



## Muhammadiyah as a Model of Transformative Islam in Indonesia

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**Abstract:** This study aims to examine Muhammadiyah as a contemporary social movement rooted in religion in Indonesia and to explore how its role and influence shape educational institutions. Employing a bibliographic review combined with interviews and supported by historical analysis, this research is grounded in a sociological framework. Through this approach, the presence of Muhammadiyah can be examined scientifically using the perspective of new social movement theory, particularly through resource mobilization theory and identity-based theory. The findings indicate that both theoretical approaches are applicable, with identity-oriented theory taking precedence, followed by resource mobilization analysis. Muhammadiyah is portrayed as an organization that introduces a transformative model within Indonesia's religiously inspired social movements. Within the framework of identity-oriented theory, Muhammadiyah represents both a collective identity and an ideological foundation. Meanwhile, resource mobilization theory highlights how Islam and Muhammadiyah function as platforms for mobilizing organizational resources, with the primary support originating from its members. Practically, this mobilization is reflected in philanthropic initiatives and the empowerment of Muhammadiyah's charitable institutions. Previous scholarly works are reaffirmed in this study, demonstrating that Muhammadiyah, as a major Islamic movement, has made a significant contribution to shaping Indonesian society into a more educated and socially conscious community. For this reason, Muhammadiyah can be regarded as a transformative Islamic movement. Ultimately, this article contributes to the discourse on modernist Islamic thought, particularly within the framework of tajdid or Islamic renewal.

**Keywords:** New Social Movement; Islamic organization; identity theory; resource mobilization; social empowerment.

### Introduction

Poverty has existed throughout human history (Spahn, 2018) and continues to influence various dimensions of human life (Maree, 2015). As a social reality, poverty is a frequently discussed issue and remains relevant in contemporary discourse (Townsend, 2014). Conditions of poverty within communities are shaped by social, economic, psychological, and political determinants (Wargadinata, 2011). Mountford emphasizes that poverty represents a serious and persistent challenge faced by every nation (Mountford, 2019). Its complexity lies not only in poverty itself, but also in its far-reaching effects on health, education systems, corruption, unemployment, and job security. Furthermore, poverty is multidimensional because it intersects with cultural, social, political, and non-economic aspects, meaning it cannot be viewed solely as a welfare concern

(Ilmi, 2017). Religion plays a significant role in addressing poverty. As a deeply rooted element of society, religion is expected to contribute to poverty alleviation through cultural, moral, and spiritual approaches. From a spiritual perspective, religion may not always directly address material deprivation; however, it offers ethical guidance and life orientation that remain closely connected to human reality. In this way, religion provides space for individuals and communities to develop in a balanced manner, including in confronting poverty, which fundamentally poses both a challenge and a threat to human existence.

Religion has long been a support for the traditional order; therefore, it is still believed to be very important for the industrial order that will emerge in the future. Although they espoused conflicting interpretations of both religion and society, two major figures in the modern sociology of religion, Durkheim and Weber, both situated religion within the broader study of social change. Of Durkheim's three main studies, his primary focus was consistently on religion. Meanwhile, Weber's sociological attention identified the essential antagonism between charisma (the irrational force that is the foundation of religious experience and movements) and the processes of institutionalization, routinization, and rationalization (Weber, 1993). Therefore, all religions always emphasize responsibility towards fellow humans (Hannigan, 1991).

Poverty is one of the challenges of religion. If we trace it to the 19th and early 20th centuries, there has been a concentration of population in big cities in Third World countries that have been developing since the early 20th Century. At the beginning of the Century, there was rapid growth in these cities, so they became industrial cities. However, large population growth is different from the growth of industrialization. Experts call the phenomenon 'over-urbanization,' 'pseudo-urbanization,' or 'hyper-urbanization.' This condition has given rise to unemployment and jobs that do not match skills. The birth of poor people and limited urban space have given rise to new, more complicated problems regarding living space for them (Gilbert & Gugler, 2005).

This kind of phenomenon began to occur in cities in Indonesia at the end of the 19th Century. (Rahman, 2013) More drastic changes occurred regarding the increase in urban population after Indonesia emerged from the war following its proclamation of independence. Several large cities in Indonesia have to bear a heavier burden due to population growth, especially urbanization. The reason is that during the colonial period until the beginning of independence, only a few cities developed. As a result, the flow of urbanization only flows to these cities (Basudoro, 2017). Therefore, the large rate of population growth that is not commensurate with the growth of industrialization has given rise to unemployment, underemployment and jobs that need to match skills in Indonesian society.

At the end of the 19th Century, the government attempted to make a positive contribution to the welfare of the indigenous population through "Ethical Politics" policies. The economic struggle remains difficult for Javanese due to the scarcity of agricultural land, which prompts many to migrate to the city in search of employment. The migration of Indonesians from villages to cities continues to occur, particularly in large and strategic urban centres. The 1920 population census recorded that 6.63 percent of Java's population lived in cities. In this period, this number increased further in 1930, the population living in the city became 8.7 percent. Of this number, 3.8 percent live in cities with a population of more than 100,000 people. In the years after independence, for example, in 1970, the number of poor people amounted to 70 million people (60%), falling to 22 million people (11%) in 1997, but increased rapidly to 80 million people (an increase of around 400%) in 1998 when the economic crisis hit Indonesia (Suryawati, 2005).

According to BPS, as of March 2011 there were approximately 1.5 million people categorized as poor out of Indonesia's total population of 237.6 million, with poverty and unemployment identified as major national challenges. In 2017, the number of Indonesians living in poverty reached 27.77 million people, or around 10.64% in March 2017, showing an increase of about 6.90 thousand people compared to September 2016, when 27.76 million individuals, equivalent to 10.70%, were classified as poor (Statistik, 2017). BPS also reported that in March 2020 the poverty rate stood at 9.78 percent, marking an increase of 0.56 percentage points compared with September 2019, and 0.37 percentage points higher than

March 2019. In absolute numbers, this percentage represents 26.42 million poor people in March 2020, an increase of 1.63 million persons compared to September 2019 and 1.28 million compared to March 2019 (BPS, 2020).

