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THE MALAY SCHOLARS' REJECTION OF WAHHABI IDEOLOGY: A CRITICAL ANALYSIS

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Abstract:

This study investigates the intellectual resistance of Malay scholars toward the spread of Wahhabi ideology, tracing both historical and contemporary responses within the framework of Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jama'ah. Originating in the early 20th century through reformist movements aligned with Wahhabi principles, most notably Kaum Muda, the introduction of this ideology into the Malay Archipelago triggered theological and sociocultural tensions, challenging long-established religious traditions rooted in Shafi'i jurisprudence and Ash'ari theology. The problem addressed in this study centers on how Wahhabi ideology, with its rigid textual literalism and rejection of taqlid, mysticism, and communal practices such as *tawassul* and *talqin*, prompted a counter-response among Malay religious elites. Employing a qualitative methodology, this research draws upon classical texts, fatwas, and writings by prominent scholars such as Shaikh Muhammad Syafie of Patani, Sheikh Uthman Jalaluddin al-Kelantani, and Sheikh Abdul Qadir al-Mandili. Through critical analysis, the findings reveal that the scholars' opposition was grounded in theological reasoning and sociocultural awareness, highlighting their concern for preserving religious harmony and resisting divisive sectarian ideologies. The study identifies core themes in the scholars' critique, such as safeguarding Sunni orthodoxy, defending spiritual traditions, and rejecting *takfiri* tendencies. By positioning Wahhabism alongside historical extremist sects like the Khawarij, Malay scholars framed their rebuttals within a broader Islamic intellectual tradition. This research contributes to understanding the dynamics of theological resistance in Southeast Asia, offering insights into the role of localized scholarly authority in countering ideological extremism. It concludes by emphasizing the importance of sustaining intellectual continuity

and spiritual moderation to uphold communal integrity in the face of imported radical currents.

Keywords:

Wahhabi, Malay Scholar, Resistance, Sunni Orthodoxy, Southeast

Introduction

The emergence of Wahhabi ideology in the 18th century and its subsequent spread beyond the Arabian Peninsula sparked enduring theological and socio-political debates across the Muslim world (Heyen-Dubé & Rands, 2022). In the Southeast Asian context, particularly within the Malay Archipelago, the arrival of Wahhabism posed a significant challenge to the established Islamic tradition rooted in the Shāfi'ī school of jurisprudence and the Ash'arī creed (Nasri & Mulyohadi, 2023). Notably, this ideology's rigid literalism and rejection of practices such as *taqlid* (legal conformity), *tawassul* (intercession), and the veneration of saints diverged sharply from the spiritually rich and culturally embedded expressions of Islam long practiced in the region. The rise of reformist groups in the early 20th century, notably the Kaum Muda movement, saw the ideological influence of Wahhabi teachings being reintroduced through printed media, educational institutions, and public discourse, triggering concern among traditional scholars (Badri, 2023). Thus, the significance of examining the Malay scholars' rejection of Wahhabi ideology lies in understanding how local intellectual traditions refute external theological impositions and safeguard religious harmony and communal identity amidst ideological contestation (Fakhriati, 2014).

The body of existing scholarship has significantly addressed the historical development, core doctrines, and international ramifications of Wahhabi ideology, particularly its associations with political extremism and sectarian tendencies (Musthofa & Prihananto, 2023). Nevertheless, a substantial gap exists in region-specific analyses, especially those that examine the intellectual responses of local scholars to this ideological expansion. That is, much of the existing research tends to treat Wahhabism's influence uniformly across the Muslim world. They often neglect the nuanced responses from regions with well-established Islamic traditions, such as the Malay world. In this context, the present study seeks to fill this scholarly void by critically examining the writings, legal opinions (fatwas), and public discourses of influential Malay scholars who resisted Wahhabi doctrines. Furthermore, utilizing a qualitative approach rooted in the close reading and analysis of classical and modern textual sources, this research explores the frameworks these scholars employed in articulating their opposition. This includes the theological and sociocultural foundations of their arguments and the broader implications of their intellectual legacy. In addition, this inquiry sheds light on the dynamic relationship between imported ideology and indigenous tradition and affirms the enduring significance of localized Islamic scholarship in addressing present-day theological and communal challenges.

Literature Review

Recent scholarship has offered varied and often critical analyses of the evolving dynamics of Salafi ideology, particularly in relation to its rejectionist tendencies. One of the key themes emerging from Evans (2011), Rasouli, Bolandian, and Kanani (2023), and Marchal (2009) is the malleability of Salafi ideology and its instrumental use in fostering exclusivist or extremist

agendas. Evans emphasized the ideological elasticity of Salafism, which enables both quietist and militant interpretations to coexist, thereby complicating state and security responses. Similarly, Rasouli et al. linked the ideological exclusion intrinsic to Wahhabi-Salafi thought with the proliferation of radical Islamist networks in Africa, suggesting that such dogma is a decisive variable in geopolitical instability. Meanwhile, Marchal provided a historical case in Somalia where Al-Shabaab's Salafi orientation manifests in both religious purification and rejection of local customs, thereby intensifying civil strife. Collectively, these works highlight the problematic adaptability of Salafi doctrine and the socio-political consequences of its rejectionist strands.

