

https://doi.org/10.24035/ijit.24.2023.272			
Received:	31 Jan. 2023	Accepted:	15 June 2023
Revised:	26 May 2023	Published:	15 Dec. 2023.
Volume:	24 (December)	Pages:	100-107
To cite: Mohammad Hasan & Muhammad Taufiq. 2023. Ahmad Dahlan and the Moderate, Humanist, and Non-Sectarian Islam. <i>International Journal of Islamic Thought</i> . Vol. 24 (December): 100-107.			

Ahmad Dahlan and the Moderate, Humanist, and Non-Sectarian Islam

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ABSTRACT

This article focuses on aspects of moderation, humanism, and non-sectarianism in Ahmad Dahlan's thoughts and movements (1869–1923 AD) in Islamic education. The method of this article is qualitative with a textual approach and is the result of library research sourced from literature written by Dahlan's students and scholars of Islamic studies, both classical and contemporary. Based on a moderate understanding extracted from the Quran, hadith, and some scholars' understanding, Dahlan is more suitable to be categorised as a moderate-humanist or middle Salafism figure rather than being categorised as a puritan-fundamentalist or right-wing Salafism figure as misunderstood by some, because of his thoughts and movements in the Islamic education, religious, social, economic, and political fields are more moderate, nonviolent, open, and visionary humanists than contemporary reformers in the country, so that their thoughts and movements inspire philanthropic actions in the Islamic education, social, economic, and politic fields that are far from radicalism and terrorism, and contrary to the modernist group's thoughts and movements that exist today, especially with puritan-fundamentalist groups.

Keywords: moderate, non-sectarian Islam, thought, Ahmad Dahlan, Islamic education

Ahmad Dahlan (1869–1923), the founding father of Muhammadiyah, worked to enhance religious knowledge, social life, and economics. He was a moderate Salafi who focused on the purification of Islamic teachings. Because of his contributions, the Soekarno-Hatta administration designated him as a national hero in 1961 with Presidential Decree No. 657. Ahmad Dahlan, also known as Muhammad Darwis, was born in Kauman Village, Yogyakarta, in 1869 AD and died in 1923 AD. He was Abu Bakar's and Siti Aminah's fourth son. Abu Bakar was a brilliant Muslim scholar who became the preacher at the Ngayogyakarta Hadiningrat Sultanate's Grand Mosque. He received his Islamic education since his childhood, when he could read the Quran fluently when he was eight years old. He began learning *fiqh* from Muhammad Saleh and Arabic grammar from Muhsin in Kauman, Yogyakarta (Nugraha, 2009).

Several months after his marriage with Siti Walidah, Darwis went to Mecca to perform a pilgrimage and for his studies. During his pilgrimage, he visited the graveyard of Sayyid Muhammad Bakri Shatha al-Dimyati as a Syafi'i yah scholar in Mecca. From him, he received the title '*Haji Ahmad Dahlan*' which he used when he returned from Mecca until his death. On his

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second visit to Mecca, Dahlan studied Islamic subjects from scholars who were experts in their fields. He studied the Islamic reforms that were carried out by reformers such as Muhammad ibn 'Abd al-Wahhab (d. 1787), Jamal al-Din al-Afghani (d. 1897), Muhammad 'Abduh (d. 1905), and Muhammad Rashid Rida (d. 1935) (Nugraha 2009). Although they differed in their views of the role of reason in understanding religious texts as well as responding to foreign ideas, they shared the same spirit of struggle in advancing Islam as expressed by their motto '*al-ruju' ila al-Quran wa al-Sunnah*'. Their collective thoughts inspired the emergence of the Puritan Islamic movement from the 1970s up to now (Faizah 2012).

