



## The Contribution of Wahhabis to the Independence of the Republic of Indonesia

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### Abstract

*This study examines the role of the Wahhabi-inspired Islamic reform movement in resisting colonialism and contributing to the Indonesian independence movement, particularly in Minangkabau, West Sumatra. The research aims to analyze the forms of struggle carried out by reformist Islamic groups from the Padri movement in the nineteenth century to the emergence of modern Islamic educational and political organizations in the early twentieth century. This study employs a qualitative historical research method using a library research approach. Data were collected from books, journals, historical documents, archives, newspapers, and other relevant literature, and analyzed through historical, political, sociological, and theological approaches. The findings show that the movement initially emerged as a religious purification movement emphasizing the return to Islamic teachings based on the Qur'an and Sunnah while opposing practices considered inconsistent with Islam. However, Dutch colonial intervention transformed the movement into broader anti-colonial resistance. The Padri movement under the leadership of Tuanku Imam Bonjol became an important symbol of armed resistance against Dutch expansion in West Sumatra. After the military defeat of the Padri movement, reformist ideas continued through educational, intellectual, and political movements led by figures such as Sheikh Ahmad Khatib al-Minangkabawi and Sheikh Taher Jalaluddin al-Azhari. Organizations and institutions such as Sumatra Thawalib, PMI, and PERMI played significant roles in strengthening Islamic consciousness, educational reform, and nationalist awareness among Indonesian Muslims. The study concludes that the Wahhabi-inspired reform movement contributed significantly to Indonesia's independence through military, educational, intellectual, social, and political transformation.*

## Introduction

Indonesia's independence was achieved through the collective struggle of people from diverse ethnic, cultural, and religious backgrounds. Rather than weakening national unity, this diversity became a powerful force in resisting colonialism and oppression (Damanhuri & Anshori, 2025). Among the many groups that contributed to the anti-colonial struggle, Muslims played a particularly significant role because Islam was embraced by the majority of the Indonesian population. Islamic scholars (ulama), students of Islamic boarding schools (santri), and Muslim community leaders actively participated in social, educational, cultural, and military resistance movements. Ahmad (2023) argues that the history of Indonesian independence cannot be

separated from the contributions of ulama and santri, who became important driving forces behind resistance movements throughout the archipelago. The involvement of Muslims in anti-colonial resistance can be observed in numerous regional wars during the Dutch colonial period. One of the most prominent examples was the Java War (1825–1830) led by Prince Diponegoro. This conflict represented not only political resistance against Dutch intervention but also religious and cultural opposition to colonial domination (National Team for Writing Indonesian History, 2010). By mobilizing Islamic values and local support, Diponegoro transformed the conflict into one of the largest anti-colonial uprisings in Indonesian history. Although the Dutch ultimately defeated him in 1830, the war demonstrated the close relationship between Islam and resistance movements in Indonesia (Muzakki, 2022; Hak, 2023; Hidayatullah, 2026).

Another major example was the Aceh War, which lasted from 1873 until the early twentieth century. Acehese leaders such as Sultan Alauddin Muhammad Daud Syah, Teuku Umar, and Teuku Cik di Tiro organized determined resistance against Dutch military aggression (National Team for Writing Indonesian History, 2010). For many Acehese Muslims, the war was not merely a political struggle but also a religious obligation to defend their homeland and Islamic identity. Mosques, pesantren, and other Islamic institutions functioned as centers of mobilization and resistance. This experience illustrates how Islamic identity became an important source of solidarity and motivation in confronting colonial domination (Rahman, 2022; Salim et al., 2025; Airlangga et al., 2025; Basyir, 2025).

Islamic resistance also emerged in other regions of Indonesia. In North Sumatra, Sisingamangaraja XII resisted Dutch expansion in the Batak region, while in Lampung local Muslim leaders opposed colonial interference and organized anti-colonial movements (Sebastian & Alkaff, 2024; Ramadhan, 2024). These examples demonstrate that anti-colonial resistance was widespread and involved Muslim communities across the archipelago. Collectively, these struggles contributed significantly to the growth of Indonesian nationalism and the eventual achievement of independence.