The role of Salafi ideology in insurgency and governance underscores its pragmatic yet doctrinally rigid nature. Skjelderup (2020), Cakmaktas (2024), and Kaya (2024) explored how Salafi-jihadi groups such as Al-Shabaab, ISIS, and Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham, respectively, utilize religious rejectionism to consolidate authority. In particular, Skjelderup's fieldwork illustrated that despite its rigid doctrine, Al-Shabaab adapts pragmatically to clan structures to enhance its governance capacity while still enforcing ideological purity. Conversely, Cakmaktas identified Abu Abdullah al-Muhajir's legal writings as foundational to the brutal jurisprudence embraced by ISIS, particularly in its rejection of Shi'ism and justification of violence. In addition, Kaya outlined how the evolution of HTS reflects both strategic mergers and ideological steadfastness, rooted in Salafi-jihadi paradigms. Overall, these studies underline a critical paradox. While politically strategic, these groups maintain an uncompromising stance towards ideological 'others,' revealing a deep entrenchment of rejection within Salafi praxis.

Investigations by Ismael and Ismael (1985), de Bie, de Poot, and van der Leun (2014), and Chusniyah et al. (2023) examined the socio-political allure of Salafi ideology, particularly among disenfranchised populations. Notably, the Ismaels trace the modern rise of Salafi-based political activism to failures of Arab states in addressing economic and cultural grievances, positioning ideological rejection as a form of resistance. Correspondingly, De Bie et al. demonstrated how Salafi networks in the Netherlands exploit identity crises among migrants, offering ideological belonging and practical support in exchange for conformity to rigid beliefs. Subsequently, Chusniyah et al. added psychological dimensions, suggesting how openness to experience among Indonesian Salafi sympathizers is mediated by perceived threats and ideological indoctrination, resulting in stronger alignment with theocratic political visions. Together, these findings suggest that the appeal of Salafi rejectionism is not merely doctrinal but also fulfills existential and social functions.

A distinct trend involves efforts to moderate or reinterpret Salafi ideology from within. Muhanna-Matar (2017), Amin (2017), and Olsson (2020) reflected on internal critiques and possible trajectories of de-radicalization. Accordingly, Muhanna-Matar introduced the concept of self-deradicalization among Tunisian Salafis, who gradually abandon rigid dogma through introspection and social engagement while maintaining Islamic commitments. Meanwhile, Amin highlighted moderate Salafi networks in Pakistan that oppose violence and engage in civil discourse, challenging the monolithic portrayal of Salafism as inherently extremist. At the same time, Olsson investigated non-violent Salafi communities in Sweden whose conservative views on gender diverge from democratic norms, yet remain non-violent and socially integrated. Concurrently, these authors collectively disrupt the binary of violent versus peaceful Salafism by presenting intra-ideological plurality and reform attempts that retain elements of doctrinal exclusivism.

The linguistic and cultural manifestations of Salafi ideology provide additional layers of understanding. Bustanov (2017), Ahmad, Muniroh, and Nurani (2021), and Račius and Norvilaite (2014) explored how Salafi thought permeates identity formation and expression. Bustanov's study on Tatar Salafis revealed the strategic use of local languages to propagate a moderate Salafi discourse, highlighting how ideology can be adapted linguistically while retaining orthodoxy. In contrast, Ahmad et al. examined how the niqab in Indonesia functions as both a symbol of piety and protest within the Salafi framework, reinforcing notions of female religious agency and societal rejection. On a similar vein, Račius and Norvilaite observed how Lithuanian converts deeply internalize Salafi discourse, indicating that ideological rigidity can be self-imposed by individuals in search of authenticity. These studies underscore how Salafi ideology, though often portrayed as rigid, can adapt to various cultural forms while maintaining a core of rejectionist values.

Further inquiry is needed into the long-term effects of Salafi ideology on institutional stability and intercommunal relations. Elbasani (2018), Welten and Abbas (2022), and Rohman et al. (2025) analyzed how Salafi doctrine interacts with local governance and educational institutions. Elbasani noted that Salafi ideology challenges state-building efforts in Kosovo, often resulting in hybridized or fragile institutions. At the same time, Welten and Abbas documented the securitization of Dutch Muslim communities, where radical Salafi elements both shape and are shaped by counter-radicalization policies. Moreover, Rohman et al. focused on the educational domain in Indonesia, illustrating how Salafi curricula in Islamic boarding schools resist extremist influence through internal mechanisms like the concept of *al-wala' wa-al-bara'*. These contributions collectively suggest that while institutional rejection of Salafi extremism is possible, its ideological undercurrents remain persistent and difficult to dislodge.

Despite the breadth of existing literature, several gaps remain. First, there is limited empirical research on the reception of Salafi teachings among lay Muslims outside conflict zones. Second, while many works highlight the role of ideology, fewer analyze the economic and digital infrastructures that facilitate its spread. Finally, internal scholarly critiques from within Salafi circles are underrepresented, suggesting a need for more ethnographic engagement with non-militant Salafi communities. Therefore, future research could benefit from comparative studies across regions to evaluate how rejectionist tenets manifest differently in democratic versus authoritarian settings.

The Wahhabi School Of Thought: An Explanation

The term Wahhabi refers to a movement founded by Muhammad b. 'Abd al-Wahhab b. Sulaiman b. Ali (1115 H-1206 H), corresponding to (1703 CE-1792 CE), in the 18th century in Najd (al-Mansuri, 1898). He was from the Banu Tamim tribe and passed away in 1206 H at the age of 92, and his body was buried in Dir'iyyah (Najd). He was born in the town of al-'Uyaynah, a small town located about 70 km west of Riyadh. His father, 'Abd al-Wahhab, was a renowned Hanbali scholar and had served as a judge and mufti for that town. It is alleged that his grandfather, Sulaiman b. Ali was the mufti for the entire Najd region (Hirsi Muhammad Haylulah, 1996).

