

RATIONAL SUFISM: The Influence of Harun Nasution's Thought in the Academic World in Indonesia

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Abstract

Sufism is a spiritual exercise dimension often carried out irrationally. Meanwhile, rationalism is a faculty of mind based on rational dimension, thus, it is almost impossible to elaborate both. Harun Nasution's thought blended them to be the Indonesian Muslims' way of thinking and live his life both spiritually and ascetically. His rational Islamic thought influenced the Indonesian thinkers profoundly until today. Analyzing his thought, this paper explores the data about him using Edmunds Husserl's Phenomenology Theory. The phenomenological historical approach aims at understanding the text about Harun Nasution and his thought from the way the text says about it. In other words, this paper attempts to apprehend his rational sufism based on his works, namely Islam Rasional and Mistisisme dalam Islam. His intentional consciousness with regard to his Islamic rationalism blended with sufism is a factor in accordance with the trend within Indonesia's intellectuals' Islamic thought. It particularly influenced his students in the academic and activist world. As a study reflection on his thought and the intellectual influence academically, Islam should be presented as a historical religion that is expected to answer and explore real problems in the society.

Islam should be studied with a holistic, multidisciplinary, and interdisciplinary approach.

Sufisme adalah dimensi olah batin yang sering dilakukan secara tidak rasional. Sementara itu, rasionalisme adalah kecakapan pikiran yang sepenuhnya berdasar pada dimensi akal, maka, hampir tidak mungkin mengelaborasi keduanya. Pemikiran Harun Nasution menyatukan keduanya menjadi cara berpikir Muslim Indonesia dan menjalankan kehidupannya secara spiritual dan asketik. Pemikiran Islam rasionalnya sangat mempengaruhi pemikir Indonesia hingga sekarang. Untuk menganalisa pemikirannya, artikel ini mengeksplor data mengenai Harun Nasution menggunakan Teori Fenomenologi Edmund Husserl. Pendekatan fenomenologi historis bertujuan untuk memahami teks mengenai Harun Nasution dan pemikirannya dari cara penuturan teks. Dengan kata lain, artikel ini mencoba mendalami sufisme rasional Harun Nasution melalui karyanya, yakni Islam Rasional dan Mistisisme dalam Islam. Ditemukan bahwa kesadarannya yang disengaja mengenai rasionalisme Islam bercampur dengan sufisme adalah faktor yang sejalan dengan tren pemikiran Islam dari para intelektual Indonesia. Hal itu, khususnya mempengaruhi murid-muridnya di dunia akademis dan aktivis. Sebagai refleksi dari studi pemikirannya dan pengaruh intelektual secara akademis, Islam perlu dipresentasikan sebagai agama historis yang diharapkan dapat menjawab dan menggali segala persoalan riil di masyarakat. Islam perlu dikaji dengan pendekatan holistik, multidisipliner, dan interdisipliner.

Keywords: *academic-activist world; harun nasution; rationalism; sufism*

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Introduction

In Islamic thought and academic world in Indonesia, Harun Nasution is known as a thinker who prioritizes Islamic rationality (Sharif 2021, 11). For Harun Nasution, Islamic rationality is needed since the stance of Islam is essential in resolving new problems that have not been previously answered by Islamic scholars. In this case, Harun Nasution emphasizes that the role of reasoning is an essential tool for understanding

the Quran and other Islamic sources. It is also crucial for actualizing Islam into discussions and arguments that can be achieved only by means of rationality (Ibrahim 2019, 132-133).

Based on Harun Nasution's view, Muslims could not keep up with the advancement because the adherents of the Hanif religion keep their distance from a methodical understanding of Islamic teachings. The main factor of a methodical understanding of Islamic teachings is theology. Therefore, these declining conditions among Muslims, according to Harun Nasution, can keep occurring if their theological views are still associated with tradition and do not actualize the present reality. Hence, he offers an idea related to the urgency of Islamic rationality towards Islamic teachings through rational theology (Sharif 2021, 1-2).

Some implementations of rational theology on Islamic teachings is Harun Nasution's view on the Quran (Suyanta & Nuryanti 2019, 1-2), reason and revelation as well as the urgency of an integrative approach in actualizing the understanding of Muslims (Ibrahim 2019, 132 -134). In relation to the Quran, he finds out that understanding the Quran requires a rational theological view of Islamic teachings. Among his recent thoughts is the importance of rationalizing Islamic teachings to make them more down-to-earth, the urgency of Sufism perspective, and other disciplinary approaches, such as anthropology and sociology (Ibrahim 2019, 138-139).

