hidup*, p. 28.

⁶¹ M.Tahir Jalaluddin, *Kitab Ta'y+d Mutabbi' al-Sunna fi al-radd 'ala al-Q+l bi-al-sunniya al-rak'ata+n qabla al-Jum'at*, Penang, Malaysia: n.p., 1953, pp.58-59. In addition, while conducting archival research at the National Archives in Kuala Lumpur, I have also located three letters that Tahir wrote to Rida, and a reply that Rida wrote to the former. See for examples, M. Rashid Rida, "Letter to Tahir, n.d." SL, Tahir Personal Papers, National Archives, Kuala Lumpur (listed as SP10/E.758); M.Tahir Jalaluddin, "Letter to Rida n.d." SL, (listed as SP 10/E.758). These correspondences do not contain any important intellectual exchanges between the two other than the issue of the late arrival of *al-Manar* periodical, and other reformist writings. Despite this, these documents did support the contention that Tahir established direct contact with Rida.

⁶² According to Hourani, Rida left Syria for Egypt in 1897. Albert Hourani, *Arabic Thought in the Liberal Age 1789-1939*, New York; London: Oxford University Press, 1962; repr., New York; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997, p. 226.

⁶³ Tahir's personal note only alludes to the fact that in 1899 he returned to the Malay world without referring to any specific place in the region. Thus, it remains unclear whether he returned to his homeland, Minangkabau at all in 1899. M.Tahir Jalaluddin, "Travel Itineraries".

⁶⁴ William R. Roff, *The Origins*, p. 37.

⁶⁵ As a matter of fact until now, the Malays in Malaysia and the Malay related inhabitants of Sumatra share many cultural commonalties despite their political fragmentation.

⁶⁶ Deliar Noer, *Modernist Muslim Movement*, p. 26.

- ⁶⁷ Prior to this marriage Tahir married and divorced several times. In contrast to his earlier marriages, this one lasted till his death in October 1956. William R. Roff, *The Origins*, p. 61.
- ⁶⁸ M.Tahir Jalaluddin, "Travel Itineraries," MS, Tahir's Personal Paper, National Archives, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia (listed as SP.10/26)
- ⁶⁹ Ibid.
- ⁷⁰ William R. Roff, *The Origins*, p.125.
- ⁷¹ Abu Bakar Hamzah, *Al-Imam and Its Role*, p. 122.
- ⁷² *Al-Imam*, 1 (23 July 1906), p.1
- ⁷³ Abu Bakar Hamzah, *Al-Imam and Its Role*, p. 107. After serving as the chief editor for about seven months, he was relieved from the post in March 1908 and was succeeded by Abbas Muhammad Taha.
- ⁷⁴ Bachtiar Djamily, *Riwayat Hidup*, p. 42.
- ⁷⁵ Anonymous, "Untitled Article," *Al-Imam*, 9 (4th April 1908), p. 264.
- ⁷⁶ Ibid., 8 (5th March, 1908), p. 244.
- ⁷⁷ Ibid., 299.
- ⁷⁸ Sultan Idris, "Appointment Letter of Qiblat Inspector, 3 October 1900" LS, Tahir's Personal Papers, National Archives, Kuala Lumpur (listed as SP 10/1484).
- ⁷⁹ M.Tahir Jalaluddin, "Travel Itineraries". However, the exact date of Tahir's appointment and his tenure in office are unknown.
- ⁸⁰ Abu Bakar Hamzah, *Al-Imam and Its Role*, p.123.
- ⁸¹ This information is provided by ZA'BA (an acronym for Zainal Abidin Haji Ahmad) in an interview with William Roff in November, 1960. William R. Roff, *The Origins*, p. 75.
- ⁸² Mujahid Yusuf Rawa, *Permata Dari Pulau Mutiara*, Shah Alam: Warathah Yusof Rawa Sdn Bhd, 2001, p. 7.
- ⁸³ Ibrahim Abu Bakar, *Islamic Modernism in Malaya: The Life and Thought of Sayid Syekh al-Hadi 1867-1934*, Kuala Lumpur: University of Malaya Press, 1994, p. 71.
- ⁸⁴ The details of Tahir's activities in Penang and contribution to the school are unknown.
- ⁸⁵ M.Tahir Jalaluddin, "Travel Itineraries."
- ⁸⁶ HAMKA, *Ayahku*, p. 275.
- ⁸⁷ Ibid.
- ⁸⁸ Saman Sharif, "Madrasah Haji Taib," *Islam di Malaysia*, ed., Khoo Kay Kim, Kuala Lumpur: Persatuan Sejarah Malaysia, 1979, pp.87-88; Haji Ja'afar Taib (The School's Principal), "Letter to Tahir, dated 31 January 1928" LS, Tahir's Personal Papers, National Archives, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia (listed as SP 10/B.38).
- ⁸⁹ Ibid., pp. 89-91.
- ⁹⁰ Aziz Mat Ton, "Kaum Muda di Melaka," *Jernal Sejarah*, 12 1973/1974, pp. 38-39. Again, Tahir's papers do not inform us the details of his activities in Malacca and even the cited secondary source tells us very little about these.

- ⁹¹ Taufik Abdullah, *School and Politics: The Kaum Muda Movement in West Sumatra 1927-1933*, Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Southeast Asia Program, 1971, p. 121.
- ⁹² HAMKA, *Islam dan Adat Minangkabau*, 2nd ed., Jakarta: Pustaka Panjimas, 1985, p.127.
- ⁹³ Anon. "Minangkabau Newspaper Cuttings on Tahir's Arrest," (details are unknown), Tahir's Personal Papers, National Archives, Kuala Lumpur (Listed as SP.10/F.1106).
- ⁹⁴ M.Tahir Jalaluddin, "Travel Itineraries."
- ⁹⁵ For further details on Tahir's major works and ideas, see Hafiz Zakariya, "Islamic Reform in Malaya," pp. 49-72.
- ⁹⁶ Bachtiar Djamily, *Riwayat Hidup*, p. 60.
- ⁹⁷ Yunos Abdul Hamid, "Yunos' Letter to Tahir 1 October 1932," Tahir's Papers, National Archives, Kuala Lumpur (listed as SP.10/B.78)
- ⁹⁸ Nik Ahmad Haji Hassan, "The Malay Press," *Journal of Malayan Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society*, Vol. 36 1963, pp. 54-55.
- ⁹⁹ The Arabic version of this book was also printed entitled *Kitâb Ta'yîd Mutabbi' al-Sunna fi al-radd 'ala al-Qâil bil-sunniya al-rak'ata+n qabla al-Jum'at* (The book Supporting the follower of the sunna in refuting those arguing for the authenticity of the Supererogatory Prayer before the Friday Prayer).