From year to year, this problem always remains open to discussion among practitioners, academics, and bureaucratic circles. The data above shows that the problem of poverty still needs to be resolved by various poverty alleviation programs carried out by the government or the private sector. In terms of poverty characteristics based on region, poverty in a region can have several categories, namely: (a) Persistent poverty, namely chronic poverty or hereditary poverty, which is generally areas with a natural resource crisis or isolated areas; (b) Cyclical poverty, namely poverty which includes the overall economic cycle pattern; (c) Seasonal poverty, namely seasonal poverty as is often found in the case of fishermen and food crop farming; (d) Accidental poverty, namely poverty due to natural disasters or regional impacts of certain policies which cause the level of welfare of a community (Sartika et al., 2016; Zhou & Liu, 2022).

Poverty has five dimensions within the integrated concept of poverty, namely: (1) poverty, (2) helplessness, (3) vulnerability to face emergency situations, (4) dependency, and (5) alienation, both geographically and sociologically. Living in poverty is always synonymous with a lack of money and low income, but it includes low levels of health, low education, unfair treatment in the law, vulnerability to crime, powerlessness in power, and powerlessness in determining one's own life (Chambers, 2013; Triani et al., 2020).

Development sociology and development economics also recognize the term 'structural poverty'. Structural poverty is poverty that appears as a social phenomenon resulting from a societal structure that can be called 'unsocial'. This means that poverty is not something that happens by itself. Poverty is the result of the actions or even engineering of certain parties who benefit from it (Suryawasita, 1987).

This poverty is a direct result of structural injustice. Structural poverty occurs due to low access of some communities to resources that occur in a socio-cultural and socio-political system, does not support the liberation of poverty and, on the contrary, causes the growth of poverty. The structure of some societies could be better so that it is able to provide a way out of dependency for a large number of its members. In its development, structural poverty has received a lot of attention because it is seen as the cause of the growth and development of three other types of poverty, namely absolute poverty, relative poverty and cultural poverty (Jamasy, 2004).

Social scientists generally agree that the primary root of poverty is closely related to the economic system operating within a given society. However, many scholars also emphasize that poverty should not be understood merely as a consequence of economic mechanisms. Instead, poverty represents the outcome of complex interactions involving almost all dimensions of human life, including structural, social, cultural, and psychological factors (Basudoro, 2017). Therefore, poverty must be regarded as a serious and multidimensional problem that requires systematic attention and intervention. This perspective clearly contrasts with conservative views, which tend not to consider poverty as a critical issue. Conservatives often assume that poverty will naturally resolve itself through existing social and economic processes, and thus does not require significant intervention from the state or society.

Human poverty can be interpreted as a result of not fulfilling basic human needs, which include primary and secondary aspects. The primary aspect of poverty is poverty in the form of knowledge and skill assets. Secondary aspects of poverty include poverty in the form of social networks and financial and informal resources, such as lack of nutrition, water, housing, health care, and education. The characteristic of poor communities is their inability to access economic activities optimally, so they are increasingly left behind by other communities that have higher potential and abilities (Kadji, 2012).

The explanation above illustrates a condition that has accompanied human existence since the beginning; poverty has been a part of human life since humanity first appeared on Earth. This reality was also encountered by KH. Ahmad Dahlan during his lifetime in Yogyakarta. The city of Yogyakarta, often referred to as the "City of Fortresses," is symbolized by an emblem depicting two intertwined dragons, which represents its establishment in 1682

in the Javanese calendar or 1756 AD.

Since its founding, this city has experienced growth in its area, it turns out that many events, both large and small, have occurred in its history. The trajectory of these various events can be broadly stated as follows: (1) The establishment of the Duchy of Pakualaman in 1813; (2) The outbreak of the Diponegoro war in 1825-1830; (3) First Boedi Oetomo Congress in 1908 in Yogyakarta; (4) Establishment of Muhammadiyah in 1912; (5) Establishment of Siswo Park in 1922; (6) First Indonesian Women's Congress in 1928 in Yogyakarta; and (7) At the beginning of independence as the center of government of the Republic of Indonesia.

In the field of education, it turns out that the city of Yogyakarta has been the most appropriate place from the past until now, so this city has earned the nickname 'Student City.' Some of these schools include Tamanan. Kweekschool, Technische School, and Gadjah Mada University which were the only Indonesian state universities at that time. The abundance of educational infrastructure has created fertile seeds for national movements, and the city of Yogyakarta is one of the centers of the Indonesian nation's struggle movement alongside the cities of Bandung and Jakarta.

Numerous national congresses and movement activities have taken place in Yogyakarta, including the Jong Java Congress, the Islamic Union Congress, the Boedi Oetomo Congress, the Youth Congress, the Taman Siswa Congress, the Women's Congress, and the Muhammadiyah Congress. Historically, Yogyakarta has been closely linked to processes of social transformation, where social mobility is significantly shaped by education as a key driver of societal change. This development is strongly associated with the leadership of Sri Sultan Hamengkubuwono IX. Following the Proclamation of Independence on August 17, 1945, the Sultan, together with Pakualam VIII, officially declared on September 5, 1945, that Yogyakarta would become part of the territory of the Republic of Indonesia. Fundamentally, the political stance adopted by regional authorities played an essential role in strengthening national political consolidation (Goenawan & Harnoko, 1993).