Although Harun Nasution is very rational in understanding Islamic teachings, he has a sufistic tendency. He is also very rational in studying and exploring Islamic teachings, has a mystical practice shown by asceticism in worship, simplicity in life, and integrity in fulfilling promises. His mindset and behavior can be considered as a tendency in rational Sufism. It is indeed interesting and distinctive especially when it is related to the study of its influence on the academic world and Harun Nasution's students or successors in Indonesia. In the previous research, the object of this study has not been discussed. Several articles related to Harun Nasution previously focused more on rational thinking in the fields of philosophy, education and theology such as *Rational Ideas Perspective of Islamic Law* (Syarif 2021); *Basic Philosophy dalam Teologi Rasional Harun Nasution* (Suyanta & Nuryanti 2019); *Implementasi Pemikiran Harun Nasution dalam Dunia Pendidikan Islam* (Sahrawi 2022); *Pemikiran Harun Nasution (Religijs-Rasional) tentang Pendidikan Islam* (Dinata 2021); *Agama dan Filsafat dalam Perspektif Harun Nasution* (Taofiq 2018); *Pemikiran tentang*

Pendidikan Harun Nasution dan Relevansinya dengan Dunia Pendidikan Kontemporer (Ngalimun & Rohmadi 2021); *Relevansi Pemikiran Pendidikan Harun Nasution dengan Pendidikan Era Modern di Indonesia* (Dewi 2019); *Paradigma Islam Rasional Harun Nasution dalam Membumikan Teologi Kerukunan* (Irfan 2018); *Pemikiran Harun Nasution tentang Kekuasaan, Kehendak Mutlak Tuhan, dan Kebebasan Manusia* (Pratama 2022); and *Ajaran Islam dalam Pandangan Harun Nasution* (Ibrahim 2019).

This study aims to identify and examine Harun Nasution's rational sufism tendency and its influence, particular reasoning, on his students who participated in academic world and activism in Indonesia. This study is distinctive compared to previous studies in two aspects. First, it is the object of special study regarding Harun Nasution's thought and behaviour, known as rational Sufism. Second, it is the study of the influence of Harun Nasution's rational sufism thought on his students who participated in academia and activism. For this last point, the author includes Azyumardi Azra, Komaruddin Hidayat, Din Syamsuddin, and Kautsar Azhari Noer, representing the academic world and activism. How can this rational Sufism orientation affect the great students of Harun Nasution in the world of academia and activism?

Research Method

The material object in this article is a review of the dynamics of rationalism and the practice of Nasution's sufism with the formal object of phenomenology. With a phenomenological historical approach, the writers tried to trace his mystical rational thought. Generally, the phenomenological historical approach emphasizes the subject analysis, which concerns his awareness and earnest intention in developing his thought, namely rational sufism. Phenomenology seeks to analyse that the subject - Nasution -has consciousness and awareness in interacting with the objects (knowledge endeavoured). The subject has visible awareness of motives, vocabulary choices and diction in exploring ideas (Hasbiansyah 2008, 163-180). In Husserl's phenomenological insight, the subject has the power and autonomy that constantly weigh on his knowledge (Husserl 1965, 71-192; Lyons 1985, 634). The motives of Nasution's Islamic thought can be traced from the choice of diction and thematic buildings in his intellectual work that is *Islam Rasional dan Mistisisme dalam Islam*. The term historical in the phenomenological historical phrase in this study means

that it examines the dynamics of his thought in the constellation of the recent Islamic thought in Indonesia and its influence in Indonesian Islamic academic circles.

Result and Discussion

The Early Development of Harun Nasution's Ideas

From an early age, he grew up from a devout religious family and environment. His family was the religious elite or aristocrat of his neighbourhood at that time. Besides being a trader from Mandailing, his father, 'Abd Jabbâr, was a chieftain (*qâdî*), in Simalungun Regency. He was the Siantar Challenger during the Dutch East Indies government era. His mother, Maimunah, was the daughter of a descendant of a Meccan alumnus scholar. The access and mastery of Islamic classics: *turath* (Islamic history), and books written in *pegon* Arabic-Malay prove a good level of religious literacy (Muzani 1994, 93).

It was the traditional modality of his family to educate Nasution about religion strictly, diligently, and with discipline. But for the young Nasution, the praxis of religious education given by his parents was not the best practice of religious education that satisfies him. He continued to search for a chance to learn and obtain best practices for religious education, which he believed were more exciting. His huge curiosity and expectation exceeded the limits of the *fiqh* or jurisprudential competence of his teachers. Questions that were unorthodox in *fiqh* and even taboo slipped his mind. For example, the permissibility of a Muslim to keep a dog; touching the *mushaf* does not require one to have an ablution; or the intention of prayer does not have to be recited (Thahir 2003, 26).

If it wasn't for his parents' coercion, he could have turned out to become a historian or a natural science expert. Since studying at *Hollandsch-Inlandsche School* (HIS), he has shown more interest in these two scientific fields instead of religious knowledge. It was not because of his religious knowledge, but it was the approach he used to learn religious science from his environment that made him less progressive. Only after studying at *Moderne Islamietische Kweekschool* (MIK), a modern Islamic high school located in Bukit Tinggi, West Sumatra, did he feel enthusiastic about learning Islam. Unfortunately, schools with a modern progressive approach do not have sufficient funding to support themselves (Muzani 1994, 93).