Dahlan became involved in religious, social, political, and economic activities after returning to his motherland. He convened an ulama consultative assembly in Yogyakarta and other regions to address the Qibla issue in Yogyakarta. He also became a religion teacher in Kauman, teaching at the Kweekschool in Yogyakarta and the Opleidingschool voor Inlandsche Ambtenaren in Magelang, becoming a *khatib* at Yogyakarta's Great Mosque, joining the Boedi Oetomo organisation, Jami'at Khair, and Sarekat Islam, establishing schools in Yogyakarta (Faizah 2012), and founding Muhammadiyah. During his activeness, he succeeded in writing papers in various scientific fields, such as *akidah*, *hadith*, *fiqh*, *tajwid*, and *sirah*. Some of his works were *Rukuning Islam lan Iman*, *Aqa'id*, *Salat*, *Asmaning Para Nabi kang Selangkung*, *Nasab Dalem Sarta Putra Dalem Kanjeng Nabi*, *Sarat lan Rukuning Wudhu Tuwin Salat* and *Rukun lan Bataling Shiyam*, (Majelis Diklitbang 2010).

Ahmad Dahlan is more preferably categorised as a moderate figure than as a Puritan. This view refers to his thoughts and activities. Currently, his thought is known as "Dahlaniyah," which is different from Muhammadiyah, particularly after his activism. Although he is the founder and central figure of this modernist Islamic group organisation, along with its historical events, Muhammadiyah has developed rapidly and experienced a shift in terms of worship ('*ubudiyah*), social, political, and economic. Deliar Noer (1982) assumed that Dahlan's renewal (reformation) was completely influenced by some reformers in the Middle East because he and other reformers in Indonesia were involved in greatly practising the idea of renewal from some popular figures, such as Ibn Taymiyah and Ibn al-Qayyim, and that they had interpreted the Quran and hadith according to the context of the problems in Indonesia. Dahlan accurately assimilated the spirit of reformation of the Middle Eastern reformers, particularly 'Abduh, by advocating *ijtihad*, reducing uncertainty or ambiguity (*taqlid*), and referring to the Quran and Sunnah.

Ahmad Dahlan and His Islamic Humanistic Philosophy

Dahlan views Islam as a noble religion and respects humanity. For him, Islam is a religion that liberates and humanises mankind and rejects all forms of colonialism (Kuntowijoyo, 2000). His liberated view of humanist and anti-dehumanising Islam is proven by his thought and activities in the following three major areas:

Akidah (Faith)

Dahlan, unlike most other puritan reformers, did not want to get involved in religious arguments. Theological dispute, according to him, was unnecessary since it was wasteful. Muslims possessed enough faith to worship Allah the Almighty as well as to obey the Quranic and Sunnah teachings. Dahlan was more oriented towards Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jama'ah based on twenty criteria based on his preaching approach and content. Several qualities in himself might be summarised into seven life philosophies, i.e., (a) humans have one chance to live; (b) the majority of human beings are arrogant and selfish; (c) human habits are difficult to change, even if he defends their habits; (d) people should think about the nature and purpose of their lives; (e) humans should hold themselves with truth; (f) the majority of a community's leaders are not encouraged to perform sacrifices but remain considering the foolish and weak; and (g) a lesson is divided into theory and practise (Baidhawiy 2017; Br Sitepu 2017).

Additionally, Dahlan's primary concern was that Islam practised in Java, particularly in the Islam-based Yogyakarta Sultanate, was adapted to Hindu-Buddhist rituals and animism. (Soelarto, 1993). Drewes had described this phenomenon as:

"Wherever the triumph of Islam is, it does not mean that it has managed to completely erode pre-Islamic ideas to their roots. Contrary to popular belief, the lasting matter remains nothing, but for some people, the trace of pre-Islamic ideas and institutions is more visible than others. This is also supposed to be Indonesian. There is a certain way of thinking where, for the Indonesian, the pre-Islamic times have seemed so fundamental that there is a gradual contact, and Islam does not succeed in changing these ways of thinking. Besides, in many areas, indigenous culture is still very broadly enduring (Br Sitepu, 2017)."