## Method

This study is grounded in a scientific paradigm within the field of religious studies. In this framework, the ways Muhammadiyah understands and articulates religious experience are positioned as part of the social structure that actively contributes to poverty alleviation, while religion itself is viewed as an important driver of social transformation and a source of social resources (Edwards & Gillham, 2013; Mazur & Tomashuk, 2020; Tufte, 2017). Therefore, this research adopts a sociological and qualitative approach to explore and interpret the deeper meanings behind social realities that appear in everyday life (Bartmanski, 2018). The data utilized in this research consist of primary and secondary sources. Primary data include academic writings published in scientific journals by practitioners involved in Muhammadiyah university programs, interview transcripts with program coordinators, and official implementation reports produced by lecturer and student teams participating in community transformation initiatives. These data were collected from two Muhammadiyah higher education institutions in Jakarta, namely Universitas Muhammadiyah Prof. Dr. Hamka (UHAMKA) and the Ahmad Dahlan Institute of Technology and Business (ITB-AD). Meanwhile, secondary data are used to enrich analysis and provide a more comprehensive understanding of the phenomena under study. For this reason, the research also employs a historical-interpretive perspective (Chapman, 2010).

## Results and Discussion

### Transformative Movement Implemented by Muhammadiyah Universities

Kh Ahmad Dahlan, the founder of the Muhammadiyah Islamic movement in Indonesia, had embodied and practiced noble humanitarian values since the early establishment of the organization through the principle commonly referred to as a "life of giving." This concept is rooted in the theological and social teachings of Surah Al-Ma'un in the Qur'an. Ahmad Dahlan emphasized to his students that Islam should not merely be understood as a body of knowledge, but must be realized through the capacity to "give" in order to actualize Islamic values in

everyday life. A sincere and upright religious attitude, therefore, is reflected in compassion, especially toward the weak and marginalized groups.

As a major Islamic organization, Muhammadiyah has become the subject of extensive scholarly attention. Studies identify three epistemological phases of Muhammadiyah thought: the period from 1912 to 1950, characterized by debates on jurisprudence, tradition, and religious myths; the era from 1950 to 2000, when Muhammadiyah was positioned within modern Islamic discourse; and the period from the 2000s onward, when Muhammadiyah has increasingly been viewed as a civil society movement contributing to social transformation (Amin & Kamarudin, 2020). Other scholars note that Muhammadiyah consistently prioritizes educational initiatives and social welfare services (Elhady, 2017; Latief & Nashir, 2020; Tahir, 2010). Meanwhile, Zuhri (2017) highlights Muhammadiyah as a leading and independent civil society force in Indonesia, capable of serving as a balancing counterpart to state power (Amin & Kamarudin, 2020; Zuhri, 2017).

Muhammadiyah displays ideological traits that align with the characteristics of new social movements, differing fundamentally from the traditional working-class paradigm and the Marxist view of ideology as a single, unifying force for collective struggle. New social movements generally highlight identity, culture, and symbolic expression as central elements of mobilization, rather than economic conflict as emphasized in class-based movements. These movements are often grounded in shared beliefs, cultural meanings, values, and symbolic attachments that foster emotional ties among diverse social groups. Such characteristics parallel the dynamics found in ethnic, nationalist, and separatist mobilizations. In various contexts, new social movements have successfully integrated into formal political arenas, gaining institutional access and even transforming into political parties to participate in electoral competition. As Eder asserts, new social movements largely represent expressions of middle-class resistance aimed at challenging structural pressures imposed by dominant political forces, while simultaneously negotiating new spaces for social participation and transformation."(Eyerman, 1984; Sukmana, 2016)

Muhammadiyah has evolved into a new social movement based on Islamic beliefs, encompassing various aspects and areas of work that align with the dynamics of Indonesia's pluralistic society; its face is almost as diverse as that of Indonesia itself. This fact is closely related to the urgency of Muhammadiyah identity education in Muhammadiyah universities, which aims to introduce the Muhammadiyah movement from three dimensions, namely the ideological dimension, the historical dimension and the organizational dimension. Apart from that, other dimensions can be expressed from the expression of Muhammadiyah's *da'wah*, such as political dimensions, cultural dimensions, economic dimensions, and other dimensions (Miswanto & Arofi, 2012). As stated by Nurcholish Madjid, to improve the quality and quantity of Muhammadiyah science, he said:

Even though it seems that Muhammadiyah's *ijtihad* efforts mostly boil down to decisions on fiqh issues and are ad hoc in nature - as reflected in the prolonged discussion about ritual differences - however, as a basic view, the ethos of *ijtihad* is the greatest source of Muhammadiyah's vitality, and it can be said that it will not be depleted finished. However, to achieve maximum results, both quantitative and qualitative, Muhammadiyah requires significantly higher and broader capabilities in Islamic sciences than it currently possesses. As has been said, Muhammadiyah is the largest and most successful modern Islamic organization in the field of practice. To make Muhammadiyah the largest, most modern, and most successful in the scientific field is something very close to his heart. Because, with adequate intellectual ability in height and breadth, excellence in the scientific field should be the most logical continuation of the ethos of *ijtihad* (Madjid, 2019, p. 2910).

Muhammadiyah has been considered an exemplary combination of Islam and modernity, as well as a new social movement that addresses personal aspects and is closely tied to human life. This movement uses a new mobilisation pattern characterised by non-violence. On the other hand, new social movements express boredom with modernist representations, by rejecting materialistic ideas and prioritizing improving the quality of human life as a whole. A new social movement generally responds to problems that stem from civil society, which aims to reorganize the relationship between the state, society, and the economy and create a public

space to develop a democratic discourse on individual and collective autonomy and freedom (Huriani, 2021).

There are several characteristics of new social movements, which can be broadly categorised into four key aspects. First, related to the assumption that civil society's power is increasingly eroding due to strong state control and market expansion, resulting in the development of community issues that oppose these trends. *Second*, changing the Marxist paradigm of class and class conflict. So far, Marxism has recognised that all forms of struggle are class struggles and that all forms of human grouping are also referred to as class groupings. However, currently many contemporary struggles are based on something other than class and emphasize non-materialistic issues, which go beyond Marxist in terms of explaining the terms class and class formation. *Third*, new social movements generally develop grassroots politics, actions from the grass roots, micro-movements from small groups, targeting local issues with a limited institutional basis. *Fourth*, the structure of the New Social Movement is determined by a plurality of goals, objectives, and orientations that are based on social heterogeneity. Nowadays, self-transformation and self-construction develop infinitely. Consequently, forms of social action and movements are plural, following various paths, pursuing different goals and voicing religious interests (Huriani, 2021).