His parents did not give their permission when he planned to move to a Muhammadiyah school in Solo, and they forced him to study religion in Mecca. Apparently, the studying atmosphere in Mecca did not satisfy him even though only a handful of Indonesian Muslims can dream of studying in that city. He decided then to move to Egypt for a better learning environment. After issuing an ultimatum to his parents stating that he would rather be a driver if he was not allowed to go to Egypt, his parents eventually give their permission. In Egypt, he explored the discipline of knowledge based on his interests and competencies on the school of thought of Muhammad Abduh. Through H.M. Rasyidi, after having a career in the diplomatic world, Nasution then continued his studies at McGill University Canada. At McGill, he reviewed the faculty of reason from Muhammad Abduh's thought in the search of religious truth. To him, Abduh was a prominent Islamic reformer who agrees with the Mu'tazilites doctrine and even more liberal than the Mu'tazilites themselves. His dissertation titled *The Place of Reason in Abduh's Theology, Its Impact on His Theological System and Views* attested to this effect (Ali 2019, 4).

Nasution's dissertation became the initial *milestone* of his rationalist line of thought. He acknowledged Abduh's thought which was considered even more progressive than the Mu'tazilite to correct the theology of Ash'arite. However, it must be emphasized that this rationalist thought of his does not reduce his obedience and submission in worship to Allah. In the end, he was able to bind the rationalism of a very progressive religious thought with a strong practice of sufism. His thinking was similar to Ahmad Amin, another Egyptian rationalist thinker and Abduh's student, who always uses a rational approach in understanding the Quran and the *sunnah* (traditions of the Prophet) (Peta 2022, 1-15).

Islamic Rationality and Rational Thought of Harun Nasution

As a result of the dominance of fatalistic theology, especially from Ash'arite theology, according to Nasution, Islamic rationality experienced suspension. The further impact of this death of Islamic rationality is that Islam and Muslims stutter against change, were awkward with modernity, and lacked the ability to develop science and technology. Historically, the progress of Islamic civilization during the Abbasid period was marked by the rapid development of science in various fields, because theologically,

Islamic rationality was positioned as its commander. State theology at that time was the Mu'tazilite, a school of kalam in Islam that favoured reason in understanding Islam. Islam then became a beacon of world civilization with the advances in science and technology it built (Watt 1985, 33-55). This is where he emphasizes the importance of applying theology that favours Islamic rationality. As in his dissertation which raised the concept of Abduh's theology, he made a proposal about the urgency of Islamic rationality in the lives of Muslims in order to achieve progress (Nasution 1987).

Studying Abduh's theology, which he considered very rational, even in its application went beyond the theology of the Mu'tazilites, which was seen as only focusing on the theoretical discourse of human freedom in the use of reason. Abduh, according to him, transcended the Mu'tazilites in terms of applying Islamic rationality explicitly in the social sphere. Because, the Mu'tazilites does not mention concretely about the ability of reason in making social laws. Abduh however believed and mentioned explicitly that reason has the capability to create social laws that can be obeyed by the public. Therefore, for him-just like Muhammad Abduh- the rational theology as developed by Mu'tazilites, serves not merely as an *intellectual exercise and academic discourse*, but as a theological basis for Islamic reform and modernism (Muzani 1994, 101).

This confirms Nasution's position as a reformer with a rational ethos, a commitment to scientific pursuit, the courage to question something established in traditional religious traditions. With one goal, the advancement of Islam is based on its belief in science and religion as a tool for the modernization of the Muslim community in Indonesia. Here, when given the mandate to become the head of IAIN, he carried out a process of curriculum change, carried out institutional and thought reforms, so that this Islamic religious study institution became the beacon of modern Islamic thought and progress that could be felt reverberating within the archipelago (Ali 2019, 6-7).

In this regard, Nasution's rational thought can be traced through at least three aspects, namely: (1) its emphasis on rational theology, the Mu'tazilites and Muhammad Abduh, borrowing Abduh's views on absolute and relative terminology, and (2) his efforts to develop an understanding of Islam in broader aspects, including the Quran and Hadith, and (3) the relationship between reason and revelation. Nasution views that the

theology of the Mu'tazilites is a theology that cannot be altered simply because of its rationality and views on human freedom. Thus, the rational theology of the Mu'tazilites has brought progress. When the Ash'arites marginalized the Mu'tazilites, the Muslims were in decline and shocked. Science and technology became scarce in development. He believed that Islam is a rational religion, either derived from revelation or reason itself, created by Allah without contradiction. Similar to his emphasis on the rational Mu'tazilite theology, his views on rational Islam were heavily influenced by Abduh (Ali 2019, 6-7).