Dahlan attempted to eradicate the superstitious, *bid'ah*, and *khurafat*, the tradition of *slametan*, the seventh day of mourning, the forty-day of sorrow, the hundred-day of grief, and other types of innovative religious practises that have no connection with the Quran and Sunnah (KH. R. Hadjid 2006). In addition to initiating the theocentric theology, Dahlan developed a humanist-social theology based on his interpretation and practise of the *Quranic al-Ma'un* (al-Quran 107: 1-7). He created *al-Ma'un* theology, which tried to enhance the social position of orphans by providing shelter and meals (Baidhawiy 2017). The theology of *al-Ma'un* was the spirit of economic and social philanthropy that Muhammadiyah has continued to practise nowadays (Latief 2016).

Fiqh

Dahlan's theological thought has influenced his thought on *fiqh*. He believed that worship must be based on the Quran and the Sunnah. Worship cannot be justified when it just relates to someone's commands, even though he is a teacher, ruler, and even a *Kyai* (Mulkhan 1990). His thought on *fiqh* was like that of traditionalist Islamic groups, such as Muhammad Hasyim Asy'ari, as the popular jurisprudence at the time (Kasdi 2019; H. M. Taufiq 2022). His book *Fiqh* (volume III), which was published by the Muhammadiyah division of Taman Pustaka and contains the reading of *qunut* in the Dawn prayer, was controversial because its authenticity could not be ascertained. It also attached the word "*sayyid*" to the name of the Prophet Muhammad. This kind of thought contradicted the official religious understanding that was issued by the Council of Tarjih Muhammadiyah (Anonim 2014; Anwar 2005).

His views on *fiqh* matched the practise of jurisprudence at the time. This is evident from the teacher-student connection hierarchy in the development of his intellectual life. While inspired by reformist philosophy in the Middle East, he also learned from Shafi'i schools and comprehended Ash'ari ideas before departing for Mecca and after arriving in Mecca. As a result, his beliefs and practises in the field of *fiqh* are inevitably similar to the thoughts and practises of the experts to whom he referred and studied. As a result, his thought has been known as "Dahlaniyah". This term is used to distinguish Dahlan's thoughts and practises from Muhammadiyah's. This tendency of difference has experienced significant evidence since the Council of Tarjih Muhammadiyah was founded during Mas Mansyur's period of leadership (Anwar 2005; Fanani et al. 2021; Iswahyudi, 2020; Mutmainah 2020). Abdul Mu'ti, as the General Secretary of the Muhammadiyah in the Central Commission, has agreed with this reality. He emphasised that Dahlan was leaning towards the Shafi'i school of thought and not Wahabi. Even so, the name "Ahmad Dahlan," which was originally called Muhammad Darwis, was the name of the *tabarrukan* (beg for blessing) to Ahmad Dahlan, who was a figure of the Shafi'i school of thought. However, Dahlaniyah, or Dahlanism, is different from Muhammadiyah. Muhammadiyah adheres to the principles of Islamic teachings based on the Qur'an and *hadith*, not the personal teachings of a person, including Dahlan, which has been formulated and constructed by the Council of Tarjih Muhammadiyah founded by Mas Mansyur. Meanwhile, during the Dahlan period, the Council of Tarjih Muhammadiyah had not yet been formed, so all thoughts and practises still relied on the old principles that would have changed after the establishment of the Council of Tarjih Muhammadiyah (Abdul Mu'ti 2016).

His thought of faith and *fiqh* relying on the Quran and the Sunnah is not merely normative-textual but rather more applicable-contextual to the reality of everyday life. He had composed the normative texts of revelation as a framework and foundation for Islamic education and humanist-

liberal social, economic, and political action, so the truth of revelation becomes actual and functional and can be felt by people in his lifetime and prospective generations up to the present time on a larger scale. In this case, he acts as the main interpreter and actor in manifesting the revelations before asking others to do so (Mohamad Ali et al. 2016) social, economic, and political fields during his lifetime.