### **Social Action of Muhammadiyah**

Muhammadiyah can be understood as a modern social movement that does not emerge from a particular class base and does not prioritize material interests. Instead, it emphasizes ethical renewal, social responsibility, and community empowerment, offering an analytical perspective that moves beyond classical Marxist explanations of class and social formation. The organization grows through grassroots initiatives, everyday civic engagement, and collective action at the community level. Guided by principles of discipline, equality, and a strong work ethic, Muhammadiyah has evolved into a progressive and self-reliant movement. Its contribution to Indonesian society is reflected in its extensive network of institutions, including 177 universities, thousands of schools at various levels, and hundreds of hospitals and health service facilities, which rival those managed by the state. However, the success of Muhammadiyah in social, educational, and economic domains does not automatically imply that the organization uniformly embraces pluralism or religious tolerance. Although the majority of its members hold moderate religious views, there remains a segment that maintains more exclusive, puritan-oriented theological interpretations. Even so, Muhammadiyah's historical orientation toward public service, welfare provision, and humanitarian work has played a crucial role in distancing the organization from ideological Islamist movements, reinforcing its identity as a socially engaged, reformist, and nationally oriented Islamic organization (Burhani, 2018).

The Puritan element in Muhammadiyah was explained by Robert N. Bellah, who mentioned the term beyond Muhammadiyah Puritanism. Namely, Muhammadiyah is a movement that leaped over the puritanical ideology that still thrives among most of the ulama and members of Muhammadiyah. This is, of course, the ulama of other modernist organizations - both at the central, regional, and local levels. For that reason, the movement of thought beyond Puritanism Muhammadiyah requires the following things (Effendy, 2005):

*First*, it provides a broad window into Islamic thought in the context of local culture and art. It is time for efforts to loosen thinking to begin again so as not to be trapped by the sacredness of thinking inherited from our predecessors. Muhammadiyah, which existed as a matter of thought and activism for the people and nation, has so far given the impression that it has turned into a kind of sacred, exclusive and ideological palace and is alienated from social dynamics, the people and the nation. Methodologically, this starts from dismantling the old vision and paradigm of Muhammadiyah culture, which was not accommodating to local culture and art. Local culture and art are no longer placed face to face with textual religious doctrines-fiqhiyah which tend to be judgmental. On the other hand, it sees local art and culture as a reality that must be accommodated in the context of localizing Islamic values (Nurhayati et al., 2019).

*Second*, explore local intelligence and mobilize movements for decentralization or localization of religion. Abdul Munir Mulkhan's findings in Jember, East Java, were quite

surprising for Muhammadiyah residents. Mulkhan's thesis shows that pure Islam - namely Muhammadiyah - in the context of local culture does not show a single face but appears in various variants. The various variants of Muhammadiyah followers are a visualization of local intelligence through a dialectical process between Islam and cultural plurality. This is where the need for decentralization of religion, both institutionally and as a product of social fatwas (Mulkhan, 1999).

The decentralization of religion in the local cultural context opens up wide space for the growth of creativity and innovation from below in responding to and resolving problems that arise in local areas with their respective cultural strengths. Anthropologically, religious movements are ultimately cultural movements because the final manifestation of a person's behavior appears in the cultural realm. If religion is unable to actualize itself in the cultural context as an emancipatory movement, then people will abandon religion. Therefore, Muhammadiyah ulama and Muslims in general are concerned with how to civilize Islam, not Islamize culture, so that Islam then becomes a tree of civilization whose roots are on Earth. This means that Islam needs to open itself in a pro-existence and accommodative manner to local dynamics (Nurhayati et al., 2019).

*Third*, building cultural networks with artists and cultural groups, for example, is done by establishing cultural studios. As a movement of thought beyond Puritanism, of course, it requires adequate infrastructure in the actualization process. Infrastructure can be started at Muhammadiyah Universities by opening arts and culture faculties or departments. Beyond Puritanism, with these three agendas, we will be able to oversee the emancipatory dialectical process of Islam and local culture. This is part of one of the works and riches of Islam in the future, which tries to marry universal Islamic values without having to be trapped in a process of cultural impoverishment, as Muhammadiyah and some Muslim modernist groups have done so far. The cultural poverty referred to has resulted in the emergence of cultural resistance, especially in conflict-prone areas.

Suppose we use the theory of Geertz and others as outlined above. In that case, it can be understood that Puritanist values in Muhammadiyah have existed since its inception until the beginning of its development. Meanwhile, if you use Din Syamsuddin's theory when criticizing Rasyid Ridha's thoughts, Muhammadiyah would more accurately be called a proportional theology, namely Puritan Orthodoxy in the field of worship. The Salafiyah paradigm is KH's choice. Ahmad Dahlan in positioning the Muhammadiyah Association (Nurhayati et al., 2019).

As a religious reform movement, Muhammadiyah is known for its efforts to purify the Islamic faith and its call for the purity and authenticity of Islam. Impurity of the faith is believed to be the cause of the 'backwardness' of Muslim society. As stated by M. Dwi Fajri, Chair of the AIK UHAMKA Institute (2021) that:

KH. Ahmad Dahlan, as a person whose knowledge is endowed with (KRH. Hajid, 2018; 8) the desire to change the condition of the people free from tuberculosis and various forms of life's shackles, has made Muhammadiyah, which was founded by KH. Ahmad Dahlan has become a very influential organization with a geographical reach that extends quantitatively, not only in Indonesia but also in various countries, through the establishment of many Muhammadiyah Special Branch Leaders (PCIM) there. (Interview with M. Dwi Fajri, Chair of the AIK UHAMKA Institute, conducted on Thursday, July 15 2021).