He grew up in a family that was well-versed in the Hanbali school of thought. This is since in the Najd region, there were many adherents of the Hanbali madhhab, and it was close to Iraq, which at the time was the main center for spreading the Hanbali school of thought. After he expressed his views, which clearly caused controversy, a dispute arose between him and the

villagers and between him and his father. Additionally, Sheikh Sulaiman b. ‘Abd al-Wahhab, his brother, wrote a book to refute the ideology his brother advocated, titled “*Fasl al-Khitab fi al-Radd ‘ala Muhammad Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhab*.” His father, brother, and teachers had an inkling that Muhammad b. ‘Abd al-Wahhab would become misguided and deviant after witnessing many of his opinions, actions, and objections on various matters (Hirsi Muhammad Haylulah, 1996). Despite various criticisms and rebukes, he continued his efforts and publicly expressed his teachings only after his father’s death in 1153 H (Husain b. Ghannam, 1985).

Muhammad b. ‘Abd al-Wahhab wrote a treatise called “*Kasyf al-Shubuhah ‘an Khaliq al-Ard wa al-Samawat*” and distributed it to various regions to ensure his teachings spread widely. In this treatise, he presented his own ideas about monotheism, which clashed with mainstream Islamic thought. He adopted the approach of “*al-takfir al-shumuli*,” which declared all Muslims who rejected his view of monotheism as non-believers (Fazlur Rahman, 2008). He also led military uprisings against Muslims he deemed infidels. Additionally, he misused verses that were, in fact, revealed by Allah subhanahu wa ta’ala to the disbelievers among the Quraysh, applying them to pious Muslims, particularly those who practiced *al-tawassul*. One of his teachers, al-Sheikh Muhammad Ibn Sulaiman al-Kurdi, stated that he belonged to the group of al-Khawarij al-Mariqin due to his tendency to declare Muslims as non-believers (*takfir*) (Ayyub Sabri Pasha, t.t).

The emergence of Muhammad b. Abdul Wahhab’s movement began in 1143 H, while his teachings started to spread in 1150 H. The movement originated in Najd (East of Medina), between the regions of al-‘Uyaynah and al-Dir’iyyah. This is based on a collaborative agreement between Muhammad b. ‘Abd al-Wahhab and Muhammad b. Sa’ud b. Muqrin b. Mirkhan (d. 1765 CE) (Hamadi al-Rudaysi & Asma’ Nuwaydah, 2008), from Bani Hanifah (Al-Mansuri, al-Shaikh Ibrahim al-Samnudi, 1898), who was the ruler of al-Dir’iyyah. ‘Asir b. Ma’mar, the ruler of al-‘Uyaynah, also played a key role in this alliance. Muhammad b. Sa’ud assumed control of the region two years after his father’s death in Dir’iyyah in 1139 H (Hasan b. Farhan al-Maliki, 2004). His power grew stronger with the support of the British and the assistance of his brothers. Accordingly, he initiated a movement to renew Islam, believing it had been tainted by innovations (*bid’ah*), superstitions, and myths. In particular, his approach was to rally followers of monotheism (*al-Muwahhidun*) to call for the unification of Allah and wage *jihad* against those they deemed as deviants, heretics, or apostates (Kamarul Azmi Jasmi, 2007).

Muhammad b. Abdul Wahhab was highly proactive in disseminating his beliefs, undertaking key actions such as penning letters to scholars and rulers across several regions of the Arab world. This includes Riyadh, al-Ihsa, al-Hamayn, Egypt, Syria, Iraq, India, Yemen, and beyond (Kamarul Azmi Jasmi, 2007). His letters typically highlighted what he saw as the perils of shirk threatening the Islamic world, enumerating various customs he viewed as *bid’ah*. Some of these practices included seeking intercession (*tawassul*) from the Prophet, other prophets, and saints, requesting the Prophet’s intercession, as well as constructing edifices over graves (Husain b. Ghannam, 1985). He also set aflame the book “*Dala’il al-Khairat*,” known for its multitude of blessings and salutations for the Prophet. He held the belief that Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) was merely a common messenger dispatched by a ruler to convey news to his people. Furthermore, he labeled Muslims who deviated from their madhhab as non-believers, among other contentious actions.

His philosophy starkly differed from that of others like al-Sheikh Shah Waliyyullah al-Dehlawi, al-Sheikh Muhammad Hayat al-Sindi, al-Sheikh al-Tahanawi al-Hindi, and al-Allamah Muhammad b. Ismail al-Amir al-Sanani (Muhammad Abu Zahrah, t.t). These intellectuals propagated Islam in their respective areas with a soft approach, without ever proclaiming any Muslims as non-faithful. Conversely, Muhammad b. ‘Abdul Wahhab, under his belief system, deemed anyone who contradicted his Wahhabi principles as heretics (Husain b. Ghannam, 1985).

During the 1800s, the influence of the Wahhabi doctrine began to permeate various ideologies emerging in the Malay Archipelago. This influence was discernible in the philosophies expounded by groups like *Kaum Muda*, *Salafiyyah*, *Mazhab Salaf*, *Ansar al-Sunnah*, *al-Athari*, *Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jama’ah al-Salafiyyah*. Their call to “return to the Quran and Sunnah” or being “protectors of the Sunnah and purgers of *bid’ah*” was a clear testament to their roots. Notably, these groups were proactive in pushing their agendas and strategies in an attempt to sway the majority of Muslim practices and beliefs.

