



Muhammad Abduh's Rational Hermeneutics and Its Implications for Islamic Legal Reform

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Research Objective: This study investigates Muhammad Abduh's rational hermeneutics as a foundation for Islamic legal reform, examining how his integration of reason (*'aql*), ethics, and revelation (*naql*) reconfigures Qur'anic interpretation to revitalize *ijtihad* and promote justice-oriented legal principles. **Research Method:** The research adopted a qualitative design grounded in hermeneutical analysis and Islamic legal theory. It analyzed key verses from *Tafsir al-Manar*, *Tafsir Juz 'Amma*, and *Risalat al-Tawhid* using textual, contextual, and comparative approaches to assess their jurisprudential significance. **Results:** Abduh's tafsir consistently elevates ethical reasoning, public welfare, and *maqāṣid al-sharī'ah* above rigid textualism. His interpretations of verses on religious freedom (2:256), family law (4:3), justice (5:8), and gender equity (33:35) reflect a reformist orientation grounded in moral deliberation. **Findings and Implications:** The findings reveal a transformative legal paradigm that reframes Islamic law as an adaptable, ethically driven system. Abduh's approach supports institutional reform and offers credible alternatives to formalist legal reasoning in addressing pluralism, governance, and human rights. **Conclusion:** Abduh's rational hermeneutics demonstrates that Islamic legal thought can be renewed through a principled balance of textual fidelity and moral responsiveness, affirming the enduring relevance of *ijtihad* in contemporary legal discourse. **Contribution:** This study enriches Islamic legal scholarship by offering an analytical model that bridges classical jurisprudence and modern ethical challenges, positioning tafsir as a meaningful tool in legal reform. **Limitations and Suggestions:** The study is limited by its focus on textual analysis without assessing practical implementation. Future research should explore the framework's applicability to digital ethics, environmental jurisprudence, and policy-making.

Introduction

This paper revisits Muhammad Abduh's interpretation of the Qur'an, emphasizing its implications for Islamic legal reform.¹ During the late 19th and early 20th centuries, Muslim

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1 Harry Mulfi, "Konsep Muhammad Abduh Tentang Islam Rasional Di Era Modern," *Al-Hikmah: Jurnal Theosofi Dan Peradaban Islam*, 2021, <https://doi.org/10.51900/alhikmah.v3i1.11234>; Zaini, "THE



societies faced the dual challenges of colonial dominance and internal stagnation, particularly in legal thought. Classical jurisprudence had become constrained by rigid adherence to *taqlid* and was increasingly detached from changing socio-political realities.² Muhammad Abduh (1849, 1905) addressed this crisis not only through theological renewal but also by proposing a rational hermeneutic framework that redefined the foundations of Islamic law. His interpretive methodology, most notably articulated in *Tafsir al-Manar*, sought to restore the role of *ijtihad* (independent reasoning) and to reformulate the ethical foundations of Islamic legal norms. This study examines how Abduh's rational hermeneutics revitalized Islamic legal discourse and continues to shape reformist approaches to *shari'ah* in the contemporary era.³

While Abduh's influence on theology and education is well documented, his contributions to modern Islamic legal thought remain underexplored. His application of reason (*'aql*) and contextual analysis challenged literalist readings of the Qur'an, opening the door to reinterpretations of legal injunctions in light of *maqāṣid al-sharī'ah* (the higher objectives of Islamic law). His emphasis on ethical reasoning, social utility, and justice over formalist legalism marked a critical shift in Islamic jurisprudence. Yet scholarly treatments often overlook the juridical significance of his *tafsir*. Addressing this gap, the present research foregrounds the legal dimensions of Abduh's rational exegesis and its relevance for contemporary legal reform in Muslim societies.⁴

Although rationalist traditions such as those of the Mu'tazilites had emerged centuries earlier, Abduh played a pivotal role in reviving and advancing the use of reason within modern Islamic thought, particularly in legal and educational reform. He argued that reason should be central to religious life and legal interpretation, advocating a harmonious balance between rational inquiry and spiritual values to promote human well-being in both this world and the hereafter.

Through an analysis of key legal-themed verses and Abduh's interpretive strategies, this research demonstrates that his *tafsir* was not solely exegetical but also jurisprudentially transformative. Abduh's methodology enables the reexamination of laws concerning religious freedom, gender justice, and public welfare. Employing an interdisciplinary approach that

METHOD OF INTERPRETATION OF SYEH MUHAMMAD ABDUH AND SYEH RASYID RIDHA IN THE BOOK TAFSIR AL MANAR," *Al-Bayan: Jurnal Ilmu Al-Qur'an Dan Hadist*, 2019, <https://doi.org/10.35132/ALBAYAN.V2I1.44>; Raffy Akbar Nst et al., "Pemikiran Muhammad Abduh," *Mimbar Kampus: Jurnal Pendidikan Dan Agama Islam*, 2024, <https://doi.org/10.47467/mk.v23i2.3814>; Tasnim Abdul Rahman and A Amir, "The Influence of Muhammad Abduh in Indonesia," 2021, <https://doi.org/10.21580/ihya.23.1.7076>; A Amir, "The Influence of Muhammad Abduh in The Nusantara: From Qur'anic Exegesis to Islamic Reform Movement," *Afkaruna: Indonesian Interdisciplinary Journal of Islamic Studies*, 2022, <https://doi.org/10.18196/afkaruna.v18i2.10282>.