Despite extensive discussions of Islamic resistance in Indonesian historiography, most studies examine Muslim participation in broad terms without focusing on the role of specific Islamic movements. In reality, Indonesian Islam consisted of diverse organizations and reformist currents, including Nahdlatul Ulama, Muhammadiyah, modernist groups, and Wahhabism. Each movement possessed distinct religious orientations, strategies, and methods in responding to colonialism and social change. However, compared to other Islamic organizations, the contribution of the Wahhabi movement to Indonesian resistance history has received relatively limited scholarly attention (Abdullah & Shodiq, 2024; Malik, 2024; Hidayah et al., 2024; Amri, 2025). Therefore, examining the role of Wahhabi-inspired reform movements is important for understanding the diversity of Islamic contributions to Indonesia's struggle for independence.

The Wahhabi movement entered Indonesia in the early nineteenth century through returning pilgrims from the Arabian Peninsula. Historical records indicate that figures such as Haji Miskin, Haji Piobang, and Haji Sumanik introduced reformist ideas influenced by Wahhabism to Minangkabau, West Sumatra, around 1803 (Hasyim, 2022; Saprina & Rahmi, 2024). These ideas emphasized the purification of Islamic teachings, the rejection of practices considered inconsistent with the Qur'an and Sunnah, and the implementation of a stricter Islamic lifestyle. Over time, these reformist ideas became closely associated with the Padri movement, which sought both religious reform and broader social transformation within Minangkabau society (Amril & Ramananda, 2023; Ilham & Syauqi, 2025; Razi et al., 2025; Valentina & Putera, 2025).

Initially, the Padri movement generated conflict with traditional adat leaders because reformist Muslims criticized local customs that they considered incompatible with Islamic teachings. However, the arrival of Dutch colonial intervention transformed this internal conflict into a broader anti-colonial struggle (van Gaalen & Braake, 2025; Bosma, 2025; Oostindie, 2025). When Dutch forces entered Minangkabau in the early nineteenth century, Padri leaders strongly opposed colonial expansion. In 1821, Dutch troops attacked several reformist strongholds, including Simawang, Sulit Air, and Pagaruyung, triggering fierce battles between colonial forces and local Muslim fighters (National Team for Writing Indonesian History, 2010).

The Padri resistance became one of the earliest large-scale Islamic resistance movements against Dutch colonialism. Leaders such as Tuanku Imam Bonjol, Tuanku Tambusai, and Tuanku Rao organized military resistance by combining religious motivation with local social networks to mobilize support (Amril & Ramananda, 2023; Zakaria, 2023). Among them, Tuanku Imam Bonjol emerged as the most prominent figure and was later recognized as a national hero for his persistence in resisting Dutch forces. Although the Dutch eventually captured Imam Bonjol in 1837 and suppressed the Padri movement, the struggle left a lasting legacy of Islamic resistance and anti-colonial consciousness in Indonesian history (Hasyim, 2022; Aljunied, 2024; Sebastian & Alkaff, 2024).

The influence of reformist Islamic ideas continued even after the military defeat of the Padri movement. During the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, reformist leaders such as Sheikh Ahmad Khatib al-Minangkabawi and Sheikh Taher Jalaluddin promoted religious renewal, criticized colonial domination, and encouraged Muslim awakening through education and publications (Aljunied, 2025). Educational institutions such as Sumatra Thawalib became important centers for disseminating reformist ideas and fostering anti-colonial awareness among Indonesian Muslims. The transformation of traditional surau into modern Islamic schools in Padang Panjang, Bukittinggi, Payakumbuh, and other regions reflected efforts to strengthen Muslim society intellectually and socially (Mirdad & Admizal, 2024; Rama, 2025; Ilham & Syauqi, 2025).

This educational reform movement subsequently influenced the emergence of political organizations such as PERMI, which combined Islamic reformism with nationalist aspirations against Dutch colonial rule (Yamaguchi, 2024; Mokodenseho et al., 2024; Isfayanti, 2025). Through political education, publications, and organizational activities, reformist Muslims contributed to the development of anti-colonial consciousness and nationalist sentiment among Indonesian society.

During the Japanese occupation from 1942 to 1945, reformist Muslim groups also played an important role in defending society and preparing for independence. Although Japan initially sought Muslim support by presenting itself as a liberator from Western colonialism, its exploitative and oppressive policies eventually generated widespread disappointment among Indonesian Muslims (Tim Nasional Penulisan Sejarah Indonesia, 2010). Reformist Islamic leaders responded by strengthening educational, social, and organizational activities that nurtured nationalist consciousness. Many former reformist activists later became involved in preparations for independence and contributed directly to the broader struggle leading to Indonesian independence in 1945 (Demir & Barton, 2023; Poeze & Schulte Nordholt, 2024; Kawamura, 2026).