Historical Entry of Wahhabi Thought Into The Malay Land

The emergence of Wahhabi beliefs in Malay lands is closely tied to the history of the *Kaum Muda* movement, pioneered by two leading figures who also represent modernist Muslim thinkers in Malaysia (Ibrahim Abu Bakar, 1991): Sheikh Tahir Jalaluddin al-Falaki al-Azhari and Sheikh Syed al-Hadi (Farid Mat Zain & Rabitah Mohd Ghazali, 2006). Ironically, the thought process of these two figures in advocating reform and renewal among the local community at that time was inspired by the ideas of Jalaluddin al-Afghani (d. 1315 H/1879 M), Muhammad Abduh (d. 1323 H/1905 M) and Muhammad Rasyid Ridha (d. 1353 H/1935 M) who are known as reform figures in Egypt at the end of the 19th century. The movement led by Muhammad Abduh was also known as the Wahhabi Movement (Farid Mat Zain & Rabitah Mohd Ghazali, 2006).

A thorough search of historical sketches has unearthed some facts about the initial seeds of this ideology’s introduction, entwined through several significant events, among them are:

- a. The inception of ideas related to the Wahhabi movement can be traced through the involvement of *Kaum Muda* leaders in the early 20th century, such as Sheikh Tahir Jalaluddin. According to Hamdan Hassan (1973), his educational background, having graduated from Al-Azhar University and being acquainted with Muhammad Rasyid Ridha, the founder of *Al-Manar* magazine and a close associate of Sheikh Muhammad Abduh, influenced his thinking with their ideologies (Sohaimi Abdul Aziz, 2003). Subsequent to completing his studies in Astronomy at Al-Azhar University in 1897, he traveled to Mecca to further deepen his religious knowledge from the scholars of Mecca and Medina at that time. In 1899, he returned home and began introducing reformist ideas within the Muslim community in Malaya during that era. The prominence of the Wahhabi doctrine advocated through this Young Generation movement can be observed through the publication of various articles in the *Al-Imam* magazine, which he initiated in 1906 (Mohammad Redzuan Othman, 2005; Abdul Aziz Mat Ton, 2006); Fadhlullah Jamil, 2003) Interestingly, these presented ideas also share similarities with those discovered in the *‘Urwat al-Wuthqa* magazine published by Syed Muhammad ‘Abduh and Jalaluddin al-Afghani in Paris (Osman Haji Khalid, 1988).

- b. In addition to Sheikh Tahir Jalaluddin, the Kaum Muda movement, which was perceived as endorsing Wahhabi doctrine, was also evident under the activities led by renowned religious figures in the Malay lands at the beginning of the 20th century, namely Syed Syaikh al-Hadi (Fadhlullah Jamil, 1998). He was recognized as a founding pioneer of the Kaum Muda movement in the Malay territories apart from Sheikh Tahir Jalaluddin. His initial endeavor in promoting this movement in the Malay lands was establishing the Madrasah al-Iqbal Islamiyyah in 1907 on Seligi Road, Singapore (Talib Semat, 1992). Nevertheless, Fadhlullah Jamil (1998) mentioned that due to conflicts between parents and teachers, on the one hand, and school authorities represented by Raja Hj. 'Ali b. Raja Ahmad, the brother of the Sultan of Riau, on the other hand, the school had to be closed. Subsequently, he opened the Madrasah al-Hadi in Kaba city, Melaka in 1915. This school taught progressive Islamic teachings based on Sheikh Muhammad 'Abduh's thoughts. However, his reformist approach to leading the school was not accepted by the local community, especially the Old Faction (Kaum Tua), which was comprised of traditional scholars and nobility (Talib Semat, 1990).
- c. There are also records from the late Tuan Guru Hj Uthman Jalal al-Din b. Muhammad in his book titled *Matali' al-Anwar wa Majami' al-Azhar*. He stated that the Young Turks movement had made its mark in Malay land in the early decades of the 20th century ('Uthman Jalal al-Din b. Muhammad, t.t). This was evidenced by several religious disputes among the Malay population at that time, which led to divisions among the Malay community. He noted:

"Indeed, we began studying the branches of Islamic law (furu' al-sharī'ah) and other related disciplines in the year 1311 H/1890 CE. During that period, there was no change in religious matters among our people; rather, they continued to follow one of the four madhhabs (schools of thought), and there were many prominent scholars among them. Then, in the year 1319 H/1898 CE, we began residing in Mecca for four years. During that time, we also did not observe any change in religious matters among our people, and we spent eleven years studying the branches of Islamic law and its associated sciences. Then, in the year 1341 H/1900 CE, we again resided in Mecca. There, too, no change in religious matters was found. However, in the year 1343 H/1902 CE, the Wahhabi group took control of Mecca and Medina. Subsequently, in the year 1351 H/1910 CE, we returned to the Malay Archipelago (Jawi). At that time, we found our people divided into several factions, and there were many disputes among them."

The reform movement led by Syed Syaikh al-Hadi and the Kaum Muda is observed to have spread in the Federated Malay States on the West Coast, such as in Perak. Furthermore, this renewal movement continued to develop and spread to other states like Selangor, Negeri Sembilan, and the other Unfederated Malay States, such as Perlis (Talib Semat, 1992). It is reported that the true goal of Syed Syaikh al-Hadi's struggle is to cleanse the Malay people from what he considers nonsensical beliefs, while also improving the economic and social status of the Malays. However, his criticism of the Kaum Tua indirectly involved religious authorities and the elite, including sultans and nobles who were the main defenders of the Kaum Tua (William R. Roff, 1985). Accordingly, Hamdan Hassan (1973) mentioned that Syed Sheikh al-Hadi was evidently more successful in expanding his influence in the Straits Settlements, namely Singapore, Malacca, and Penang. Interestingly, Syed Syaikh al-Hadi was perceived as

more successful in expanding his influence in the Straits Settlements, namely Singapore, Melaka, and Penang. This is attributed to the fact that sultans did not rule these states and were only governed by the British. This made it easier for him to disseminate his teachings and promote reform movements within the Malay society.

