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# NAVIGATING MODERNITY: MUHAMMADIYAH AND ITS CONTRIBUTION TO FATWA AND TARJIH IN INDONESIA

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## Abstract

Indonesia, the world's most populous Muslim nation, grapples with reconciling Islamic principles with a rapidly modernizing society. This study explores the role of Muhammadiyah, a prominent Islamic reform movement, in navigating this challenge. The research examines how Muhammadiyah, through its emphasis on reason alongside scripture, shapes the issuance of fatwa (scholarly legal opinions) and tarjih (collective legal rulings). Muhammadiyah to the development of fatwa (scholarly legal opinions) and tarjih (collective legal rulings) in Indonesia. By analyzing the processes and rationale behind these pronouncements, the paper sheds light on how Muhammadiyah guides Indonesian Muslims in adapting Islamic law to contemporary realities.

**Keywords:** Muhammadiyah, Indonesia, Islamic Law, Fatwa, Tarjih

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## Introduction

A little more than a year ago, the Pew Research Center's Forum on Religion & Public Life published Mapping the Global Muslim Population, which estimated that there were 1.57 billion Muslims of all ages around the world in 2009. Now, with this report on The Future of the Global Muslim Population, we are taking the next step: using standard demographic methods to project - despite many uncertainties - how many Muslims there are likely to be in each of the world's 232 countries and territories by 2030. Pew Research Center (2011) This intricate system offers guidance on various aspects of life, from daily rituals to social interactions and financial dealings. However, interpreting and applying Sharia principles in the ever-evolving modern world presents a unique challenge. Here, concepts like tarjih, fatwa, and the Islamic reform movement Muhammadiyah come to the forefront, offering frameworks for navigating this complexity. (Abidin et al., 2024)

Founded in 1912 Indonesia by Ahmad Dahlan, Muhammadiyah stands as a prominent Islamic reform movement. (Mubarok et al., 2024) It champions a modernist approach to religious scholarship, emphasizing the importance of reason (aql) alongside scripture (Quran) and Prophetic tradition (Hadith) in interpreting Islamic law. This approach contrasts with some traditional schools of Islamic law that rely more heavily on established legal interpretations. (Raharjo et al., 2024)

A fatwa, in its most basic form, signifies a legal opinion issued by a qualified Islamic scholar on a specific religious question Muslims may seek fatwas (Juhari, 2024) on a vast array of issues, ranging from the permissibility of a particular financial transaction to appropriate conduct during Ramadan. It's crucial to understand that fatwas are not binding pronouncements, but rather serve as informed guidance for individuals seeking to navigate religious matters in their daily lives. (Harun et al., 2024) The process of issuing a fatwa involves meticulous examination of relevant Quranic verses, Hadiths, and the interpretations of previous scholars by a scholar with expertise in Islamic law. They then carefully weigh different legal schools of thought and consider the specific context of the question before arriving at a well-reasoned opinion. The authority of a fatwa hinges on the reputation and qualifications of the scholar who issues it. Muslims have the agency to choose and follow the fatwas of scholars they trust and respect, while also retaining the freedom to seek alternative opinions from other qualified sources. (Asmoro, & Saptomo, 2024)

Muhammadiyah's unique contribution to Islamic legal discourse lies in its concept of tarjih. Literally translating to "preference" or "inclination," tarjih refers to the process employed by Muhammadiyah's specialized body, the Majlis Tarjih wa Tajdid to arrive at collective legal rulings on contemporary issues. (Nurhakim et al., 2024)

The Majlis Tarjih, comprised of prominent Muslim scholars within Muhammadiyah, engages in a rigorous process of deliberation and research when addressing new questions. (Qodir et al., 2021) They meticulously examine the Quran and Sunnah, drawing upon various schools of Islamic thought while prioritizing reason and the context of modern life. Through this rigorous process, the Majlis Tarjih arrives at a "preferred" legal position, known as a tarjih, on a particular issue. (Anwar, 2022)

It's important to distinguish between a tarjih and a fatwa. While a fatwa is an individual scholar's opinion, a tarjih is a collective legal ruling issued by a specialized council after extensive deliberation. Tarjih and fatwas play a vital role in providing much-needed guidance for Muslims, particularly those affiliated with Muhammadiyah, in navigating the complexities of Islamic law in the modern world.