Based on these historical developments, the contribution of Wahhabi-inspired reform movements to Indonesian independence deserves closer scholarly examination. Their role extended beyond military resistance and encompassed educational reform, religious purification, intellectual activism, and political mobilization that shaped anti-colonial consciousness among Indonesian Muslims. Therefore, this study aims to examine the

contribution of the Wahhabi-inspired reform movement to anti-colonial resistance and the Indonesian independence movement, thereby providing a more comprehensive understanding of the diversity of Islamic movements involved in the formation of Indonesian nationalism.

## **Method**

### **Research Design**

This study employs a qualitative research design using a historical library research method to examine the contribution of the Wahhabi-inspired reform movement to anti-colonial resistance and Indonesian independence. A qualitative historical approach was selected because the research focuses on historical events, religious movements, ideological developments, and socio-political dynamics that cannot be adequately measured through quantitative methods. The study emphasizes historical interpretation, reconstruction, and contextual analysis of written sources related to the development of Wahhabi-inspired reform movements in Indonesia from the early nineteenth century until the achievement of independence in 1945.

Through library research, the study systematically examines historical evidence, scholarly discussions, and documentary records to understand the role of reformist Islamic movements in resisting colonial domination. The research focuses particularly on the development of reformist movements in Minangkabau, West Sumatra, their transformation into broader Islamic reform initiatives, and their contribution to educational, political, and social resistance against Dutch and Japanese colonial rule. Rather than merely presenting historical events chronologically, this study analyzes the ideological, political, and social dimensions that shaped these movements and their influence on the emergence of Indonesian nationalism.

### **Research Sources and Data Collection**

The data used in this study consist of both primary and secondary sources related to Islamic reformism, anti-colonial resistance, and the historical development of Wahhabi-inspired movements in Indonesia.

Primary sources include historical documents, colonial records, political agreements, religious writings, manuscripts, newspapers, organizational archives, and historical texts concerning the Padri movement, Sumatra Thawalib, PERMI, and prominent reformist Islamic figures. Important materials examined in this study include *Padri War in West Sumatra 1803–1838* by M. Radjab, Dutch colonial records concerning military operations in Minangkabau, the Keramat-de Stuers Agreement, writings of Sheikh Ahmad Khatib al-Minangkabawi, and documents related to Japanese occupation policies toward Muslim organizations in Indonesia. These materials were selected because they directly address the actors, conflicts, and ideological developments relevant to the research objectives.

Secondary sources include books, peer-reviewed journal articles, theses, dissertations, conference proceedings, and other scholarly publications discussing Indonesian Islamic history, colonialism, nationalism, Wahhabism, and Islamic reform movements. These sources were utilized to provide historical context, support interpretation, compare scholarly perspectives, and strengthen the analytical discussion.

Data collection began with the heuristic stage, which involved identifying and gathering historical materials relevant to the research topic. Sources were collected from libraries, archives, digital repositories, academic databases, historical publications, and online scholarly resources. Priority was given to materials directly related to the Padri movement, Wahhabi-inspired reformism, Islamic educational institutions, colonial policies, and Muslim resistance movements. Source selection was conducted carefully to ensure academic credibility, historical significance, and relevance to the study.

## **Research Approaches**

To achieve a comprehensive understanding of the subject, this study integrates four complementary approaches: historical, political, sociological, and theological approaches.

### **Historical Approach**

The historical approach was employed to reconstruct historical events systematically and chronologically. This approach enabled the researcher to trace the emergence, development, transformation, and continuity of reformist Islamic movements in Indonesia from the early nineteenth century to the independence period. Through historical reconstruction, the study examines significant events such as the Padri War, Dutch expansion in Minangkabau, the development of Islamic educational institutions, the establishment of political organizations, and Muslim responses during the Japanese occupation. This approach also facilitates the identification of key actors, ideological changes, and political developments across different historical periods.

### **Political Approach**

The political approach was used to analyze the relationship between Islamic reform movements and colonial power structures. Because reformist movements were closely associated with anti-colonial resistance, political analysis was necessary to understand how colonial authorities responded through military repression, educational regulation, political surveillance, and organizational restrictions.