Social, Economic, And Political

Dahlan was frequently active in religious, social, economic, and political events in society to strengthen his thought in the realms of faith and jurisprudence. He faced two significant problems throughout his lifetime: Dutch colonisation and feudalism at the Palace of Mataram. In this state, he observed several heinous crimes against humanity. The Dutch, on the other hand, have caused people to suffer in social, political, economic, and religious ways. In addition, the culture of a feudalistic court dominated all aspects of common people's lives, including the appreciation of religion, which had implications for injustice, social mental weakness, acute discrimination, and fatalism for ordinary people who did not have sufficient access to Islamic education and intellectual development (Abdurrahman 2003).

In religious rituals, they used to leave it to anyone with authority. In some cases, people from marginal classes have appeared to have no right, even to simply pray to Allah the Almighty. When there is a ceremony of death, the poor people are not only obliged to hire a man for prayer, but they also pay for all burdensome religious ritual activities. The *slametan* for supernatural matters, which financially cost money, must be carried out strictly in the name of tradition. In general, only the royal family or religious officials selected by the sultan can determine everything in the name of tradition (Abdurrahman 2003), whereas the majority of them adhere to Islam based on the beliefs of their ancestors.

To fight dehumanisation, Dahlan further emphasised that he must return to the spirit of Islam, which is more humanist. He viewed moral decadence, thought, and tradition that occurred due to *wahm* (moral disease) as factors that could cause modification (change) in the foundation of religion motivated by various interests. Since the politicisation and manipulation of religious interpretation were truly unavoidable, there was no other way but to return all religious matters to their authentic forms. The authentic Islam is the Islam that begins and proclaims humanity. Dahlan fought for the religion that segregates all the interests of humanity and against all kinds of anti-humanitarian acts (Kuntowijoyo, 2000).

To face these great challenges, he started his preaching (da'wah) while persistently adhering to his theological and *fiqh thoughts*. In 1906, he became a religious teacher in his village and taught at the Kweekschool in Yogyakarta and the Opleidingschool voor Inlandsche Ambtenaren, as well as becoming a permanent preacher at the Great Mosque of Yogyakarta (Nugraha, 2009). In his village, he founded a *kombong*, a dormitory for students who studied with him. He taught astronomy as his specialty, as proven by his books with mystical nuances and reformation (renewal), such as the works of al-Ghazali, al-Afghani, 'Abduh, Rida, and Tantawi.

One of his moves to change the state and community apart from traditions that were considered superstitious, such as *bid'ah* and *khurafat*, was to change the direction of the mosque's *qibla*, which he believed was wrong. As an expert in astronomy, he persuasively established deliberative assemblies for *ulama'*, involving the head of the palace and giving the role model that he started himself. Besides, he tried to change the direction of the *Qibla* of mosques in Yogyakarta, which he thought was wrong. Although he was opposed and dismissed as a preacher (Nugraha 2009), and when his father's legacy he restored was dismantled and forcibly levelled to the ground, he remained in his position without destructive resistance. Finally, he rebuilt his mosque, although the direction of the *Qibla* was not the same as the direction of the *Qibla* that was destroyed.

In 1907, Wahidin Sudira Husada founded the Boedi Oetomo in Yogyakarta, whose members came from the educated class of the Dutch government of secondary school teachers, such as Kweekschool, Normaal School, Opleidingschool OSVIA, and HK School. He formally joined the Boedi Oetomo in 1909 AD after a lengthy debate with members of the Boedi Oetomo. He had a preaching mission and reaped significant benefits from this collaboration for the welfare of the

nation. With the encouragement of Boedi Oetomo administrators, he founded a school in Yogyakarta in 1911 that combined a modern educational system with religious knowledge. The setting for learning was combining male and female students in one class. He also joined the *Jami'at* organisation to access a lot of information, especially about reformers in the Middle East. Even after Sarekat Islam (SI) was founded, he also joined in (Nugraha 2009).

Even so, he did not forget to think about his students (*santri*) in Kauman. He established an Islamic educational institution in Kauman by making his living room a small classroom with three chairs and three tables. Over that time, this educational institution had grown and received teacher assistance from Boedi Oetomo alternately at certain times. After its development and knowing that his students were not only Muslims, Dahlan was slandered and considered an apostate by the community in Kauman. He made significant changes in learning methods and systems, namely the balance of knowledge concerning world life and the afterlife (Thalhas 2002).