² Wang Yongbao, "THE IMPACT OF COLONIALISM AND NATIONALISM ON THE MARGINALIZATION OF ISLAMIC LAW IN THE MUSLIM WORLD," *Malaysian Journal of Syariah and Law* 12, no. 2 (August 21, 2024): 375–87, <https://doi.org/10.33102/mjssl.vol12no2.653>; Ibraheem Tayseer Ahmad, "The Islamic State in Contemporary Thought: A Critical Analysis of Wael Hallaq's Perspective," *Journal of Posthumanism* 5, no. 5 (April 29, 2025), <https://doi.org/10.63332/joph.v5i5.1307>; Rabi'at Akande, "Secularizing Islam: The Colonial Encounter and the Making of a British Islamic Criminal Law in Northern Nigeria, 1903–58," *Law and History Review* 38, no. 2 (May 22, 2020): 459–93, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0738248019000166>.

³ Haroon Bashir, "Islam and the Emancipatory Ethic: Islamic Law, Liberation Theology and Prison Abolition," *Religions* 14, no. 9 (August 22, 2023): 1083, <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel14091083>.

⁴ Bashir; Mark Sedgwick, "Muhammad 'Abduh: Modern Islam and the Culture of Ambiguity By Oliver Scharbrodt," *Journal of Islamic Studies* 35, no. 1 (January 1, 2024): 126–29, <https://doi.org/10.1093/jis/etad044>.



integrates hermeneutics, legal theory, and the sociology of law, this study evaluates how Abduh's perspective enriches contemporary Islamic legal discourse. In doing so, it proposes a comprehensive model for legal reform grounded in ethical rationalism and attuned to the challenges of the modern Muslim world.

Methods

This study employed a qualitative research design grounded in hermeneutical analysis and Islamic legal theory to examine Muhammad Abduh's rational hermeneutics and its contribution to Islamic legal reform. The research adopted an interdisciplinary theoretical framework integrating hermeneutics—drawing on Fazlur Rahman's double-movement theory and Mohammed Arkoun's critical hermeneutics—Islamic legal theory (*uṣūl al-fiqh*), and the sociology of law. This approach provided a critical lens to assess Abduh's efforts to reconcile reason and revelation in legal reasoning, while examining how religious texts interacted with historical contexts and institutional forces.

The primary sources comprised Abduh's exegetical and theological works, notably *Tafsir al-Manār* (co-authored with Rashid Rida), *Tafsir Juz 'Amma*, and *Risalat al-Tawhid*. Secondary sources included scholarly analyses of Abduh's legal, theological, and hermeneutic thought. The units of analysis were Qur'anic verses with legal implications interpreted by Abduh, including those on justice (4:58; 5:8), governance (42:38), religious freedom (2:256), family law (4:3; 2:229), and gender equity (33:35). These verses were purposively selected for their prominence in both classical jurisprudence and Abduh's interpretive work.

The analytical procedure comprised four sequential stages: (1) textual extraction of relevant Qur'anic verses from Abduh's works; (2) contextual analysis situating his interpretations within the socio-political conditions of 19th-century Egypt; (3) comparative legal reading contrasting Abduh's interpretations with traditional juristic commentaries (e.g., *al-Tabari*, *al-Qurtubi*); and (4) thematic coding synthesizing his hermeneutic principles, including rationalism, justice, public welfare, and *maqāṣid* orientation. This systematic approach enabled a comprehensive examination of methodological divergences and reformist shifts in Abduh's legal thinking.

Research credibility was strengthened through triangulation of multiple sources and adherence to established scholarly protocols in Qur'anic and legal studies. The study acknowledges its limitation as a textual analysis that does not empirically assess the institutional implementation or societal reception of Abduh's ideas. All sources were properly attributed, with due respect given to religious traditions.