This approach also examines the transformation of reformist movements from religious renewal initiatives into broader political and nationalist organizations such as Sumatra Thawalib, PMI, and PERMI. Furthermore, it explains how Islamic reform movements contributed to the emergence of anti-colonial political consciousness among Indonesian Muslims.

### **Sociological Approach**

The sociological approach was applied to examine social interactions and societal changes influenced by reformist Islamic movements. Particular attention was given to the relationships among reformist Muslims, traditional *adat* communities, colonial authorities, and local society within Minangkabau.

Through sociological analysis, this study explores how reformist teachings influenced social behavior, collective identity, educational transformation, and community mobilization. The sociological perspective also helps explain tensions between reformist Islamic ideas and traditional cultural practices, especially regarding religious authority, customary traditions, and social leadership.

### **Theological Approach**

The theological approach was employed to analyze the religious doctrines and ideological foundations underlying the reformist movement. The study specifically examines concepts such as the purification of Islamic teachings, the rejection of practices considered inconsistent with the Qur'an and Sunnah, and the strengthening of *tawhid* (Islamic monotheism).

This approach is important because religious beliefs and reformist doctrines constituted key motivations behind resistance to colonial domination and efforts toward social transformation. In this study, theology is understood not merely as a system of religious beliefs but also as a practical ideological framework that influenced educational reform, political activism, and anti-colonial resistance.

## **Source Criticism and Data Validation**

Following data collection, source criticism was conducted to evaluate the authenticity, credibility, reliability, and potential bias of the materials used. Source criticism consisted of external criticism and internal criticism.

External criticism focused on verifying the originality and historical validity of documents, manuscripts, and archival materials. This process involved examining authorship, publication background, historical context, and the relevance of each source to the research topic.

Internal criticism was applied to evaluate the content of historical sources critically, particularly concerning consistency, objectivity, ideological perspectives, and possible political bias. Because many historical materials related to Islamic resistance were produced within colonial contexts, special attention was given to colonial narratives that might portray Islamic reform movements negatively or disproportionately.

To minimize subjectivity, the study compared multiple historical accounts from different perspectives, including colonial records, Indonesian historical writings, reformist Islamic literature, and contemporary academic studies. Triangulation was employed by cross-checking information between primary and secondary sources to ensure consistency and reliability. Conflicting historical narratives were analyzed comparatively to identify differences in perspective, political interests, and ideological influences. This process strengthened the validity of the findings and reduced dependence on a single historical interpretation.

## **Data Analysis and Interpretation**

Data analysis was conducted through historical interpretation and thematic analysis. After the collected materials were critically evaluated, they were categorized into several major themes, including religious reform, anti-colonial resistance, educational development, political mobilization, social transformation, and Islamic nationalism.

The researcher then examined the relationships among these themes to explain how reformist Islamic movements contributed to resistance against colonial powers and influenced the development of Indonesian nationalism. Historical events were interpreted within broader political, social, and theological contexts to produce a comprehensive understanding of the movement's evolution and impact.

The study employed deductive, inductive, and comparative analytical techniques. Deductive analysis was used to interpret historical evidence through broader theoretical perspectives related to Islamic reformism and anti-colonialism. Inductive analysis enabled conclusions to emerge from specific historical findings. Comparative analysis was conducted to examine differences and similarities among historical narratives, ideological movements, and colonial responses toward Islamic reform movements in Indonesia.

## **Research Limitations**

This study acknowledges several limitations commonly associated with historical library research. First, access to certain archival materials and colonial records remains limited, particularly local historical documents concerning reformist Islamic movements in Indonesia. Second, many available historical sources were produced from colonial perspectives and may contain political or ideological biases in representing Islamic resistance movements. Third, interpretations regarding Wahhabism, the Padri movement, and Islamic reformism remain contested among scholars, resulting in differing historical perspectives. To address these limitations, the study compared a wide range of historical sources from different viewpoints and prioritized cross-referencing between primary and secondary materials. Nevertheless, limitations related to archival accessibility and interpretative subjectivity may still influence

certain aspects of the analysis. Despite these challenges, the study seeks to provide a critical, systematic, and balanced understanding of the contribution of Wahhabi-inspired reform movements to anti-colonial resistance and Indonesian independence.