Therefore, he opposed anyone who argues that Abduh adheres to the fatalistic theology of Ash'arites since Abduh was an adherent to the theology of the Mu'tazilites to him. To prove this, he studied in depth two of Abduh's works: *Risālat al-Tawhîd* and *H{ashiyah 'alā Sharh{ al-Dawwānī li al-'Aqāid al-'Adudīyah*. In conclusion, according to him, Abduh's theology is of the Mu'tazilites. Something that made him delay publishing a translation of his dissertation in Indonesian, was his fear of not being accepted by the Indonesian audience (Muzani 1994, 100). The domineering position of Muslim communities in Indonesia, especially the Ghazalians of Ash'arite creed, Shafi'ite mazhab or jurisprudence, and Sufistic Tareka, and Taymiyahan (Salafiyya-Wahabiyya). Although the two schools of Ghazalian and Taymiyahan contradicted each other, they oppose Mu'tazilites and sometimes even the Maturidi theology, which is seen closely aligned to the Mu'tazilites (Abdullah 1996, 316-322). It is understandable with regard to the delay in the publication of Harun Nasution's dissertation. The rejection of his dissertation could have been more intense, considering this additional point: Harun Nasution's model of Mu'tazilism did not reject Sufism. Sufism is defined as moral qualities born from rationality in understanding revelation. This indicator can clearly be seen from his work on Reason and Revelation in Islam (Nasution 1982) and Philosophy and Mysticism in Islam (Nasution 1973).

The rationale thought of Harun Nasution was influenced by Abduh, with regard to the absolute and the relative. Abduh divided the teachings of the Qur'an and hadith into areas of worship (which are unambiguous and tend to be detailed) and areas of social relations that are sometimes ambiguous and mentioned in general terminology. The specific understanding, interpretation and application of the terminology can be adapted to the time and place. The absolute contains monotheism and

other fundamental teachings, while the relative is understood through historical interpretation and application related to economic, political, and governmental issues. Regarding the concept of the Caliphate, for example, it is considered relative; while leadership itself is absolute. The time when Caliph Umar no longer gave money to the converts because he saw no more reason to do so when the Muslims had become stronger was an example of the application of rationality in the absolute and the relative (Ali 2019, 4). His rational thought is drawn from his understanding of the Quran and hadith that affirms the use of reason. This was based on the story told by Faris Pari (2020) to the first author on February 25, 2020, in the Postgraduate classroom of UIN Jakarta (S2 and S3). Nasution once explained about the great sins of several companions of the Prophet, including Uthman bin Affan. Then he asked: "How to explain this great sin in relation to the hadith about the guaranteed entry to heaven from the Prophet (peace be upon him)?" The students responded with sophisticated arguments related to the direction of hadith, and Allah's gracious and mercy. He said the students' answers were wrong. He answered simply: "The good of the companions was greater than their sin". This answer confirms one of the proofs of rationalization; the use of reason in understanding the text.

Despite learning from orientalist, Nasution affirmed that he was not influenced by them but was influenced by Muhammad Abduh and the Mu'tazilism. He said that, truthfully, Muslims have a legacy of rational thinking from classical scholars who have thought long about religious teachings rationally. They wonder why Muslim do not use their thought as an indisputable original heritage and why Muslims should be obsessive with Western thinking when Islam acknowledges rational thinking. Thus, he promoted Mu'tazilism and Abduh's rational theology because they possess the essence of rational thinking. Thus, when his critics say that his rational thinking was influenced by orientalist infidels, according to him, they do not understand him nor his thinking (Muzani 1994, 115).

He also affirms the role of rationality in Islam by explaining that the aspects of Islamic teachings are not only related to *fiqh*, worship, *tafsir*, and *hadith*. These aspects go beyond that, as well as history, civilization, culture, economics and politics. Therefore, rationality is needed to transform these Islamic teachings aspects into the theoretical and applicable realms. Related to *fiqh*, in particular, he thinks that too much tendency towards *fiqh* will get

Muslims involved in debates that are futile and revolve around traditionalist and textual ways of thinking.

When compared to other thinkers, such as Muhammad Imarah, Nasution's views on reason and text of the Quran present a fitting balance. He states that Islam cannot escape from reason and abandon it, nor can it eliminate the text of the Quran and hadith. Both Imarah and him seem to have the desire to assert that rational Islam can bring the benefit of thought to a wider audience without omitting and abandoning the text as Western thinkers or those having the same idea do (Imarah 1988, 5-7).

However, in a different context, Harun Nasution is more similar to Abdul Karim Soroush, an Iranian thinker who views the West in a dichotomy. In other words, not everything that emerges from the West countries is right, good, and advanced; or wrong, bad, and regressed. The West is not monotonous. While certain aspects of Islam seen from the lens and tradition of the West can be taken as modern and progressive; some views should be discarded as they are irrelevant to modern and progressive interpretation of Islam (Soroush 2000, xi-xix; Sadic 2022, 223-235).