As a result of his further struggle, based on his inspiration and relationship with the organisation Boedi Oetomo, he succeeded in establishing Muhammadiyah. On November 18, 1912 M/8 (*Dzulhijah*) 1330 H, the Dutch East Indies government granted the establishment of this cooperation by *besluit* and *recht person*. To treat the Dutch, he restricted the Muhammadiyah movement by suggesting that Muhammadiyah's official branches (inside and outside Yogyakarta) use different names (Nugraha 2009). Through Muhammadiyah, he tried to achieve his two main missions, namely: (a) promoting and propagating Islamic teachings and ideology in the Dutch East Indies; and (b) promoting and propagating the way of life along the advancement of Islam to its allies (KH. R. Hadjid 2006). His battle was successful in changing the socio-cultural conditions and causing religion and religious teachings to lose prominence since they always benefited the status quo of the royal feudal lords. Under his leadership, Islamic teachings became more accessible to all social classes. In this case, his sympathy for social justice and humanity can be identified. He resisted Dutch colonialism and the feudalistic tradition of the court through subtle, educational, and cultural strategies (Kuntowijoyo, 2000).

Ahmad Dahlan and His Non-Sectarian Islamic Humanistic Moderation

All of his beliefs and actions reflect non-sectarian Islamic humanistic moderation. Dahlan aggressively purified and re-interpreted Islamic teachings because he was inspired by reformer figures in the Middle East such as Muhammad ibn 'Abd al-Wahhab, al-Afghani, Abduh, and Rida, but he differed from the majority of reformers in terms of thought and implementation procedures that were more persuasive, humanist, open, educative, adaptive, systematic, and affluent. Furthermore, his non-sectarian stance was shown in his willingness to associate with both nationalist movements, such as Boedi Oetomo and his non-Muslim pupils, and Islamic organisations, such as *Jami'at Khair* and Sarekat Islam (SI). Although he was viewed as an anti-local culture figure due to his anti-superstition, *bid'ah*, and *khurafat*, his life history demonstrated another way in which he accepted the tradition of names-changing after the hajj (pilgrimage) and declared that Eid al-Fitr, which coincided with the sultan's birthday, should be celebrated a day in advance (Ali 1957). In addition, he was not a priori anti-westernization, as proven by the use of the Dutch school system in his teaching and learning activities.

Dahlan used various means (media) to spread Islam as a noble religion and respect humanity. He did it slowly, gently, and without excessive confrontation. Ash'ari's humanistic theological thought (Ath-Thayyib 2016) and his *fiqh* thought, which tended to adhere to the Shafi'i school of thought but did not follow the motto of returning to the Qur'an and the Sunnah as proclaimed by other reformers, had made him a non-sectarian moderate-humanist figure who had an open-mindedness and wide association. His open-mindedness and wide association had made him able to accept new ideas, adapt to foreign cultures, and interact and exchange ideas with some elements, both Muslim and non-Muslim, while still holding his identity as a Javanese Muslim.

Categorising Dahlan as a moderate Muslim figure or a Puritan Muslim figure is problematic because there is no agreement among Muslim and non-Muslim Islamic scholars on the boundaries or criteria between the three typologies of various groups in Islam as Puritan

Muslims, moderate Muslims, and secular Muslims. Each scholar has different criteria and definitions that will be followed by other scholars in the futures no agreement among Muslim and non-Muslim Islamic scholars on the boundaries or criteria between the three typologies of various groups in Islam as Puritan Muslims, moderate Muslims, and secular Muslims. Each scholar has different criteria and definitions that will be followed by other scholars in the future. In a close overview, the ultimate argument for Dahlan's categorization as a puritan Muslim figure is that he tries to purify Islamic teachings from the practise of superstition, *bid'ah*, and *khurafat*, whereas his purification is not as extreme as that of puritans in general so that he does not mislead and disagree, confront, intimidate, and persecute other groups.