## **Result and Discussion**

The following section discusses the forms of struggle carried out by the Wahhabi-inspired reform movement against Dutch and Japanese colonialism in Indonesia, particularly in Minangkabau, West Sumatra. The discussion is divided into several major themes, including military resistance during the Padri War, the transformation of Islamic reform movements through education and intellectual activism, and the development of political organizations in the late colonial period. In addition to describing important historical events and figures, this section also analyzes the political, sociological, and theological dimensions of the movement to understand how Islamic reformist ideas contributed to anti-colonial resistance and the development of nationalist consciousness in Indonesia.

### **The Wahhabi Movement and the Padri Resistance Against Dutch Colonialism**

The emergence of the Wahhabi-inspired reform movement in Minangkabau during the early nineteenth century represented an important phase in the development of Islamic reform and anti-colonial resistance in Indonesia. Historically, the movement was closely associated with the Padri movement, which emerged after several Minangkabau scholars returned from Mecca carrying reformist Islamic ideas influenced by purification movements in the Arabian Peninsula. Nevertheless, historians differ in their interpretation of the relationship between the Padri movement and Wahhabism. Some scholars argue that the Padri movement reflected strong Wahhabi influences because of its emphasis on religious purification and the rejection of practices considered contrary to the Qur'an and Sunnah (Almannai, 2025; Sheikh, 2025; Al-Etaibi, 2026). Other scholars, however, contend that the Padri movement was primarily a local Islamic reform movement shaped by the socio-cultural context of Minangkabau society rather than a direct extension of Arabian Wahhabism.

In this study, the term Wahhabi-inspired movement refers to reformist Islamic influences associated with religious purification efforts in Minangkabau. Initially, the movement focused on purifying Islamic teachings and reforming social practices within local society. Reformist ulama criticized gambling, cockfighting, alcohol consumption, and several adat traditions that they considered inconsistent with Islamic principles. These reform efforts generated tensions between reformist groups and traditional adat leaders, creating social divisions within Minangkabau society. However, the arrival of Dutch colonial intervention transformed this internal conflict into a broader anti-colonial struggle.

The Dutch colonial administration sought to exploit divisions between reformist and traditional groups to strengthen its political influence in West Sumatra. As a result, the reformist movement gradually evolved from a religious purification initiative into a political and military resistance movement. When Dutch authorities first entered West Sumatra, they initially attempted to secure influence through diplomatic persuasion rather than direct military confrontation. Colonial officials encouraged reformist leaders to accept Dutch authority and cooperate with colonial administration (Anatona et al., 2025). However, Padri leaders rejected these proposals, arguing that submission to colonial power was incompatible with Islamic principles and Muslim autonomy.

Following the failure of diplomatic efforts, the Dutch launched military operations against Padri strongholds. According to Rahim et al. (2022), Dutch forces encountered significant challenges during the early stages of the conflict because the Padri movement enjoyed strong local support and maintained effective defensive positions. Dutch military expansion

intensified following the arrival of Lieutenant Colonel A.F. Raaff in West Sumatra on 8 December 1821. He brought additional troops, artillery, ammunition, and military equipment to strengthen colonial operations in the region.

Rather than attacking the central Padri headquarters immediately, Dutch forces initially targeted smaller and politically vulnerable villages. Communities that cooperated with colonial authorities received protection, whereas villages suspected of supporting the Padri movement were subjected to military attacks and artillery bombardment. This divide-and-rule strategy gradually weakened anti-colonial solidarity within Minangkabau society and enabled the Dutch to expand their influence. Subsequently, colonial forces launched attacks on several major Padri centers, including Pagaruyung, Rao, Tanjung Alam, Kota Lawas, Singgalang, and Sirunggang. Although Padri fighters successfully mobilized large numbers of supporters and mounted sustained resistance, Dutch superiority in weaponry, logistics, and military organization increasingly strengthened colonial control over the region.

Despite these disadvantages, Padri resistance remained significant and continued to challenge Dutch expansion throughout West Sumatra. One of the most important political developments during the conflict was the signing of the Keramat de Stuers Agreement in 1825. The agreement represented an attempt by both sides to reduce prolonged hostilities and establish temporary political stability. It addressed issues related to peace, territorial authority, trade protection, and non-interference in religious affairs.