This is the basis for Muhammadiyah to recommend that the way to revive Islam is to purify it from external elements. To realize this vision, Muhammadiyah uses two different methods: First, inspired by the Islamic theologian Ibn Taymiyah (1263-1328), Muhammadiyah shows an unforgiving attitude towards superstition, unorthodoxy, or heresy that is not prioritized in the prophetic tradition, and al-Qur'an. In this method, this organization is often seen as having a firm stance on issues of religious principles. *Second*, inspired by Muhammad Abduh of Egypt (1849-1905), Muhammadiyah has rationalized and modernized religious beliefs through education (Ali 1990; Fuad 2004; Lubis 1993). In this second method, Muhammadiyah gives the highest priority to reason or logic in theory and reforms the education system in practice (Burhani, 2018).

Muhammadiyah has collaborated politically with the authorities throughout most of its history, both under colonial rule and Indonesian rule (Alfan 1989; Fuad 2004). Muhammadiyah has also been drawn into the arena of political party activities several times. This organization was actively involved in the struggle for Indonesian independence in the 1940s. Muhammadiyah also became the strongest component of the Masyumi party in the 1950s and 60s. In the New Order regime, which began after Suharto came to power in 1966, Muhammadiyah participated in the formation of Parmusi (Indonesian Muslim Party) in 1968.

Since 1969, Muhammadiyah has maintained an official position of political neutrality while allowing its members the autonomy to engage individually in political affairs. Following the collapse of the Suharto regime in 1998, pressures emerged from politically active cadres who aspired for Muhammadiyah to expand its role beyond social and religious engagement toward more explicit political involvement. Despite these internal dynamics, the organization consistently reaffirms its stance as a non-partisan civil society movement, even though certain members continue to advocate efforts to draw Muhammadiyah closer to practical politics. This neutrality has been expressed through different rhetorical formulations across leadership periods. Under Ahmad Syafi'i Ma'arif (1998–2005), Muhammadiyah emphasized the principle of maintaining equal distance from all political parties. During Din Syamsuddin's leadership (2005–2015), this position evolved into a more flexible approach—remaining close enough to engage constructively with political actors while still upholding institutional independence and avoiding partisan alignment (Burhani, 2018)."

From the outset, Muhammadiyah had an ambivalent relationship with Christianity, which shaped its interactions with other religions. Individually, the Muhammadiyah leadership has friendly relations with Christians. However, organizationally, Muhammadiyah was founded as an active opponent of the penetration of Christian missions, although this attitude was partly driven by missionary activities and by the Dutch colonial government's discriminatory and unequal policies towards Islam and Christianity in Indonesia. After Indonesia's independence, concerns about Christian proselytizing remained strong. This was partly due to the New Order government's favorable treatment of Christians through its bureaucracy. Despite the founding of this organization, Muhammadiyah leaders enjoyed close relations with Christian leaders. In line with this ambivalent attitude, it is no coincidence that Muhammadiyah's social and educational work replicates and competes with the work of missionary schools and hospitals (Burhani, 2018).

Likewise, Muhammadiyah's role as a modern social movement was based on four problems faced by Muslims at that time, namely: (1) damage in the field of belief, (2) freezing in the field of jurisprudence, (3) setbacks in the field of education, and (4) poverty of the people and loss of the sense of mutual cooperation. (Miswanto & Arofi, 2012) KH. Ahmad Dahlan is historically proven to have used Al-Ma'un's letter as a theological basis in the real Muhammadiyah movement, where the Qur'an was revealed at a practical level to deal with this problem.

Community-based social activism has become a defining characteristic of Muhammadiyah, making this Islamic organization widely recognized as a socio-religious movement rooted in its strong commitment to public service. Within Muhammadiyah, community philanthropy is institutionalized through what is referred to as the "Charity and Business" initiative, which represents the organization's strategic effort to realize its core mission of Islamic da'wah and social transformation toward the development of a morally grounded and progressive Muslim society. This philanthropic mandate is expressed through various structured programs and institutional networks, including an extensive system of educational facilities ranging from early childhood education and elementary schools to secondary schools and higher education institutions. Through these initiatives, Muhammadiyah demonstrates its consistent dedication to empowering communities and strengthening social welfare. This was also confirmed by M. Dwi Fajri, as Chair of the AIK UHAMKA Institute (2021) that:

This organization, which is more than a Century old, has a qualitatively wide reach of influence through various charitable efforts, both educational, health and social, whose movement patterns have received appreciation from various parties. To name some of

them, the higher learning institution is accredited A by the Board of National Accreditation for Higher Education (BAN-PT), the award for LAZISMU by the byMoeslim Choice Award 2019 in the in-Humanitarian Institution category Performance for Humanitarian Social Institutions in Empowering Small (Micro) and Medium Economies, and various other awards. (Interview with M. Dwi Fajri, Chair of the AIK UHAMKA Institute, conducted on Thursday, July 15, 2021).

In addition, Muhammadiyah has hundreds of hospitals, maternal and child health care, orphanages, and other charitable activities spread across all provinces and regions in Indonesia. These charities and services are enhanced by the participation of members and sympathizers, illustrating the spirit of the Islamic movement to demonstrate Islam as a religion for life. Therefore, zakat and devotion are not just a series of physical institutions but reflect the basic spirit of the Islamic movement which provides solutions for people's lives.

In the opinion of Mark Woodward, who has conducted comparative research between Muhammadiyah in Indonesia and Christianity in America, concluded several reasons for the importance of the Muhammadiyah movement in Indonesia; *First*, Muhammadiyah is one of the two largest Muslim organizations in Indonesia, the country with the largest Muslim population in the world. Muhammadiyah has approximately 30 million followers in a country with a total population of around 260 million. To put these numbers in perspective, there are approximately 50,000,000 Baptists in the United States for a total population of approximately 330,000,000 (Rohmaniyah & Woodward, 2012).