Regardless of whether we agreed to this view or not, his view of hadith as a tradition developed by the Prophet might have been influenced by the orientalists or even due to a cautious attitude in the use of the hadith as religious edicts. He views that only the Quran and hadith of *mutawâtir* category can be used as the basis of Islamic creed. At this point, some people may have regarded his religious views as being influenced by the orientalists, in cautioning the use of hadith that were controversial in determining the validity of the sacred text. As mentioned in the history of the codification of hadith, that hadith was not memorized in the early days of the Companions because it was feared to be mixed with Quran (Jamal n.d.). This interpretation of his rationalism must be understood firmly with his own insights on rationalism. In the final part of his book, *Akal dan Wahyu*, he stated:

“In this regard, it is necessary to emphasize that the use of the words ‘rational, rationalism and rationality’ in Islam must be detached from the true meaning of the words, which is the rational of mere revelation and disregard to revelation, or to make reason higher than revelation so that revelation can be nullified by reason. Some have been seen

in the description given above, both in the field of philosophy and the science of kalam, more particularly in the field of fiqh, reason never cancels revelation. The intellect remains subject to the text of revelation. The text of revelation is still considered absolutely true. The intellect is used only to understand the text of revelation and not to oppose revelation. The intellect only gives interpretation to the text of revelation according to the tendency and ability of the interpreter (Nasution 1982, 101).”

This excerpt of his thought once again confirms that his rationalism remains controlled, and still limits itself in knowing that rationalism is a creature and not a creator. The product of rationalism, however, cannot be beyond *Kalam Allah* or revelation. This also confirms that the project of modernization of Islam can be bonded with rationalism, without secularism, by separating revelation and reason as seen within the Western societies. As a faculty of humanity, reason can be pursued to modernise Islam by making the most rational interpretation of revelation.

Harun Nasution’s Rational Sufism

Does the rationality of his rational Islamic thought prevent him from practicing Sufism? When we examined the book entitled *Philosophy and Mysticism in Islam* (Nasution 1973), Sufi practice (or known as sulūk) promoted by him is a pattern of philosophical Sufism. As Sufism developed among Muslims, what is highlighted is the understanding, academic concepts and knowledge as well as the spiritual application of Sufi teachings, such as: mahabbah (love), ma'rifah (interior knowledge or mystical knowledge of God), fanâ' (the complete denial of self and the realization of God), and baqâ' (subsistence or permanency which describes a particular state of life with God), ittihâd (mystical union with God), hulûl (relation between a body and its place, an accident and its substance), and wahdat al-wujûd (oneness of being or unity of existence). In Sufi virtue, a practitioner of Sufism, is a person who is clean in heart, views humans equally, loves Allah through h{usnudzan (positive thinking in Islam) towards man and also towards Allah. In his book on *Philosophy and Mysticism in Islam*, he did not honour or recognised Sunni Sufism and the tariqa patterns. Sunni Sufism and tariqa were regarded by him as groups

that avert Islamic rationality, and were even accused of being movements that closed the door to *ijtihad* (independent reasoning) (Nasution 1973, 70-95).

However, the fact that he is always keeping his *dhikr* or remembrance of Allah, punctually going to the mosque during Friday prayers, and his solemnity in living the life of the Quran opens up to interpretation. A rational person does not mean that individually he is against the practice of Sufism such as *dhikr*. This confirms that Islamic rationality is intertwined with the worship of Allah. Muslim rationalists are not people who are heretical and far from Allah. As mentioned by Max Horkheimer, they are not rationalists, like Western rationalists, who are stuck on the instrumental rationale of modernity (technical ratios and open consciousness), and confined in technological fetishism (Braun 2017, 192-207).

Nevertheless, when we read the book *Philosophy and Mysticism in Islam* profoundly, it will be clear to us that Nasution has a strong moral basis in the practice of Sufism. Regarding this, through his dissertation, Saude confirmed that Nasution was a practitioner of Sufism (*sālik*). Saude called the *sulūk* of Harun Nasution a mysticism where a combination of faith, worship, pious deeds, and noble morals were intertwined together (Saude 2011, 183-190). The results of Saude's interview with one of Nasution's students named Darun Setiady reveal that the foundation of mysticism in Nasution's thought was always accompanied by moral and intellectual insights and practices. This shows that he has a strong commitment to spiritual perfection. Saude asserted that Nasution was one of the few intellectuals, not only among Muslims, but also Indonesian intellectuals in general, who often talks about morals and commitment in everyday life. In another interview, his student named Barsihannur testified that if Nasution had promised his students that he would deliver his lecture on the coming Tuesday, he would still deliver the lecture despite the presence of an *ad hoc* invitation to Canada. It was this moral commitment in addition to his broad insight that became a symbol of Nasution's sufism. A teacher is obliged not only to teach, but must also set a good example to his students. These sufistic manifestations are rare in most intellectuals (Saude 2011, 183-190).

The practice of *zuhud* and perseverance in worshipping of Harun Nasution was better than anyone else during his time, according to the

testimony of his disciples and colleagues. It was revealed after his frequent visits to *Pondok Pesantren Suryalaya* to meet the *murshid* of Tariqah Qadiriyyah Naqsyabandiah (TQN), Abah Anom. When he was questioned whether he had chosen Sufism, he replied firmly, "No. I remain a rationalist" (Pari 2020).