From a political perspective, the agreement demonstrated Dutch recognition of the influence and authority exercised by Padri leaders within Minangkabau society. At the same time, it reflected Dutch strategic efforts to consolidate colonial power while reducing the costs of prolonged military conflict. Nevertheless, the agreement failed to produce lasting peace. Several years later, hostilities resumed, and in 1831 Dutch forces launched a renewed military campaign against Padri strongholds, gradually extending colonial control across Minangkabau.

During this period, resistance under the leadership of Tuanku Imam Bonjol became the most prominent symbol of anti-colonial struggle. Imam Bonjol organized military defenses, strengthened religious solidarity, and mobilized resistance despite increasing colonial pressure. His leadership combined religious authority with military organization, allowing the Padri movement to maintain resistance for several years. However, shortages of military resources, limitations in weaponry, and internal divisions increasingly weakened the movement's capacity to sustain long-term warfare.

The fall of Bonjol in 1837 marked a decisive turning point in the Padri War. Dutch forces intensified their operations through coordinated attacks, artillery bombardment, and prolonged siege tactics that gradually dismantled Padri defenses. Imam Bonjol was eventually captured after being invited to negotiations by Dutch authorities, an event widely interpreted in Indonesian historiography as a colonial strategy to neutralize resistance leadership. Following his arrest, he was exiled to several locations before finally being sent to Manado, where he remained until his death. The defeat of the Padri movement strengthened Dutch political dominance in West Sumatra and facilitated the expansion of colonial administrative control throughout the region.

From a sociological perspective, the Padri War produced significant transformations within Minangkabau society. The conflict intensified tensions between reformist Islamic groups and traditional adat communities, particularly regarding religious authority, cultural practices, and social leadership. Although both groups occasionally cooperated in resisting colonial domination, differences in worldview and social organization persisted long after the conflict ended. Nevertheless, it is important not to portray traditional communities as uniformly

opposed to Islamic reform, as responses to reformist ideas varied considerably across regions and social groups.

The Padri resistance also demonstrates that anti-colonial struggle in Indonesia cannot be understood solely through political or military perspectives. Religious ideology and social reform were equally important components of the movement. Reformist ulama regarded Islamic purification, moral discipline, and resistance to colonial domination as interconnected objectives. From a theological perspective, resistance was viewed not merely as a political obligation but as part of a broader effort to preserve Islamic values and strengthen Muslim society. Consequently, theology functioned not only as a religious doctrine but also as a powerful source of social mobilization, collective identity, and political legitimacy in the struggle against colonial rule.

### **The Transformation of the Reformist Movement Through Education and Intellectual Resistance**

Although the Padri resistance was militarily defeated, reformist Islamic ideas continued to develop during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries through education, intellectual activities, and organizational development. Two important reformist figures associated with this movement were Sheikh Ahmad Khatib al-Minangkabawi and Sheikh Taher Jalaluddin al-Azhari. Both figures promoted Islamic purification, criticized colonial influence, and encouraged educational modernization among Indonesian Muslims.

Before the establishment of Sumatra Thawalib, Sheikh Ahmad Khatib developed resistance strategies through education and intellectual influence. He educated Indonesian students in Mecca and encouraged them to strengthen Islamic teachings and oppose colonial domination. Several important Indonesian Islamic figures, including Haji Abdul Karim Amrullah and KH Ahmad Dahlan, were influenced by his reformist ideas. Through these educational networks, reformist Islamic thought spread throughout Indonesia.

In addition to educational activities, Sheikh Ahmad Khatib also criticized colonial influence through his writings. One of his statements emphasized the dangers of Muslim cooperation with colonial powers and the weakening of Islamic faith. He stated:

*“You know, that my servant, when I heard about our brothers from the Malays who were called Muslims, who had mixed them with infidels, before knowing that their religion was different from the shahadah alone, and said to them that the white man had doubts about the religion of Islam, which has half of the doubts, the mi'raj of our Prophet to the heavens and accepted that the ignorant people would be so doubtful and deny it. Also, he will migrate to our Prophet, because remembering the words of his teachers, those who disbelieve because they are ignorant of the nature of their religion and because they are blind to knowledge and because they are the ones to whom the white people attract them, they will surely be attracted to them and not knowing that there is nothing for them in their world, but... only to become slaves of white people, and in the end they enter eternal hell and they suffer losses in this world and the hereafter. And because of that, I wrote this book to express the essence of the Islamic religion...”*

This statement demonstrates that colonialism was perceived not only as political domination but also as a theological and moral threat to Muslim society. Sheikh Ahmad Khatib connected anti-colonial resistance with the purification of Islamic teachings and intellectual awakening. From a theological perspective, the quotation reflects the reformist belief that strengthening tawhid and Islamic knowledge was essential for resisting foreign domination and preserving Muslim identity.