*Second*, some American scholars characterize Muhammadiyah as a "mild" or "moderate" expression of Islamic fundamentalism. This perception arises from Muhammadiyah's emphasis on the Qur'an and Hadith as the primary and authoritative foundations of religious life. Such emphasis is often compared to Martin Luther's *sola scriptura* principle in Protestant Christianity, which upholds scripture as the ultimate source of truth. However, Muhammadiyah differs from many other fundamentalist groups both within Islam and Christianity because it integrates religious commitment with rational inquiry and scientific thinking as tools for addressing human and social problems.

*Third*, within this theological orientation, Muhammadiyah's perspective resonates with the ideas of nineteenth-century German Protestant theologian Friedrich Schleiermacher, who highlighted the need for a "permanent covenant" between religion and science. Interestingly, this message has frequently been overlooked by many American Protestants. Muhammadiyah's thought also reflects the reformist spirit of early twentieth-century Islamic modernism promoted by Muhammad Abdurrahman, emphasizing renewal, rationality, and social responsibility. This synthesis of faith and knowledge underpins Muhammadiyah's extensive educational and social welfare initiatives, including schools, universities, clinics, and hospitals. In this regard, Muhammadiyah's social engagement parallels the institutional service tradition long practiced by the Roman Catholic Church in the United States (Rohmaniyah & Woodward, 2012).

Muhammadiyah's charitable encouragement inspires its members to give generously so that Muhammadiyah is recognized as a charitable social movement. The development of social movements is seen as a product of environmental forces, both internal and external to the movement. Internal factors include: leadership, level of resource availability, group size, and level of internal organization. Meanwhile, external factors include the level of repression from society, the level of external sympathizers, and the number and strength of political groups.

The development of the Muhammadiyah movement cannot be separated from the fundamental leadership qualities of KH. Ahmad Dahlan, who is recognized as a pioneer in encouraging individuals and communities within Islamic society to prioritize charitable action as a core expression of faith. Through the widespread implementation of this principle, Muhammadiyah has succeeded in mobilizing its organizational resources to strengthen its existence and significantly contribute to social transformation at both community and national levels, positioning itself as one of the most influential Islamic movements in Indonesia. This perspective is reinforced by the statement of M. Dwi Fajri, Chair of the AIK Institute at UHAMKA (2021), who emphasized that:

It is generally understood that the presence of Muhammadiyah was initiated by KH. Ahmad Dahlan on 8 Dzulhijjah 1330 H/18 November 1912 was the fruit of his deep understanding of the sources of Islamic teachings and his response to the problems faced by society at that time, especially Muslims who were in the shackles of acute backwardness. Internally, Muslims during the time of KH. Ahmad Dahlan grew up in the confines of superstition, unorthodoxy, and heresy, which made their mindset shackled, and they were fond of carrying out religious practices that were far from the purity of al-Qur'an and Sunnah. Meanwhile, externally, because of colonialism and everything that included it, the condition of Muslims who were on the edge of the abyss fell into it and almost became permanent residents of the abyss of backwardness. (Interview with M. Dwi Fajri, Chair of the AIK UHAMKA Institute, conducted on Thursday, July 15 2021).

### **Muhammadiyah *Tajdid* Movement: Purification and Reform**

Muhammadiyah is a *tajdid* movement. The word "*Tajdid*" is taken from Arabic and comes from "*Jaddada-jaddidu-Tajdiidan*" which means renewing. *Tajdid* is defined as renewal, modernization, and restoration. In other words, *tajdid* is defined as renewing or reviving religious values according to the Qur'an and Sunnah after experiencing lethargy and decline due to superstition and heresy within the Muslim community.

According to the Indonesian Islamic Encyclopedia, *tajdid* is formulated as an effort or activity to change the lives of the people from the current situation to a new situation that is about to be realized. It also means that this effort is for the benefit of their lives (both in this world and the hereafter), is desired by Islam, is in line with its ideals, or at least is within lines that do not violate the basic teachings agreed upon by the ulama (Sari, 2013). Muhammadiyah was founded in 1912 and later obtained formal recognition as an organization in 1914. During the colonial era, the interaction between religion and the state was largely framed within social, cultural, and economic dimensions. Although political issues were present, they were generally addressed through a humanistic and sociological perspective (Muhammadiyah, 2015).

The *tajdid* movement promoted by Muhammadiyah has been able to target social groups; it is more likely to give rise to a social movement if the social group is segmented. For Muhammadiyah, the *tajdid* movement encompasses two religious-based segments: *tajdid* in the sense of purification and *tajdid* in the context of renewal (reformation). Segmented social groups will draw their members from special classes in a society so that the more segmented an association group is in a society, the greater the possibility of being mobilized into a Social Movement Organization (SMO). Similar membership in a group tends to also have similarities in terms of shared desires. Therefore, Muhammadiyah is able to segment the spirit of *tajdid* in the context of purification to free Muslims from superstition, unorthodoxy, or heresy. Meanwhile, *tajdid* in the context of renewal is an effort and effort by Islamic intellectuals to renew and update the understanding and appreciation of their religion in accordance with changes and developments in society (Sari, 2013).

*Tajdid* is a form of *ijtihad*, which is strategically grounded in the context of time and space. The Muhammadiyah *tajdid* formula is as follows: The word *tajdid* has 2 (two) meanings, seen from its aspect and target. These two meanings are explained as follows: *First*, updates that are always updated, which means *tajdid* is targeted at questions that have a backing, basis, and source that does not change or is fixed.