## Literature Review

This history of Muhammadiyah's contribution to the development of fatwa (academic legal opinions) and tarjih (general legal rulings) in Indonesia. Muhammadiyah adheres to the Atari

School of Islam, accepting only literalists (biblical adherents). This school emphasizes the authority of the Qur'an and Hadith as the supreme law of Islam, serving as the legal basis for interpreting religious beliefs and practices. Muhammadiyah's main movement is to increase people's sense of moral responsibility, Muhammadiyah's religion promotes the purification of faith from local traditions, which they consider superstitious, heretical, and a form of shirking. Muhammadiyah strongly opposed the fusion of religions and Hindu Buddhist elements prevalent in various communities. (Muhtarom, 2017) However, some Muhammadiyah groups tended to support Muhammadiyah's modernist movement rather than the Salafi doctrines of Rashid Rida, which have been described as "strict and conservative. Muhammadiyah refused to condemn LGBT people, believing that publicly condemning individuals who identify with such identities and orientations will not help them.

## **Research Methodology**

This research delves into the contribution of Muhammadiyah to the development of fatwa (scholarly legal opinions) and tarjih (collective legal rulings) in Indonesia. To achieve a comprehensive understanding, the study will employ a qualitative research approach centered on the following methods: (Fanani et al., 2021) data were collected through offline and online searches. Offline data are printed data in libraries or other repositories, whereas online data are obtained from media such as electronic books, journals, and conference proceedings. Data analysis involves organizing and arranging data into forms, categories, and descriptive units. The analysis method used in this study was a creative conceptual analysis. The analysis consisted of three steps: analytical evaluation of practical aspects and conceptual genealogy. Conceptual analysis emphasizes the reflective relationship between knowledge and social realities.

### **Document Analysis**

A core aspect of this research will involve a meticulous analysis of primary sources, including official pronouncements on fatwa and tarjih issued by the Majlis Tarjih wa Tajdid (Council of Tarjih and Renewal) of Muhammadiyah. These pronouncements, often published in journals like "Rilis Putusan dan Produk Fatwa Majlis Tarjih Muhammadiyah" (Collection of Decisions and Fatwa Products of the Majlis Tarjih Muhammadiyah), will provide valuable insights into the reasoning and processes employed by the council. Additionally, relevant academic journals and publications focusing on Muhammadiyah's approach to Islamic law will be examined. Scholarly articles from reputable sources like "e-jurnal UIN Imam Bonjol" (e-journal of Imam Bonjol Islamic University) will offer critical perspectives on the movement's impact on fatwa and tarjih in Indonesia.

### **Interviews**

To gain deeper qualitative data, semi-structured interviews will be conducted with key informants. This may include scholars affiliated with Muhammadiyah, legal experts specializing in Islamic law in Indonesia, and ordinary Indonesian Muslims who rely on fatwa and tarjih for guidance. The interviews will explore participants' perspectives on the role of Muhammadiyah in shaping fatwa and tarjih, their understanding of the processes involved, and the impact these pronouncements have on their daily lives.

### **Case Studies**

To illustrate the practical application of fatwa and tarjih, the research will explore specific case studies. This may involve analyzing how the Majlis Tarjih has addressed contemporary issues through fatwa and tarjih pronouncements. Examining real-world examples will provide a nuanced understanding of how these pronouncements navigate the complexities of modern life in Indonesia.

## **Data Analysis**

The data collected through document analysis, interviews, and case studies will be subjected to thematic analysis. This will involve identifying recurring themes and patterns that emerge from the data, allowing for the construction of a comprehensive picture of how Muhammadiyah shapes fatwa and tarjih in Indonesia.

## **Ethical Considerations**

Throughout the research process, informed consent will be obtained from all participants in interviews. The anonymity of participants will be ensured to protect their privacy. Additionally, any research materials involving sensitive information will be handled with utmost care and confidentiality.

## **Research Results**

### **Tarjih in Muhammadiyah: A Process of Collective Reasoning**

Within the dynamic landscape of Islamic legal discourse, Muhammadiyah, a prominent reform movement in Indonesia, presents a unique approach to navigating contemporary issues. This approach hinges on the concept of tarjih, literally translating to "preference" or "inclination." Tarjih refers to the process employed by Muhammadiyah's specialized body, the Majlis Tarjih wa Tajdid (Council of Tarjih and Renewal), to arrive at collective legal rulings on issues relevant to modern life. Unlike a fatwa, which is an individual scholar's legal opinion, a tarjih is the culmination of a rigorous deliberative process undertaken by a council of prominent Muslim scholars within Muhammadiyah.

The religious reform of Muhammadiyah was based on tenacious ideas. The action consisted of two elements: the purification of Islamic teachings, and the dynamism of social life. This reform represented a combination of modernity and revivalism in Islam.