Categories of Thought of Harun Nasution

Mukti Ali was a scholar who appreciated the thought of Harun Nasution, while HM Rasyidi was a main critic of his thought. In Mukti Ali's text, Nasution's rationalism paved the way to the progress of Islam in Indonesia. On the contrary, in HM Rasyidi's text, Nasution's rationalism was dangerous for Muslims in Indonesia especially in his discourse on the position of hadith. HM Rasyidi maintained the view of the absoluteness of hadith as the second source of Islam. To him, by following Nasution's thinking, hadith can easily be deconstructed. If we agree with the statement that the Holy Quran is the single most important source of information on how to be a Muslim properly and live our lives accordingly, and also agree that we should only use the Holy Quran as a guide in our life as stipulated by Allah Almighty, then why do we place so much importance on the Hadith? The *umma* would reduce their sacralisation to the sunnah when hadith is considered just a supplementary source. Similarly, in the realm of Sufism, HM Rasyidi criticized Nasution's genealogical perspective of Islamic sufism. In HM Rasyidi's view, the teachings of sufism were not a derivative of Islam. On the contrary, Nasution believes that sufism is an important aspect of Islamic teachings, which have Quran and hadith as its strong sources. HM Rasyidi rejects the concept of *ittihad* because it degrades the *Khâliq* or God as equal to a servant, while Nasution views *ittihâd* as an important dignifying position of a servant who is close to God (Syakur 2018, 343).

Regarding his views on Sufism, he explains (Nasution 1985, 47):

"However, the understanding that God and man, which is based on the basic teachings of mysticism, is found in the Quran and Hadith. So, regardless of whether or not there may be outside influences, the verses of the Quran can lead to the emergence of Sufism in Islam, when you mean

Sufism are the teachings about being as close to God as possible.”

As described by Muhammad Imarah, religious public discourse is now dominated by two ideas: Western worshippers and ex-servants (Imarah 1988, 5-7). There are similarities and differences in these two spectrums of thought, namely: both are uncritical in thinking; and differ in their approach. One is radically rational, while the other one is text-oriented, and both are equally uncritical. One is not critical of everything born of the West; the other is uncritical and ignorant of reason in understanding the text. Harun Nasution is not within any of the two strains.

According to M. Amin Abdullah (Abdullah 1996, 318-319)., religious studies and discourses are in ambiguity between normativity and historicity. Islam should- and this is what Nasution proposes, with its project of rationalization of Islam or rational Islam - come with an understanding as a historical reality. Therefore, Islam needs to use a broader and integrative approach, such as philosophy, anthropology, sociology, and so on. There is no one from an *an sich's* religious textual approach.

As we explained in the previous section, opposition to rational Islamic thought, or Philosophical Islam – in the language of Amin Abdullah – is carried out by a thought that has been crystallized into orthodoxy that can be traced in two poles of thought: Ghazâlî and Taimîyah. According to Amin Abdullah, although both use philosophy to hit philosophy, it still shows the authenticity of their thoughts: they are both textual. Al-Ghazâlî was too *taken for granted* to the hadith without wanting to see the degree of validity, while Ibn Taimîyah was too strict to look at the hadith, so what was considered deviated from hadith was considered a heresy. Then, a matter about how do we answer the challenges of modernity occurs. (Abdullah 1996, 318-319).

This is the concern of Muslim intellectuals like Muhammad Imarah, Abdul Karim Souroush and Harun Nasution himself, who want to present Islam which is able to answer the contemporary problem. His rational Islamic project has become the entry point to the revival of Islamic religious thought and modernism in Indonesia through institutions like IAIN or UIN. Of course, this project needs to continue, with the understanding that Islam must come into the reality of society in order to

clearly answer the problems they face. Thus, Islamic thinkers need a comprehensive and integrative method to present an enlightening and progressive religious discourse.

The Influence of Harun Nasution's Thought in the Academic World

Traced from his works, Nasution is a figure who was influenced by the thoughts of Muhammad Abduh in terms of mainstreaming rationality in religious interpretation. Compared to another influential student of Abduh in Egypt, Sayyid Muhammad Rashid Rida, the influence of Abduh's thought in Indonesia is still circulating in the world of academics, in a relatively elite circle. Whereas, Rida's influence in spreading Abduh's thoughts can be traced from the network of the popular al-Manar magazines.

Understandably, Al-Manar magazine disseminated the thought of Islamic modernism centred in Cairo which spread throughout the Muslim world. It was so prominent that Al-Manar's thought resonates in the archipelago at that time; the government of the Dutch East Indies was forced to forbid its dissemination. *Intelektual Nusantara Muslims* who were hungry for an access to the idea of Islamic modernism were no less resourceful in obtaining Al-Manar through three avenues: *first*, through smuggling at the pier of Tuban, which was relatively monitored lightly. *Second*, it was obtained through the Hajj pilgrims who returned from the Muslim holy land. *Third*, it was obtained by the help of students who return home from Egypt or the Middle East. Thus, Azyumardi Azra (Azra 2006, 143) explained the circulation of al-Manar as follows:

“The influence of Al-Manar on the Malay Indonesia world can hardly be overestimated. Despite Dutch's effort to ban it from entering the Archipelago, it was regularly read by various part of the religion. In fact, it has been suggested that al Manar was reasonably well circulated within the Malay-Indonesian world by several means.”