*Secondly*, renewal in this context refers to a transformative process that supports modernization by revising elements that are no longer relevant or lack a strong foundational basis. This includes reform in methods, systems, techniques, strategies, and various practical approaches, which must always be adapted to changing spatial and temporal conditions. In the official discourse of Muhammadiyah, *tajdid* is understood as "renewal." Conceptually, *tajdid* encompasses two main orientations: (a) **Purification**, which stresses the preservation and safeguarding of Islamic teachings so that they remain firmly rooted in the Qur'an and the authentic Sunnah; and (b) **Reform and development**, which emphasize improvement, renewal, and modernization in various aspects of religious life. Through this dual meaning, *tajdid* does not merely signify returning to original sources of Islamic teachings, but also signifies a constructive effort to contextualize Islamic practices so that they remain dynamic, relevant, and

responsive to contemporary realities. (Sari, 2013).

The purification program (*Tanfizu al-aqidah al-Islamiyah*) has become quite a prominent characteristic of the early generation of the Muhammadiyah Association and to this day. However, it must be realized that the purification program is more focused on the *aqidah* (metaphysical) aspects. Eradicating superstition, unorthodoxy, or heresy is Muhammadiyah's concrete response to local culture, which states that it deviates from the rules of the Islamic faith. This is related to the conditions of religious life in the Javanese Islamic community, historically seen by previous cultures, namely Hinduism and Buddhism. Apart from that, Javanese behavior, especially in rural areas, is still steeped in a culture of syncretism, namely the mixing of various religious values. At that time, many people believed in shirk, even outright shirk. Traditional Islamic habits of asking for blessings at sacred graves, magic, and using various forms of amulets are not in accordance with the idea of Islamic purity (Sari, 2013).

Muhammadiyah's historical identity is inseparable from its transformative da'wah orientation. From its early development, this movement emphasized action-based da'wah (*da'wah bil-hal*) rather than relying solely on verbal preaching. This orientation was reflected in its concrete engagement with humanitarian work, especially through educational institutions, health services, and social welfare programs for marginalized groups. At the same time, Muhammadiyah also modernized verbal da'wah by shifting it from traditional oral delivery toward written and mass-mediated communication, as demonstrated by the publication of *Suara Muhammadiyah* in 1915 and other modern communication platforms, which marked an important development in Islamic proselytization (Nashir, 2015).

Muhammadiyah emerged within a tajdid (renewal) and modernization framework, which seeks to reinterpret Islamic values in line with social transformation. Tajdid does not merely imply doctrinal renewal, but also an effort to contextualize religious understanding with societal change, allowing Islam to remain relevant and dynamic in responding to contemporary realities (Sari, 2013). The Muhammadiyah tajdid spirit rests on several philosophical foundations: religious interpretation is not absolute, Islam must guide ethical social order, and historical precedents show that renewal has always been integral to Islamic civilization (Nashir, 2015).

Because of this intellectual orientation, Muhammadiyah is frequently positioned within the broader landscape of global Islamic reform movements, sharing intellectual resonance with figures such as Ibn Taymiyyah, Muhammad Abduh, Jamaluddin al-Afghani, and Rashid Ridha. However, Muhammadiyah developed its own distinctive reform character shaped by Indonesian socio-cultural conditions. This uniqueness strengthened Muhammadiyah's identity as a reformist Islamic movement that not only preserves religious authenticity but also actively contributes to social transformation and nation-building (Nashir, 2015).

Muhammadiyah has built a common membership in a group that tends to have similarities in terms of shared desires. As a Social Movement Organization, Muhammadiyah is able to manage well-available resources. These sources include material resources, such as jobs, income, and savings, as well as non-material sources, such as authority, moral commitment, trust, friendship, ability, etc. As Haedar Natsir argues, the spirit and origins of Muhammadiyah can be traced back to the formulation of objectives contained in Statuten I, which was conceived and submitted to the Dutch East Indies Government in 1912.

The Muhammadiyah Statute was proposed after the Islamic organization was declared in Loodge Gebauw Malioboro, Yogyakarta, on Saturday evening of the last week of December 1912. The objectives of Muhammadiyah are outlined in the Muhammadiyah Statutes (Article 2): (a) to spread the teachings of the Religion of His Holiness the Prophet Muhammad among the native residents of the Yogyakarta Residency, and (b) to encourage religious life among members (Muhammadiyah Statutes, 1912).

The spirit of "promote" is a strong symbol of the Islamic reformist ethos, which is supported and packaged with extensive da'wah outreach efforts. Since then, the words "Islamic modernism" have remained the message of Muhammadiyah reform, which was often put forward by Kyai Mas Mansur during his leadership (1938-1942) and then integrated into a decree issued by the 37th Muhammadiyah Congress in Yogyakarta in 1968 as one of the forms of dynamic message from Islamic society at that time (Nashir, 2015).

The formation of Muhammadiyah with status as an organization contains three meanings, namely: (1) Organization is defined as a social system formed to achieve certain goals, meaning that relationships between individuals and groups in an organization create expectations for individual behavior. These expectations are realized in certain roles that must be produced. Some people must play the role of leader, while others the role of follower; (2) an organization is defined as a group that has differentiated roles, meaning that in one organization, each individual must be able to play more roles; (3) an organization is a group of people who agree to comply with a set of norms, meaning that when a person joins an organization, that person must voluntarily comply with the organization's norms (Sukmana, 2016).

Muhammadiyah emerged in 1912 as a reformist Islamic movement that sought to renew religious understanding and social practice. In its early phase, the organization encountered strong skepticism from traditional groups who assumed that its initiatives represented a departure from established religious traditions. However, within roughly a decade, Muhammadiyah succeeded in gaining wider public recognition and gradually consolidated its influence. By 1922, branches of the organization had already developed beyond Yogyakarta, marking its institutional presence in regions such as Pekalongan, Garut, Padang Panjang, Makassar, as well as several areas in East Java. Its expansion continued steadily, reaching various parts of Sumatra, Sulawesi, South Kalimantan, and even Aceh by 1927. In the early 1930s, Muhammadiyah extended its network to Eastern Indonesia, including areas like Nusa Tenggara, Ende, and Flores. This growth was accompanied by the strengthening of its dakwah, education, and humanitarian initiatives, which became pillars of its organizational identity (Sukmana, 2016).