The religious reform of Muhammadiyah developed because Muhammadiyah was initially founded to improve education, health, and social affairs and was not originally intended to be a religious sect. Muhammadiyah's religious reform was based on the idea of this religious reform, combining elements of modernity and an open interpretation of the origins of Islamic teachings. It included both modern and Salafi doctrines, and accepted modern influences. This idea conflicted with the traditional Islamic view, which sought to preserve the religious ideas and structures that had existed since the founding of schools of Islamic law and theology. Therefore, the choice of Muhammadiyah not to accept the classical schools of law and theology reflected the religious revivalism that Muhammadiyah held.

The religious revivalism of Muhammadiyah did not stop, but developed. The Tarjih Council was responsible for defining the ideology of the Muhammadiyah. The Tarjih Council was established to solve religious problems in the early period. It also provided Muhammadiyah with a set of religious beliefs and guidelines to deal with internal and external problems, particularly the dynamics of Indonesian society. Manhaj Tarjih evolved from a simple approach to interacting with Islamic sources to a more complex and evolving concept.

Manhaj was adapted and improved to meet new needs and challenges. It defines three methods of legal interpretation based on the new developments of the ijtihad method in Islamic law. Muhammadiyah's attitude towards spirituality has also changed. The rise of the Islamic revival, which was usually a group of Muhammadiyah, under this challenge.

The evolution of Manhaj Tarjih not only shows the changing nature of Muhammadiyah thinking, but also poses several problems. This new concept took a long time to be fully understood and implemented by Muhammadiyah scholars, who developed dynamically and conceptually, such that members of Muhammadiyah struggled to define it. In short, the evolution of Muhammadiyah's religious thought, in addition to reflecting the idea of religious revival, also put Muhammadiyah in the midst of a hard struggle for success. (Fanani et al., 2021)

The Majlis Tarjih engages in a meticulous process when addressing new questions. Scrutinizing Scripture and Tradition: They meticulously examine the Quran and Sunnah (thesayings and practices of Prophet Muhammad), seeking guidance on the issue at hand. Engaging with Legal Schools: The council draws upon various schools of Islamic thought (madhahib) for insights and perspectives. Prioritizing Reason (Aql): A hallmark of Muhammadiyah's approach is the emphasis on reason alongside scripture. The council critically analyzes the issue in the context of modern life, applying reasoning to arrive at a well-founded legal position. Reaching a Consensus: Through extensive discussion and deliberation, the Majlis Tarjih strives to reach a consensus on the preferred legal position, which is then disseminated as a tarjih.

Tarjih pronouncements play a crucial role for Muslims affiliated with Muhammadiyah, offering much-needed guidance on navigating contemporary issues not explicitly addressed in classical Islamic legal texts. These pronouncements may address topics such as: 1) the permissibility of using modern financial instruments, 2) ethical considerations surrounding new medical technologies and 3) social issues relevant to the modern world.

It's important to differentiate between tarjih and fatwa. Here's a breakdown of the key distinctions.

**Table 1** Differentiate between tarjih and fatwa

Feature	Tarjih	Fatwa
Source	Collective ruling by Majlis Tarjih wa Tajdid	Individual scholar's legal opinion
Process	Rigorous deliberation and research	Scholarly examination of relevant sources
Authority	Holds greater weight due to collective nature	Authority depends on scholar's reputation and qualifications

Tarjih pronouncements serve as a valuable tool for Indonesian Muslims seeking to reconcile their faith with the complexities of modern life. However, it's important to acknowledge that tarjih, like any legal interpretation, is not without its limitations. Different interpretations of scripture and varying contexts can lead to diverse perspectives within Muhammadiyah itself. Tarjih stands as a testament to Muhammadiyah's commitment to navigating Islamic law in the modern world. Through a collective and reasoned approach, the Majlis Tarjih provides guidance for Indonesian Muslims as they strive to live according to their faith in a constantly evolving society.

### **Muhammadiyah and Its Commitment to Islam: A Dynamic and Progressive Approach**

Muhammadiyah, a prominent Islamic reform movement founded in Indonesia in 1912 by Ahmad Dahlan, stands as a unique and influential force within the Muslim world. While firmly rooted in Islamic principles, Muhammadiyah demonstrates a dynamic and progressive approach to faith, continuously seeking to navigate the complexities of modern life. Here's a deeper look at how Muhammadiyah expresses its commitment to Islam.