The spread of al-Manar in Indonesia, which at that time received a warm welcome before Indonesia's independence, shows the influence of Abduh within this archipelago from the work of Rashid Rida. However, what about the influence of Harun Nasution, the disciple of Abduh and Rida, in

Indonesia in the context of academic and intellectual development during the New Order after Indonesia became independent?

Actually, his influence can be traced to the typology of the thoughts of his students at the Syarif Hidayatullah State Islamic Institute (IAIN) Jakarta, who are active in public spaces and contemporary Islamic discourse. Some of them are Azyumardi Azra, Komaruddin Hidayat, Kautsar Azhari Noor, and M. Din Syamsuddin. Through their testimonies, they confess that Nasution was very serious and detailed in explaining an issue. When it comes to the Mu'tazila, he seemed to be very mu'tazili. Similarly, when describing the Ash'aria, he seemed to be an Ash'arite. He was focused, was detailed and had a serious scientific-research spirit. That is what inspires his students to become intellectuals-thinkers-activists *par excellence*. Those testimonies were conveyed to the first author directly when he was attending the class of Komaruddin Hidayat during Philosophical Research Methods class for the *Aqida*-Philosophy department class in 1995. It was also based on their experience of taking M. Din Syamsuddin's class when teaching Modern Schools in Islam subject in 1997. Another experience they had was attending Azyumardi Azra's seminar on Muslim Reformers in Indonesia at the IAIN Auditorium Jakarta in 1996. The other one was the class of Kautsar Azhari Noor during the time he confessed that his interest in Ibn 'Arabi was directly inspired by Nasution when teaching Philosophy and Mysticism in Islam where the model of Sufism that characterizes Ibn 'Arabi was philosophical Sufism.

Although Nasution's students are specialized in their respective scientific fields and movement activities, their typologies in general can be described by almost similar expressions. Those are 'rational and phenomenological-historical ones in building the basis of argumentation of thought; reformist and moderate in movement-organization; as well as Sufi and sincere in daily conduct with family and colleagues'. What is meant by rational and phenomenological-historical expressions in building the basis of argumentation of thought is the tendency of Nasutions students' above in prioritizing rationality and consideration of historical phenomenological facts from a religious normative text. The religious attitudes and organizational affiliations of his students were far above the idea of reformism and moderation. In addressing religious facts, as a result of rationality considerations and historical phenomena, they always refer to the relevance of value and contemporary contexts. Hence, they tend to

make frequent update in understanding the religious context. In organizations, they were mostly active in the mainstream organizations in Indonesia, for example in Muhammadiyah, the largest Muslim modernist organization in the world. They were Sufistic and sincere in their daily interactions with family and colleagues. They were positively devout in worship, leading a simple life, and building relationships with colleagues based on the sincerity of humanity, not the pragmatism of needs as seen in daily politics. Although they worked as academics, they did not only live in the ivory tower of discourse, but were also activists in Islamic reform agenda.

To find out more about their thoughts and works in the public sphere, it is worth exploring the fruits of their thoughts and activities related to Islam and national issues, which can be denoted by their books or their opinions as official figures of an Islamic institution. Azyumardi Azra is known as a historian and a professor of history. Her highest academic level was attained from the University of Columbia with a dissertation entitled *'The Transmission of Islamic Reformism to Indonesia: Network of Middle Eastern and Malay-Indonesian 'Ulama in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries'* (Azra 1994). Azra is also a researcher who obtained a title as a principal researcher from the Indonesian Institute of Sciences (LIPI) in the field of history. Together with Din Syamsuddin, the former Rector of Syarif Hidayatullah State Islamic University (UIN) Jakarta, he initiated the Wasatiyah Islam movement. Azra was also a prolific columnist, related to contemporary Islamic, social and political issues, for example in *Republika* and *Kompas*.

In contrast to Azra, Komaruddin Hidayat, who majored in Comparative Religion for his undergraduate degree, developed the tradition of Nasution's rationalism through a research focusing on philosophy and sufism. Peculiar to Nasution's rationalism, the former Rector of UIN Jakarta after Azra explored Islamic spirituality through the tradition of philosophical sufism. This can be found in his work entitled *'The Psychology of Death, Turning Fear into Optimism'* (Hidayat 2008). In this book, he thoroughly discussed the meaning of death and its philosophical wisdom. For Komaruddin, death is a frightening event and an optimistic process. With death, psychologically, people are ensured by Komaruddin to dive into it as a spiritual experience to get closer to God, the source of inspiration for virtue. In addition, the Rector of the

International Islamic University of Indonesia (UIII) philosophically presents a project of thinking on the interpretation of the Quran or religious issues with a language and hermeneutical approach. This can be unveiled from his work entitled *Understanding the Language of Religion* (Hidayat 2011). As a graduate of *Middle East Technical University* (METU) Ankara, Turkey, in the field of Western Philosophy, he is a professor in the field of Philosophy of Religion.