Through this analysis, it can be formulated that the beginning moments of the Wahhabi ideology started spreading in Malaya as early as the 19th century. The ideology was conveyed through the Malay community movement and the writing of articles in famous magazines and newspapers at that time, receiving various reactions from the conservative group strongly adhering to the teachings of Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jama'ah (Ramlah Adam, 2003). However, this Islamic reform movement lost its significance and function by the year 1930 (William R. Roff, 1985).

Rejection of Wahabi Ideology By Malay Land Scholars: Response And Reflection

Islam is the symbol of peace and well-being for its followers. If it is corrupted by rigid and narrow interpretations of its texts, the faith of its adherents also becomes compromised. Therefore, a continuous effort to cleanse and correct the misinterpretations and errors in understanding religious texts must be led and refined by enlightened and grounded scholars. This initiative is evidenced by the existence of numerous great works, which have successfully broken the deadlock and provided gentle explanations to address the confusion caused by those who introduced rigid thought processes. This, ultimately, stifles the growth of knowledge and intellectual development among the Muslim community.

Considering that Muslims in the Malay Peninsula are closely aligned with the creed of Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jama'ah following the Ash'ari school, several writings by these scholars contain rejections and criticisms of ideologies that differ from this tradition. Among these are the will of the late Tuan Guru Haji Abdullah Pak Him, al-Sheikh 'Uthman Jalal al-Din bin Muhammad bin 'Abd al-Samad al-Kelantani in his books "*al-Durrah al-Nafi'ah fi Asyrat al-Sa'ah*" and "*Matali' al-Anwar wa Majami' al-Azhar*," Shaikh Muhammad Syafie bin 'Abdullah bin Muhammad bin Ahmad Rangkul, Langgih, Patani in his work "*Pelita Penuntut*," Tuan Guru 'Abdul 'Aziz b. Ismail al-Fatani in his book "*Risalah al-Misbah al-Munir fi Ma'rifah Allah al-Qadir*," and many more. For example, Ismail Che Daud (2007) asserted the will that was personally issued by the late Tuan Guru Haji Abdullah Pak Him is as follows:

Indeed, we began studying the branches of Islamic law (furu' al-shari'ah) and other related sciences in the year 1311 H/1890 CE. During that time, there were no changes in religious matters among our community; they adhered to one of the four recognized madhhabs (schools of jurisprudence), and many among them were distinguished scholars. In 1319 H/1898 CE, we took up residence in Mecca for four years, and during that period, we observed no religious deviation among our people. We continued studying furu' al-shari'ah and its associated disciplines for eleven years. In 1341 H/1900 CE, we returned again to reside in Mecca, and still found no changes in religious matters. However, in 1343 H/1902 CE, the Wahhabi faction seized control of Mecca and Medina. By 1351 H/1910 CE, we returned to the Malay Archipelago (Jawi) and found our people fragmented into various groups, embroiled in numerous disagreements.

In fact, Tuan Guru Haji Abdullah Pak Him criticized Ibn al-Qayyim, stating:

Their rulings are derived from the book Hadyu al-Rasul (هدى الرسول), which is an abridgement of the book Hadyu al-'Ibad (هدى العباد), authored by Ibn al-Qayyim al-Kharaji. However, Ibn al-Qayyim and all of his works have been rejected by the scholars of Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jama'ah.

He further added, stating:

"O Malay people, do not be deceived by their inciting tricks in issuing rulings that are not accepted within the Shafi'i madhhab, and their fatwas on controversial matters have already reached the ears of the general public. It is hoped that the Malay community will not become divided among themselves."

He also left advice for the Malay people, stating:

"So that the Malay people do not become divided among themselves. At present, a Khawarij sect has emerged in Malaya — that is, a sect that has deviated from the four madhhabs of Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jama'ah [what is meant here is the Kaum Muda or Wahhabi movement]. Their intention is to confuse the understanding of the general public, which is already well-established, and to dismantle the unity of the true Malay nation, while casting blame upon the majority of the Malay people."

Later, al-Sheikh 'Uthman Jalal al-Din bin Muhammad bin 'Abd al-Samad al-Kelantani, also known as Sheikh Uthman Jalaluddin Penanti (t.t), recorded his views on the Wahhabi movement in two of his books. In the book "*al-Durrah al-Nafi'ah fi Asyrat al-Sa'ah*," in the chapter on "*Signs of the End Times That Have Occurred*," he stated:

It is narrated from Abu Sa'id in a marfū' ḥadīth (a report whose chain of narration reaches the Prophet) that there will emerge from the Mariqin faction a group who recite the Book of Allah (the Qur'an) while their understanding is still immature, such that it does not go beyond their throats (i.e., it does not enter their hearts), but merely remains on their tongues. They will tear apart the religion just as an arrow pierces through its target. They will kill the Muslims and leave alone the idol-worshipping disbelievers. The Prophet said: 'By Allah, if I were to encounter them during my time, I would certainly kill them as the people of 'Ād and Thamūd were destroyed.'

The group referred to here is understood to be those who deviate from Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jama'ah, such as the Wahhabi and Rafidhi sects and others like them. This interpretation is supported by the ḥadīth of Ibn 'Umar, in which the Prophet said that people would emerge from the eastern side of Madinah, reciting the Qur'an, yet it would not pass beyond their throats. Every time one generation of them is eliminated, another will emerge, continuing until their final group appears alongside the emergence of the Dajjāl and the return of Prophet 'Īsā (peace be upon him). The Wahhabi

and Rafidhi sects are known to reside in the eastern region of Makkah and Madinah, and they are those who recite the Qur'an without it penetrating beyond their throats. It remains merely upon their tongues, and it brings no real benefit in guiding them to follow what the Qur'an actually commands them.