Meanwhile, Sheikh Taher Jalaluddin al-Azhari expanded reformist influence through journalism and publications. His magazine al-Imam promoted Islamic reform, criticized superstition and certain tarekat practices, and encouraged Muslim intellectual awakening. Compared with earlier military resistance, this movement emphasized intellectual and educational transformation as strategies for strengthening Muslim society under colonial rule.

One of the most significant developments of this reformist movement was the establishment of Sumatra Thawalib. Initially originating from surau-based Islamic learning centers, Sumatra Thawalib transformed into a network of modern Islamic schools in regions such as Padang Panjang, Parabek, Payakumbuh, Bukittinggi, Pariaman, and Maninjau. These schools combined religious education with modern subjects and organizational discipline. Their development reflected a strategic shift from armed resistance toward educational empowerment and intellectual mobilization.

From a sociological perspective, the transformation of surau into modern schools represented broader social changes within Minangkabau society. Education became an important instrument for strengthening anti-colonial consciousness, shaping Muslim intellectual identity, and producing future nationalist leaders. Reformist Islamic schools also functioned as alternatives to Dutch secular schools and Christian missionary institutions.

The rapid development of Islamic reformist schools attracted increasing colonial attention. In response, the Dutch colonial government introduced the Teachers' Ordinance during the late 1920s and early 1930s to supervise Islamic educational activities. The regulation required Islamic teachers to obtain government permission and allowed colonial authorities to monitor educational institutions. Reformist ulama strongly opposed this regulation because they considered it colonial interference in religious affairs and Islamic education.

Resistance toward the Teachers' Ordinance reflected the continuing political consciousness of reformist Muslim groups in Minangkabau. Religious leaders organized meetings and public discussions rejecting colonial intervention. During discussions regarding the ordinance, Haji Rasul stated:

*"No, we cannot leave this village. We must fight against it by all means, even if only our sternum remains."*

He further emphasized:

*"Where else can we wage jihad in the path of Allah if not now?"*

These statements demonstrate how reformist Islamic leaders interpreted resistance against colonial educational policies as part of religious duty and collective struggle for Muslim autonomy.

The reformist educational movement later developed into political activism through organizations such as the Indonesian Muslim Association (PMI) and subsequently the Indonesian Islamic Union Party (PERMI). PERMI combined Islamic reformism with nationalist political goals and openly criticized Dutch colonial policies. The organization promoted political education, press activities, and anti-colonial mobilization among Indonesian Muslims.

A major conference held in Padang in 1932 produced several important decisions, including expanding organizational networks outside West Sumatra, strengthening political education, and developing newspapers as instruments of political communication. Consequently, Medan Rakyat became one of PERMI's important publications for spreading anti-colonial and reformist ideas.

The Dutch colonial government perceived PERMI as a political threat because of its growing influence among educated Muslim communities. Colonial authorities responded through surveillance, restrictions on political activities, censorship, and the arrest of important leaders such as Ilyas Ya'kub and Jalaluddin Thaib. In 1937, increasing political repression eventually led to the dissolution of PERMI. Despite its dissolution, the organization contributed significantly to the development of Islamic political awareness and nationalist consciousness among Indonesian Muslims.

### **The Reformist Islamic Movement During the Japanese Occupation**

The Japanese occupation of Indonesia between 1942 and 1945 marked a significant transition in the history of Islamic reform movements. The rapid collapse of Dutch colonial authority created a new political environment in which Indonesian Muslim organizations sought to redefine their role in society. At the beginning of the occupation, Japan attempted to portray itself as the liberator of Asian nations from Western colonial domination. Through extensive propaganda campaigns, Japanese authorities promoted slogans such as “Japan the Leader of Asia” and “Asia for Asians,” aiming to gain support from Indonesian nationalists and Muslim communities. Several prominent Indonesian leaders who had been imprisoned under Dutch rule were released and allowed to participate in limited administrative and political activities.