Two other Nasution's students, Kautsar Azhari Noor and M. Din Syamsuddin, are unique because their focuses on thought and activities were different from the previous two students. Kautsar is a Sufi and expert on Ibn 'Arabi. This alumnus of Gontor, an expert in the art of calligraphy was even appointed an honorary member of the Ibn 'Arabi Society based in the United States because of his expertise on Ibn 'Arabi. Kautsar is a genuine academic, a professor of Sufism with a speciality on Ibn 'Arabi (Noor 1996). His daily life revolves around teaching, writing, and carrying out the mandate as one the Meeting managers; Point Journal published by the Nurcholish Madjid Society (NMS). His personal life is also very ascetic, *zuhud*, and simple. The thoughts and activities depicting Din Syamsuddin's is in opposition to Kautsar. Gontor alumni were also involved in the field of Islamic Political Thought. The UCLA graduate wrote a dissertation on Imam al-Mawardi's Political Thought adapted from his *magnum opus*, *al-Ahkâm al-Sultāniyah*. It discusses the relations between religion and politics, and relations between religion and state. His focus on Islamic political thought was intertwined with his socio-political activities. During the New Order era, Din was active as a functionary of the Golkar political party while remained active in Muhammadiyah. His last position was as Chairman of the Central Leadership of Muhammadiyah. As the Chairman of the *Centre for Dialogue and Co-operation amongst Civilisations* (CDCC), he is also very active in interfaith dialogue activities as the President of ACRP (Asian Conference for Religions and Peace) and WCRP (World Conference for Religions and Peace). In his socio-political activities, Din has also initiated the World Peace Forum (WPF), an international event by inviting key policy figures and important intellectuals at the international level to discuss and recommend peace for the universe.

Scholarship links and the influence of Harun Nasution on his students was seen in three important things. First, it is the use of rationality and historicity in understanding religion, either with a historical,

philosophical, socio-political or cultural approach. They usually do not use a mere textual normative approach. For them, the text needs to be contextualized its values in the present. However, this does not mean that they abandon or ignore the sacred text. They still use it as a reference for religious social discussions. Their approach was supplemented by phenomenology-history. Second, the religious thought of his students was moderate. Perhaps this is an implication of intellectual paths and movements based on rational and historical religious arguments. Finally, almost all of his student were intellectuals who started an academic career at his alma mater's campus. Just like Nasution, they disseminated their Islamic thought through their influence and position in campus, either as rectors, postgraduate directors, or lecturers. What is different from the teacher is the fact that they were active in promoting Islamic reform and the revival ideas not only through campuses and books, but also through their activities in cross-organizational religious organizations, such as in the Indonesian Ulama Council (MUI) or the Indonesian Muslim Scholars Association (ICMI). The battlefield for jihad for his students is much wider and far more challenging.

Conclusion

From the aforementioned description, some conclusions are made. First, since childhood, Harun Nasution was a rebellious person that went against the Islamic teaching and learning system focusing on memorization, *Fiqh* studies, and interpretive absolutism. In this regard, he proposed the revival of the Islamic teaching and learning system with curriculum changes and emphasis on the importance of rationality and rational thinking in Islam. Second, to realize his reformist ideals, he offered a rational theology in the style of Mu'tazila and Muhammad Abduh to become the basis of Islamic religious teaching, replacing the dominance of the doctrine of Ash'aira fatalism theology. Third, making it more real, the renewal proposal was included in the teaching-learning tradition, especially at IAIN Jakarta. The curriculum made based on rational tradition, analysis and critical discussion was developed in the learning tradition at IAIN Jakarta. A curriculum that emphasizes rational understanding of Islam, philosophy, rational theology, and methodology of analysis of new religious texts was presented and applied at IAIN Jakarta. Fourth, he was a rational Sufi reformer. This is evidenced by the practice of *sulūk* worship and *dhikr* that

he does in *istiqâmah* (consistent) manner. However, Sufism still leaves the question: whether it was genuinely born of rationality and piety that merges in him, or whether he experienced phases of thought like al-Ghazâlî. Although Saude has examined the testimony of some of his students, he has not discussed the relationship with Abah Anom. Therefore, it needs to be investigated further. Fifth, as can be seen from the thoughts and activities of his students at IAIN Jakarta, he has a significant transmission of knowledge and influence on the mindset and seriousness in studying a problem related to Islamic knowledge, Islamic issues, and Islamic activism. Finally, as a reflection from the study of his thought and the intellectual influence academically, Islam needs to be presented as a historical religion that is expected to answer and explore real problems in the society. Islam needs to be studied with a holistic, multidisciplinary, and interdisciplinary approach. Islam is important to be understood through historical, philosophical, rational, and concrete empirical approaches.

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