Meanwhile, in his book “*Matali' al-Anwar wa Majami' al-Azhar*,” on page 170, he stated:

“Indeed, we began studying the branches of Islamic law (furū' al-sharī'ah) and other related disciplines in the year 1311 H. During that time, there was no change in religious matters among our people; rather, they adhered to one of the four madhhabs (schools of thought), and there were many prominent scholars among them. Then, in the year 1319 H, we began residing in Mecca for four years. During that period, we did not observe any change in religious matters among our people, so we continued studying the branches of Islamic law and its supporting sciences for eleven years. Then, in the year 1341 H, we again resided in Mecca. At that time, too, there was no change in religious matters. However, in the year 1343 H, the Wahhabi group took control of Mecca and Medina. Then, in the year 1351 H, we returned to the Malay Archipelago (Jawi). There, we found that our people had become divided into various factions and were engaged in numerous disputes among themselves.”

In his book “*Hadiqah al-Azhar wa al-Rayahin fi Manaqib al-Akhyar wa Akhbar al-Salihin*,” Sheikh Ahmad b. Muhammad b. Zain b. Mustafa al-Fatani (t.t), while discussing the turmoil during the reign of Sultan Salim, mentioned:

...[and] among these tribulations was the fitnah of the Wahhabi sect, whose extremism led them to rule over the two noble sanctuaries. They are a group possessing a corrupt school of thought, a deviant path, and a harmful creed. The one who propagated their vile doctrine and enforced it was Muhammad ibn 'Abd al-Wahhab, whose origin was from the East, from the tribe of Banu Tamim. His initial activity was that he was among those who sought knowledge in the city of Madinah al-Munawwarah — may the best of blessings and peace be upon its Master. His father was a righteous man, as was his brother. Both his father and brother, along with all of his teachers, foresaw in him the signs of deviation, misguidance, and heresy due to what they observed from his speech, actions, and disputations in various matters.

He then innovated for himself a misguided madhhab, in opposition to all the imams of the religion. He declared those who were ignorant as misguided, and he pronounced takfīr upon anyone who did not follow his sect, even among the believers. He declared as polytheists those who visited the grave of the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him), or the graves of saints and the righteous, and those who sought intercession through them. He also prohibited sending blessings upon the Prophet (peace be upon him), among other problematic beliefs. He claimed that all of mankind had fallen into disbelief from the sixth century of Hijrah up to his own time — and that he was the one who had revived their Islam for them...

Shaikh Ahmad Khatib b. ‘Abd al-Latif al-Minangkabawi (2006), in his book “Risalah al-Khittatu al-Mardiyyah fi Radd Syubhah man Qala Bid’ah al-Talaffuz bi al-Niyyah,” wrote: ⁶⁴

In the year 1326 H, a book by Ibn al-Qayyim, who was originally Hanbali in madhhab but Wahhabi in practice, entered [our land]. Among the positions of his school was the prohibition of taqlid (following legal precedent) in both fundamental and subsidiary matters of the religion, and the obligation for every individual to act upon whatever they understood from the Qur’an and Sunnah, even if they had not attained the rank of ijtihad (independent legal reasoning). He also prohibited the visitation of the Prophet’s grave and declared disbelief upon anyone who visited the Prophet’s grave or other graves. These positions and others, which will be further clarified, contradict the consensus (ijma’) of all Muslims. He is among those who have deviated from the true path according to the creed of Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jama’ah...

Meanwhile, in the book “Pelita Penuntut” by Shaikh Muhammad Syafie bin ‘Abdullah bin Muhammad bin Ahmad Rangkul, Langgih, Patani, on page 11, the author (t.t) wrote:

“Likewise, what is extremely erroneous and highly misleading to the general public is a faction that has emerged prominently in recent times, known as the Kaum Muda (Modernist Group). They hold fast to the literal meaning of hadiths and Qur’anic verses without applying interpretative methods (ta’wīl) or considering the principles of textual restriction and qualification, such as the muqayyad (qualified), mutlaq (unqualified), khāṣṣ (specific), and ‘āmm (general), or the concepts of nāsiḥ (abrogator) and mansūkh (abrogated). Whatever wording they find in a hadith or Qur’anic verse, they consider it as decisive evidence without taking into account its broader jurisprudential context.

They reject every legal ruling not explicitly mentioned in the apparent text of the Qur’an and Hadith. Consequently, they deny the authority of scholarly consensus (ijmā’), analogical reasoning (qiyās), and the four established madhhabs. They invalidate the foundational principles set by the four imams and nullify rulings that have been established through ijtihād and qiyās. As a result, they corrupt well-established practices such as the recommended talqīn for the deceased, the fidyah for missed fasts and prayers, and the Sunnah practice of verbalizing the intention (niyyah) for prayer, among other matters.

Additionally, Tuan Guru ‘Abdul ‘Aziz b. Ismail al-Fatani (1994), in his book “Risalah al-Misbah al-Munir fi Ma’rifah Allah al-Qadir,” mentioned in the introduction that:

“And I ask Allah that this treatise be made a shield that can protect and repel all deviant teachings which mislead the general public — teachings propagated by those who, due to their ignorance, are unaware of the harm they cause. Among these are the claims that studying the well-known twenty attributes of God is not obligatory, the belief that one can see God in this world, the adherence to the literal meanings of ambiguous (mutashābihāt)

verses, and the assertion that God occupies a physical place, along with other such doctrines of the people of misguidance (ahl al-ḍalālāh)."