Following Indonesian independence in 1945, Muhammadiyah evolved into one of the most influential modern Islamic organizations in the country. Entering its second century, Muhammadiyah is challenged to sustain its historical achievements while responding to the dynamics of contemporary society. Modern cultural transformations demand innovation, organizational resilience, and the ability to manage both external challenges and internal dynamics. In this context, the strength of Muhammadiyah lies not only in its institutional structure but also in its capacity to mobilize participation, commitment, and social solidarity among its members. As emphasized by Oberschall, the vitality of a movement depends on its ability to attract participants, channel their contributions, and maintain organizational endurance amid opposition and changing contexts (Sukmana, 2016).

This study positions Muhammadiyah as a new social movement characterized by participatory engagement and organizational flexibility. Muhammadiyah combines elements of mass protest organization with grassroots community mobilization. On one hand, it demonstrates structured collective action supported by formal organizational systems; on the other, it maintains a strong participatory spirit rooted in community involvement. This dual character has enabled Muhammadiyah to sustain its activism, strengthen its social base, and remain relevant in Indonesian socio-religious life across generations (Sukmana, 2016).

In Robbins' opinion, there are six reasons for the participation of members who join and involve themselves in an organizational group, namely: (1) security, a person's involvement in a group because the group is able to reduce feelings of insecurity compared to being alone; (2) Status, a person's involvement in a group because the group is able to provide or increase prestige value because group inclusivity is seen as important by other people in providing recognition and status for group members; (3) self-esteem, namely a person's involvement in a group because the group is able to provide a feeling of self-worth for its members; (4) affiliation, namely a person's involvement in a group because the group is able to provide a person's need for affiliation with other people; (5) power, a person's involvement in a group because the group is able to provide the power that actions that are not possible to do individually, then in a group situation it is possible to do; and (6) goal achievement, namely a person's involvement in a group because the group is able to create goal achievement through carrying out tasks that are difficult for individuals to do (Sukmana, 2016).

Muhammadiyah's renewal agenda is deeply rooted in the active engagement of its grassroots members, which is translated into a clear and systematic organizational framework. One of the important milestones in this direction was the 45th Muhammadiyah Congress held in Malang, East Java, in 2005. Through this congress, Muhammadiyah reaffirmed its

commitment to revitalizing the spirit of tarjih, tajdid, and Islamic values as the intellectual and moral foundation of a progressive social movement. This orientation emphasizes Muhammadiyah's responsibility to respond constructively to socio-cultural challenges so that Islam continues to serve as a guiding force for ethical behavior, social transformation, and national development.

In essence, Muhammadiyah's reform movement prioritizes several strategic directions: developing contextual Islamic understanding within a pluralistic society; strengthening methodologies of Islamic thought as the core of the tajdid mission; enhancing institutional capacity to address real social issues; disseminating reform-based Islamic perspectives across society; and establishing research and knowledge centers to support continuous renewal (Nashir, 2015). At the time of the 45th Congress, Muhammadiyah had already demonstrated significant institutional growth, managing 163 higher education institutions, more than 5,000 schools, dozens of Islamic boarding schools, and over 10,000 philanthropic and social service units. With this expansive educational network, Muhammadiyah has become a major force shaping national education and contributing dynamically to social change in Indonesia (Tahir, 2010).

The above will fulfill the concerns as critically expressed by Nurcholish Madjid:

Muhammadiyah is big, modern, and successful primarily as a charitable movement. This can be seen as an advantage because Islam, like human life itself, finds its capital in charity. However, Muhammadiyah's advantage in the field of charity is also a weakness, namely that Muhammadiyah's practical character is implied by a lack of insight. In fact, this insight is absolutely necessary not only as a tool that provides comprehensive awareness of all charitable activities and as a framework for seeing the organic relationship between various parts of the charitable activities but also as a source of energy for the dynamic and creative development of the charitable activities themselves. Viewed from the perspective of this insight, relatively very small groups such as *Jamā'at-i Islam-i* in modernist Pakistan, or *Jamā'at-I 'Ulamā'-i Hind* from India, are still superior to Muhammadiyah, even though in terms of socio-religious practice these groups are no match for Muhammadiyah (Madjid, 2019).

Social movements do not always progress in a straight, predictable line; they experience phases of continuity and disruption that connect the past, present, and future. In facing these dynamics, critical self-reflection becomes essential so that the movement can advance with confidence and optimism. Muhammadiyah's development is closely tied to its ability to continuously evaluate itself, making the renewal of thought a strategic necessity. Individual hesitation toward intellectual change should not hinder the organization's broader efforts to expand its vision in responding to evolving social realities in its second century. As Muhammadiyah's cultural identity continues to grow, constructive dialogue, open discussion, and intellectual engagement must be nurtured wisely and thoughtfully. Ultimately, the future strength of Muhammadiyah lies in its capacity to systematically harness its existing potential while learning from historical achievements. Forward-looking planning is therefore crucial in preparing the organization to play a meaningful role in humanitarian, national, regional, and global contexts in the coming era.

## Conclusion

This research demonstrates that Muhammadiyah, as a social movement organization, employs a distinctive strategy that enables the identity, ideology, and resources of its members to effectively reinforce the organization's role in da'wah activities as well as in addressing social and humanitarian challenges, particularly poverty. Muhammadiyah's approach is rooted in the transformative *Tajdid* movement, which is developed and implemented through the Muhammadiyah Higher Education network, especially via Al-Islam and Muhammadiyah education. In essence, this movement represents a form of new social movement that draws upon the organization's identity, ideological foundation, theological perspective, and collective resources. The findings highlight Muhammadiyah's concrete contribution to the

welfare of Indonesian society. Beyond the national context, Muhammadiyah has also played a significant role in various practical initiatives within the broader Islamic world, although this study does not elaborate on these aspects in detail. Therefore, future research is encouraged to further explore the contributions of similar religious organizations within the international arena.

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