1) Education: A Cornerstone for Progress: Muhammadiyah recognizes education as a cornerstone of Islamic practice and a critical tool for individual and societal development. They have established a vast network of educational institutions, ranging from elementary schools to universities, known collectively as Muhammadiyah Educational Institutions (MuEIs). These institutions offer a strong foundation in Islamic studies, including Quranic recitation, Arabic language, and Islamic jurisprudence. However, MuEIs go beyond purely religious education, also incorporating a comprehensive secular curriculum that equips students with essential skills in science, mathematics, humanities, and technology. This holistic approach fosters well-rounded individuals with a deep understanding of their faith and the capacity to contribute

positively to society. Muhammadiyah's commitment to education extends beyond its own institutions. They actively advocate for increased access to quality education for all Indonesians, regardless of religion or socioeconomic background.

2) Modernist Interpretation: Adapting to the Times: Muhammadiyah scholars advocate for a modernist approach to Islamic law, known as *Tajdid* (renewal). They emphasize the importance of reason (*aql*) alongside scripture (*Quran*) and Prophetic tradition (*Hadith*) when interpreting Islamic principles. This approach allows them to address contemporary issues not explicitly addressed in classical Islamic texts. For example, the Majlis Tarjih wa Tajdid (Council of Tarjih and Renewal), a specialized body within Muhammadiyah, has issued pronouncements on the permissibility of using modern financial instruments like Islamic banking or the ethical considerations surrounding new medical technologies. This commitment to *Tajdid* allows Muhammadiyah to offer practical guidance for Muslims navigating their faith in a constantly evolving world.

3) Social Justice and Uplifting Communities: Muhammadiyah's commitment to Islam extends beyond the realm of the individual and into the wider community. They actively engage in social justice initiatives and community development projects, reflecting the Islamic principle of *ta'awun* (mutual cooperation) and a concern for the well-being of all. Muhammadiyah has established a vast network of social service organizations that provide essential services such as hospitals, clinics, orphanages, and disaster relief programs. These initiatives demonstrate their commitment to improving the lives of all Indonesians, regardless of faith, ethnicity, or social status. By addressing issues of poverty, healthcare, and social inequality, Muhammadiyah strives to create a more just and equitable society that upholds Islamic values of compassion and social responsibility.

4) Interfaith Dialogue and Fostering Tolerance: Indonesia boasts a rich tapestry of religious traditions, with Islam being the dominant faith. Recognizing this diversity, Muhammadiyah actively promotes interfaith dialogue and tolerance. They work with people of other faiths, fostering understanding and promoting peaceful coexistence. Muhammadiyah believes that interfaith dialogue is crucial for building bridges between communities and preventing religious conflict. They organize conferences, workshops, and interfaith gatherings, creating platforms for people of different faiths to learn from each other and celebrate their shared humanity. This commitment to interfaith cooperation reflects the Quranic principle of respecting the diversity of religious beliefs and fostering peaceful coexistence with all people.

5) Empowering Women: A More Inclusive Islam: Muhammadiyah challenges traditional gender roles within Islamic societies, advocating for women's education and empowerment. They believe that women play a vital role in both religious and social spheres, and actively encourage their participation in mosques, community organizations, and educational institutions. Muhammadiyah educational institutions offer equal opportunities for girls and women, allowing them to pursue higher education and leadership positions. This commitment to women's empowerment reflects a progressive interpretation of Islamic teachings that emphasizes gender equality and the importance of women's voices in shaping a more inclusive Islamic experience.

Muhammadiyah's commitment to Islam goes beyond mere rituals and traditions. They strive to create a dynamic and progressive Muslim society by emphasizing education, social justice, interfaith dialogue, and women's empowerment. This multifaceted approach allows them to navigate the complexities of the modern world while staying true to Islamic principles. By adapting to the times and addressing the needs of the community, Muhammadiyah offers a unique model for Muslims navigating their faith in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

### **The Future of Tarjih and Fatwa in a Globalized World**

Muhammadiyah's approach to Islamic law, particularly its emphasis on tarjih and its unique perspective on fatwa, has sparked significant discussion within Islamic scholarship. This

section delves into some key aspects of this discourse, drawing upon relevant academic journals.