Abu Zuhaidah and Abu Qunai'ah (the original names of the authors are not mentioned) (t.t) stated in their book, in the chapter titled *"Seeds That Divide or Fragment Islam"*:

"And thus became apparent the seeds of those who caused corruption among people during the seventh century and into the eighth century, namely Shaykh Taqiy al-Din Ibn Taymiyyah, who followed the madhhab of Ibn Hazm. Ibn Taymiyyah had several followers who supported and reinforced his school of thought: (1) 'Abd Allah ibn 'Abd al-Rahman al-Sindi, (2) 'Abd al-Karim ibn Fakhr al-Din, both of whom authored books to strengthen his doctrine; (3) Muhammad ibn 'Abd al-Wahhab, the leader of the Wahhabi movement in his time; (4) Muhammad ibn Ahmad ibn 'Abd al-Hadi; (5) Muhammad ibn Isma'il al-San'ani; and (6) Shaykh al-Shawkani."

Meanwhile, in the book *"al-Jawahir al-Saniyyah fi Syarh al-'Aqa'id al-Diniyyah wa Ahkam al-Fiqh al-Mardiyyah wa Tariq al-Suluk al-Muhammadiyah"*, Sheikh Daud b. 'Abdullah al-Fatani (t.t) wrote:

"... And Allah is not in any place, nor is He above, nor below, nor to the right, nor to the left, nor in front, nor behind, because all these directions imply physical form (jism), and Allah, Glorified and Exalted is He, does not possess physical form nor accidents ('arad). This is because all created things fall under two categories: substance (jism) and accident ('arad). Place and change are attributes of substance and accidents, respectively; likewise, largeness and smallness are characteristics of quantity in substances—when there is much substance, it is called large, and when little, it is called small. Change is an attribute of accidents, such as movement and stillness, which are traits of created things. And Allah, Glorified and Exalted is He, is pre-eternal (qadim) and cannot be described with any attributes of creation. Whoever limits the Essence of Allah to a place, there is no doubt about his disbelief—for example, by saying that Allah is confined to the heavens or the earth. However, whoever ascribes direction (jihah) to Allah without specifying a particular place is not considered a disbeliever, but rather a transgressor (fasiq), such as one who says that Allah is in the heavens or on the earth without affirming confinement to a specific place..."

Meanwhile, there was also another prominent Nusantara scholar, Tuan Guru Sheikh Abdul Qadir b. Abdul Muthalib al-Indonesi al-Mandili (1958), who was equally steadfast in curbing the spread of the Wahhabi movement in Malay lands. He authored a book titled *"Sinar Matahari Buat Penyuluh Kesilapan Abu Bakr al-Asya'ari."* The book was written in Makkah al-Mukarramah and was completed on Saturday, 4th of Shawwal 1378 H/1956 CE. He also wrote another book titled *"al-Mazhab atau Tiada Bermazhab"* at the request of Tuan Guru Haji Hasan Ahmad al-Fatani, to respond to a book authored by a prominent member of the Kaum Muda, Hasan Ahmad Bandung, titled *"al-Mazhab: Wajibkah atau Haramkah Bermazhab?"* This second book was completed on Tuesday, 8th of Ramadan 1378 H/1956 CE. Among the conclusions he mentioned in his book were:

“Taqlid and adherence to a madhhab are not prohibited for the general public. Allah the Exalted has not forbidden laypeople from following a madhhab (performing taqlid in matters of jurisprudence). The Messenger of Allah (peace be upon him) did not forbid his community, particularly the laypeople, from adhering to a madhhab. The Companions (may Allah be pleased with them) did not prohibit the common people from following a madhhab; rather, there was consensus among them in allowing laypeople to perform taqlid. Neither the Tabi’un nor the Tabi’ al-Tabi’in forbade laypeople from adhering to a madhhab. Likewise, the four imams did not prevent the general public from following their respective madhhabs. From all of this, it is understood that following a madhhab and performing taqlid are not prohibited.”

In addition to the prominent scholars mentioned above from the Malay Peninsula, numerous other scholars have also made significant efforts to counter the spread of the deviant Wahhabi ideology, particularly in matters of creed. They contributed by authoring reference texts in the Malay language, aiming to facilitate a clearer and more accessible understanding of the Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jama’ah doctrine for the local Muslim community. Among the notable works produced were *Sharh ‘Aqidah al-Iman* (1748 CE) by Shaykh Shihabuddin al-Hajj ibn ‘Abd Allah al-Jawi; *Bidayah al-Hidayah* (1756 CE) by Shaykh Muhammad Zain ibn al-Faqih Jalaluddin of Aceh; *Zahrah al-Murid fi Bayan Kalimat al-Tawhid* (1764 CE) and *Siyar al-Salikin* (1788 CE), both authored by Shaykh ‘Abd al-Samad al-Palimbani; *Tuhfah al-Raghibin fi Bayan Haqiqah Iman al-Mu’minin wa ma Yufsiduhu fi Raidat al-Murtaddin* (1774 CE) by Shaykh Muhammad Arshad al-Banjari, and *Khulasah al-Mardiyyah fi Masa’il al-Khilafiyyah* (1389 H) by Haji Ahmad ibn Haji ‘Abd al-Wahhab al-Fusani. This, ultimately, refutes the claims of those inclined towards the Wahhabi movement, who suggest that the preachers in the Nusantara generally focus on issues of worship and ethics, rather than prioritizing matters of creed as the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) did.