He was a portrait of a figure in Islamic reform who applied friendship and mujahadah and provided role models in social life to realise his mission of renewal (Nugraha 2009). He had a good relationship with the chief of the royal palace (*keraton*) and held the *ulama's* deliberative assembly to straighten the direction of the *Qibla*. Besides, he also maintained a good, stable relationship with Boedi Oetomo administrators to jointly fight for the fate of the nation and joined religious and economic organisations. In addition, he tried hard by providing role models to realise his vision and mission, although he had to be opposed and ostracised by the chief of the royal palace (*keraton*), scholars (*ulama'*), and people around him. However, he never forced others to join his thoughts by committing acts of violence, both verbal and physical. Although Dahlan and Muhammadiyah can be categorised as figures and organisations affiliated with *Salafism*, their views on *Salafism* are moderate. According to Din Syamsuddin, Dahlan's moderate *salafism*, which later became the foundation of Muhammadiyah, was at certain points the same as Muhammad Rashid Rida's *salafism*, but it differed from it *in that it* belonged to some groups that must wear a robe, have glitter in the eyes, wear pants over the heels, and pray differently (Gunawan 2018).

Based on his thoughts and movements, his *Salafism* was a combination of traditionalism and modernism that negated one another. He did not completely reject traditionalism and did not fully adopt modernism, but rather contextualised it with the Indonesian context, especially Javanese principles. Meaning that Dahlan was a unique Islamic reformer because he tried to combine these thoughts according to the context of Indonesian so that his *Salafism* was moderate, humanist, and non-sectarian both theoretically and practically.

Lastly, his views and movements demonstrated that he was a genius who surpassed the concepts and movements of his contemporaries, as seen by the fact that his movements succeeded in improving the Indonesian people, particularly Muslims, without producing bigger issues. It is hardly an exaggeration to argue that he was more synonymous with the jargon "*al-ruju 'ila al-Qur'an wa al-sunnah*" (return to the Qur'an and the Sunnah), but in a later time, he also practises the jargon of the traditionalist Islamic group, namely "*al-muhafazah 'ala al-qadim al-salih wa al-akhdh bi al-Jadid al-aslah*" (preserving old traditions that are still relevant and implementing new things that are more relevant) with a different emphasis; that is, the traditionalist Islamic groups emphasise more on "*al-muhafazah 'ala al-qadim al-salih*," while Dahlan emphasises on "*al-akhdh bi al-jadid al-aslah*" (Harisudin 2017; Kasdi 2019; Maimun & Kosim 2019).

To conclude, Dahlan is the best example of an Indonesian Islamic reformer who has successfully actualized his ideas in the order of Islamic education, religious, health, social, economic, and political life by exploring what he considers to be the best of classical and modern Islamic intellectual property from two opposing perspectives, namely traditionalism and modernism. Both sides contradict each other to standardise based on the Indonesian context. Hence, his thought is not right-extremist *salafism*, which is synonymous with fundamentalism and acts of religious violence, but rather moderate *salafism*, which is founded on the origins of Islam and incorporates potentially significant concepts.

His moderate thought extends not just to the realm of faith but also to the realm of fiqh. In terms of religion, he is more similar to Ash'ari since he is also moderate; however, in terms of fiqh, he is more similar to the Shafi'i school of thought, which is followed by the majority of Muslims in Indonesia. His moderate thought has been blanketed by jargon on the subject of faith, "returning to the Qur'an and the Sunnah," synonymous with puritan-fundamentalists. Contrary,

he is often judged as a puritan figure with anti-local tradition, whereas his theological moderate thought, which relies on the Ash'ari theological thought, and his thought on *fiqh* are different from the thought of Muhammadiyah in terms of *fiqh* after the establishment of Tarjih Council.

Acknowledgments

The authors would like to thank our sponsors for providing support and funding. The first author is sponsored by the Ministry of Religious Affairs, Republic of Indonesia. The second author is sponsored by the Indonesia Endowment Fund for Education (Lembaga Pengelola Dana Pendidikan Republik Indonesia, LPDP-RI).

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