These policies initially generated optimism among some Indonesian Muslims, who hoped that Japanese rule would provide greater opportunities for national and religious development. However, the reality of Japanese occupation soon contradicted its promises of liberation and cooperation. Japanese authorities imposed strict military control over society and implemented policies primarily designed to support Japan's war effort in the Pacific. Large numbers of Indonesians were recruited as *romusha* (forced laborers) and sent to work under extremely difficult conditions on military infrastructure projects.

Agricultural products, natural resources, and economic assets were heavily exploited to support Japanese military needs, causing widespread shortages and economic hardship among the population. In many regions, schools, community buildings, and even religious facilities were utilized for military purposes. These conditions created growing dissatisfaction among Indonesian Muslims and gradually undermined the credibility of Japanese claims regarding Asian solidarity and liberation.

In response to these developments, reformist Islamic leaders sought to preserve and strengthen Islamic activities despite the restrictions imposed by the occupation authorities. One important effort was the reorganization of Muslim educational, social, and religious networks through institutions such as the Majelis Islam Tinggi (MIT) under the leadership of Sheikh Muhammad Jamil Jambek. The organization encouraged cooperation among Muslims, promoted religious education, and fostered collective awareness regarding the importance of national independence.

Although Japanese authorities closely monitored Islamic organizations and limited political activities, reformist leaders utilized available institutional spaces to continue educating the Muslim community and maintaining social cohesion during a period of uncertainty and hardship. From a sociological perspective, Islamic organizations played an essential role in protecting community resilience during the occupation period. Mosques, religious schools, and Islamic study circles became important centers for social interaction, mutual assistance, and the dissemination of information. Reformist Muslim leaders emphasized discipline, moral responsibility, and community solidarity as responses to the social dislocation caused by war and occupation. These activities helped maintain public morale and prevented the weakening of Islamic social institutions under the pressures of military rule. Furthermore, reformist

networks continued to produce educated individuals who later participated actively in the nationalist movement and the struggle for independence. Politically, the Japanese occupation unintentionally created conditions that facilitated the growth of nationalist consciousness among Indonesian Muslims. While Japanese authorities attempted to control political activities, their mobilization of local leaders and organizations provided valuable administrative and organizational experience for many Indonesians. Reformist Muslim activists learned to operate within complex political structures, build organizational networks, and engage in leadership roles. These experiences became important assets during the final stages of the independence movement. The occupation period therefore functioned as a transitional phase in which reformist Islamic organizations strengthened their institutional capacity while simultaneously preparing for future political change.

According to Hamka, many Muslim activists who later played important roles in the Indonesian independence movement had previously been involved in reformist educational and political organizations established during the colonial era. He observed that a large majority of his colleagues in the independence struggle had long participated in Islamic reform movements before the revolution. This observation highlights the continuity between earlier reformist educational initiatives and the emergence of nationalist leadership during the independence period. The intellectual and organizational foundations developed by reformist groups enabled many Muslims to contribute effectively to political mobilization and nation-building efforts.

From a broader historical perspective, the Japanese occupation represented the final stage in the transformation of the reformist Islamic movement before Indonesian independence. What had initially emerged as a religious purification movement evolved into a multifaceted force encompassing educational reform, intellectual activism, social organization, political awareness, and anti-colonial resistance. Although Japanese rule imposed significant restrictions and hardships, reformist Muslim networks successfully adapted to changing circumstances and continued their efforts to strengthen Islamic identity and national consciousness. As a result, these movements made an important contribution to preparing Indonesian society for the declaration of independence in August 1945 and the subsequent struggle to establish a sovereign nation.

## Conclusion

This study concludes that the Wahhabi-inspired reform movement contributed significantly to Indonesia's anti-colonial struggle and the development of Islamic reform. Initially focused on the purification of Islamic teachings, the movement evolved into broader forms of resistance through military action, educational reform, intellectual activities, and political mobilization. Although facing military defeat and colonial repression, reformist ideas continued to influence Indonesian Muslim society by promoting educational advancement, Islamic awareness, anti-colonial sentiment, and nationalist consciousness. These contributions demonstrate that the movement played an important role not only in resisting colonialism but also in shaping the intellectual and social foundations of Indonesian independence.

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