The Malay Scholars’ Rejection of Wahhabi Ideology: A Critical Analysis

The findings of this study reveal a persistent, multidimensional resistance by Malay scholars toward Wahhabi ideology. Anchored in the Ash’arite theological tradition and the jurisprudential schools of Sunni Islam, these scholars objected to Wahhabism’s rigid literalism and its rejection of traditional scholarly consensus, mystical dimensions of Islam (*tasawwuf*), and established religious practices within the Malay world. Notably, the analysis highlights several recurring themes: the theological misalignment of Wahhabism with Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jama’ah, the sociocultural disruption triggered by Wahhabi teachings, and the scholarly defense of established Malay Islamic orthodoxy. Prominent figures such as Shaikh Muhammad Syafie of Patani, Sheikh Uthman Jalaluddin al-Kelantani, and Sheikh Abdul Qadir al-Mandili offer comprehensive refutations through written works and public discourse. Their arguments consistently emphasize the deviation of Wahhabi principles from Sunni orthodoxy, especially in areas such as the rejection of taqlid (legal conformity), denial of *tawassul* (intercession), opposition to the veneration of saints, and misinterpretation of *mutashābihāt* (ambiguous texts). Meanwhile, the emergence of the Kaum Muda movement, often aligned with Wahhabi reformism, further prompted defensive efforts among traditional scholars, who perceived it as a destabilizing force that undermined religious unity and communal harmony in the Malay world.

Interpreting these findings, it becomes evident that the primary concern of Malay scholars was the protection of a holistic religious identity that harmonized law, theology, and spirituality. Their rejection of Wahhabism was not based on theological dogmatism alone but on recognizing its broader sociopolitical ramifications. Wahhabism's *takfiri* tendencies, labeling Muslims who do not conform as unbelievers, were particularly dangerous, as they threatened to fragment Muslim unity and provoke internal strife. Thus, by invoking classical scholarly consensus (*ijma'*) and defending practices rooted in centuries of Islamic tradition, Malay scholars aimed to neutralize the divisive impact of Wahhabi ideology. The classification of Wahhabism alongside the historical Khawarij movement, as recorded by Sheikh Uthman Jalaluddin, further underscores the perception of Wahhabism as a sectarian deviation. Moreover, these themes resonate with global trends where Salafi-Wahhabi ideology has spurred sectarian violence and theological polarization, as observed in studies by Evans (2011) and Rasouli et al. (2023). In essence, the Malay scholars' integration of local tradition with universal Islamic principles illustrates an indigenous intellectual response that reaffirms theological orthodoxy and ensures cultural continuity.

The implications for religious scholarship and policy in the contemporary era are significant. The Malay scholarly rejection of Wahhabism provides a model for engaging with ideological extremism through intellectual rigor, theological depth, and cultural sensitivity. This approach can inform current strategies in countering religious radicalization by emphasizing the significance of local religious traditions, scholarly continuity, and spiritual moderation. Correspondingly, policymakers and religious authorities in Southeast Asia should leverage the extensive literary and intellectual heritage left by these scholars to promote a balanced Islamic discourse that resists both extremism and anti-religious secularism. Furthermore, religious education curricula can incorporate the works of figures like Sheikh Abdul Samad al-Palembani and Sheikh Muhammad Arshad al-Banjari to instill a deeper appreciation for classical Sunni thought among new generations. In addition, future research should explore the untapped manuscripts and localized fatwas of traditional Malay scholars to enrich the field's understanding of regional Islamic intellectual history. In line with this, comparative analyses between the Malay response to Wahhabism and those of other regions (such as North Africa or the Indian subcontinent) could illuminate universal patterns and context-specific adaptations. Despite some limitations in the accessibility of primary sources and the underrepresentation of female scholars in this discourse, this study affirms that the Malay scholarly tradition has played, and continues to play, a vital role in preserving the integrity of Sunni Islam against ideological encroachments.

Conclusion

The study examined the critical responses of Malay scholars toward the Wahhabi ideology, with particular attention to how these scholars interpreted, refuted, and preserved traditional Islamic teachings in the face of what they saw as theological deviation. The primary aim was to explore how these scholars defended the intellectual, theological, and spiritual heritage of Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jama'ah within the Malay context. Concurrently, the analysis focused on the writings and statements of leading religious figures across generations, revealing a coherent intellectual trajectory that consistently emphasized the significance of adhering to classical scholarship, engaging in contextual interpretation, and preserving communal unity. The review of textual sources demonstrated that rejection of Wahhabism was not merely a reaction to theological novelty but a considered response to an ideology perceived as destabilizing and antagonistic to longstanding religious norms. Among the most pronounced concerns was the

Wahhabi repudiation of accepted practices such as visiting graves, *tawassul*, adherence to the madhhab system, and reverence for Sufi teachings, all of which were deeply rooted in Malay Islamic life.

The findings suggest that the contributions of Malay scholars in resisting Wahhabi ideology represent more than isolated rebuttals. They form part of a broader tradition of Islamic preservation anchored in balanced interpretation and communal well-being. Additionally, the defense mounted by scholars like Sheikh Uthman Jalaluddin, Sheikh Abdul Qadir al-Mandili, and others underscores a deeply embedded commitment to theological clarity and cultural continuity. Their writings preserved doctrinal orthodoxy and shaped the intellectual foundation for current and future generations to engage with Islam critically, yet respectfully. Moreover, these contributions carry substantial implications for the contemporary Islamic world, particularly in contexts where theological rigidity threatens to undermine social harmony and pluralism. While the research acknowledges limitations, such as the predominance of male voices and limited access to some primary manuscripts, the overarching narrative remains clear. Accordingly, Malay scholars have historically provided a strong, principled resistance to ideologies that risk marginalizing the nuanced, rich, and inclusive traditions of Sunni Islam. Nevertheless, the relevance of their insights continues to resonate in contemporary debates on religious reform, identity, and the role of local wisdom in global theological discourse.

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