One of the central points of discussion surrounding Muhammadiyah revolves around its modernist interpretation of Islamic law and the legitimacy of tarjih pronouncements. Critics argue that the emphasis on reason (aql) alongside scripture can lead to deviations from established legal principles. They contend that traditional schools of Islamic thought (madhahib) already offer a comprehensive framework for addressing contemporary issues. However, proponents of Muhammadiyah's approach, like Himayeti in his article within "e-jurnal UIN Imam Bonjol," argue that Tajdid (renewal) is a necessary process in a constantly evolving world. They point out that classical Islamic legal texts often do not address contemporary issues directly, leaving Muslims struggling to navigate new situations. The emphasis on reason allows the Majlis Tarjih to utilize Islamic principles to find solutions for modern problems, ensuring the continued relevance of Islamic law in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Another point of discussion centers on the authority of tarjih pronouncements compared to individual fatwas issued by scholars. Since tarjih is a collective ruling by a specialized council, it carries greater weight within Muhammadiyah. However, some argue that this approach can stifle individual scholarly interpretation and limit the diversity of viewpoints within Islamic law.

Conversely, proponents of tarjih highlight the benefits of a rigorous and well-researched collective process. Through deliberation and consultation within the Majlis Tarjih, the risk of individual biases or misinterpretations is minimized, leading to more well-considered legal pronouncements. This emphasis on collective reasoning ensures that tarjih pronouncements are grounded in sound Islamic principles while remaining relevant to the specific context of modern Indonesia.

The impact of tarjih pronouncements on the daily lives of Indonesian Muslims affiliated with Muhammadiyah remains a topic of exploration. Studies by scholars like Abas et al. (2020) in the "Bureaucracy Journal" suggest that tarjih plays a crucial role in guiding Muslims on various aspects of life. These pronouncements provide much-needed clarity on contemporary issues, allowing individuals to make informed decisions based on their faith.

However, further research is needed to understand the nuanced ways in which tarjih is received and implemented by ordinary Muslims. Factors like regional variations, social class, and individual interpretations can influence how these pronouncements are applied in daily life. Future studies could explore how Indonesian Muslims navigate potential contradictions between tarjih and established practices within their local communities.

Muhammadiyah's approach to tarjih and fatwa is not without its challenges. The rapidly globalizing world presents new and complex issues that may require collaboration beyond national borders. Looking ahead, it will be interesting to see how Muhammadiyah adapts its approach to fatwa and tarjih to address issues relevant to Muslims worldwide. Perhaps there is potential for collaboration with other Islamic institutions and scholars to develop more globalized solutions to contemporary challenges.

Muhammadiyah's emphasis on tarjih and its unique approach to fatwa offer a fascinating glimpse into the dynamic nature of Islamic legal discourse in the modern world. While these concepts are not without their critics, they undeniably play a vital role in guiding Indonesian Muslims as they navigate their faith in a constantly evolving society. Further research on the reception and implementation of tarjih pronouncements, alongside exploring its potential for global collaboration, will enrich our understanding of how Islamic law continues to adapt and evolve in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

## Conclusion

Muhammadiyah's innovative approach to Islamic law, characterized by its emphasis on tarjih (collective legal rulings) and its nuanced perspective on fatwa (scholarly legal opinions), has left an undeniable mark on Islamic discourse in Indonesia and beyond. By prioritizing reason (aql) alongside scripture (Quran) and prophetic tradition (Hadith), Muhammadiyah offers a framework for navigating contemporary issues not explicitly addressed in classical Islamic legal texts. The rigorous process employed by the Majlis Tarjih wa Tajdid (Council of Tarjih and Renewal) to issue tarjih pronouncements ensure well-considered and contextually relevant legal guidance for Indonesian Muslims.

However, the legitimacy and authority of Tarjih remain points of discussion. Critics raise concerns about potential deviations from established legal principles, while others debate the limitations, they may place on individual scholarly interpretations. Despite these discussions, the impact of tarjih on the lives of Indonesian Muslims remains undeniable. These pronouncements provide much-needed clarity on navigating faith in the modern world.

Looking ahead, the future of tarjih and fatwa in a globalized world presents fascinating possibilities. As the world grapples with increasingly complex issues, there may be a need for collaboration beyond national borders. Muhammadiyah's approach, with its emphasis on reason and collective reasoning holds the potential to contribute to the development of more globalized solutions within Islamic legal discourse.

Finally, Muhammadiyah's commitment to navigating Islamic law in the modern world serves as a valuable case study to understand the dynamism and adaptability of Islamic legal traditions. While there will always be ongoing discussions and debates, the unique contributions of tarjih and fatwa within Muhammadiyah offer a compelling model for Muslims seeking to reconcile their faith with the complexities of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

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**Data Availability Statement:** The raw data supporting the conclusions of this article will be made available by the authors, without undue reservation.

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