Results and Discussions

Reforming Legal Interpretation: From Formalism to Ethical Functionalism

Muhammad Abduh's Rational Hermeneutics and Its Implications for Islamic Legal Reform presents an interpretive model that functions as a reformist legal framework. His tafsir marks a decisive departure from legal formalism, reconceiving Qur'anic interpretation as a dynamic process centered on ethical intentionality, justice (*'adl*), and public welfare (*maṣlaḥah*). In contrast to rigid juristic literalism, Abduh's hermeneutics prioritizes ijtihad (independent legal reasoning) to ensure that Islamic law remains responsive to evolving human needs.⁵

Abduh's rational hermeneutics significantly transforms the methodology of interpreting Islamic law from a rigid, precedent-bound framework to one rooted in ethical and functional considerations. In his explanations of Surah *al-Nisā'* and *al-Baqarah*, he prioritizes justice, equity,

⁵ Bashir, "Islam and the Emancipatory Ethic: Islamic Law, Liberation Theology and Prison Abolition"; Siddiqi, "Moral Epistemology and the Revision of Divine Law in Islam."



and public welfare over strict adherence to established jurisprudential rulings. For example, his reexamination of polygamy supports limiting it based on ethical capacity and social justice, anticipating modern *maqāṣid*-oriented reasoning. Likewise, his interpretation of *lā ikrāha fī al-dīn* (“no compulsion in religion”) reframes legal pluralism and freedom of belief as core Qur’anic principles, in direct contrast to historical coercive interpretations.⁶

The analysis further affirms that Abduh’s exegesis calls for a reappraisal of penal codes, gender regulations, and religious obligations in light of changing socio-political contexts. This approach resonates with contemporary reformist initiatives in Egypt, Indonesia, and elsewhere, which apply his methodology to justify modern legal adaptations while remaining anchored in the teachings of the Qur’an.⁷

Qur’anic Legal Verses and Their Reformist Reinterpretation

The findings indicate that Abduh’s rational hermeneutics shifts Islamic legal interpretation from a rigid, formalist orientation toward a more ethical and functional perspective. His tafsir consistently derives legal principles through ethical reasoning, contextual awareness, and an emphasis on justice (*‘adl*) and the common good (*maṣlaḥah*). The following examples illustrate how specific Qur’anic verses underpin his approach to legal reform:

1. **Surah Al-Baqarah (2:256):** “*Lā ikrāha fī al-dīn*” (“There is no compulsion in religion”). Abduh interprets this verse as a definitive legal principle guaranteeing religious freedom and autonomy of conscience. Rejecting coercive interpretations common in pre-modern jurisprudence, he argues that faith must be grounded in conviction, not force, and that legal systems must uphold human dignity. This reading provided a foundation for reformist arguments in favor of religious pluralism and non-coercive law.⁸
2. **Surah Al-Nisā’ (4:3)** — “*If you fear that you shall not be able to deal justly with orphans, marry women of your choice, two, three, or four. But if you fear that you shall not be able to deal justly, then marry only one...*” Abduh interprets this verse as a conditional allowance rather than an endorsement of polygamy, with justice as its central requirement. Critiquing the historical misuse of this verse, he advocates for legal restrictions on polygamy, emphasizing ethical

⁶ Moh. Nor Ichwan, David Ming, and Mokh Sya’roni, “Bridging Tradition and Modernity: Integrating Classical Interpretation and Modern Hermeneutics through Ijtihad in Qur’an Studies,” *Pharos Journal of Theology*, no. 106.2 (March 2025), <https://doi.org/10.46222/pharosjot.106.2021>; Siddiqi, “Moral Epistemology and the Revision of Divine Law in Islam.”

⁷ Siti Iyam Muslimah, “Adâbî Ijtima’î Dalam Penafsiran Ayat Gender Perspektif Muhammad Abduh,” *Journal of Comprehensive Science (JCS)*, 2024, <https://doi.org/10.59188/jcs.v3i11.2721>; Moh. Nor Ichwan et al., “Muhammad Abduh and Sufism: Building Spiritual Consciousness in the Context of Social Change,” *Teosofi: Jurnal Tasawuf Dan Pemikiran Islam*, 2024, <https://doi.org/10.15642/teosofi.2024.14.1.163-187>; I Adam, “Islamic Modernism and Tafsir in Nineteenth Century Egypt: A Critical Analysis of Muhammad Abduh’s Exegesis,” *Journal of Quranic Sciences and Research*, 2023, <https://doi.org/10.30880/jqsr.2023.04.01.006>.

⁸ Adam, “Islamic Modernism and Tafsir in Nineteenth Century Egypt: A Critical Analysis of Muhammad Abduh’s Exegesis”; Pierluigi Chiassoni, “Protecting Freedom of Conscience in a Constitutional State,” 2021, 15–42, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003131083-3>; Nicolae Sedletchi, “The Right to Freedom of Conscience - Dimensions Conceptual-Legal,” *Vector European*, 2023, <https://doi.org/10.52507/2345-1106.2022-2.06>; J Maclure and Charles Taylor, “Secularism and Freedom of Conscience,” 2011, <https://doi.org/10.4159/harvard.9780674062955>.



capacity and social consequences. His interpretation anticipates later *maqāṣid al-sharīʿah*-based arguments for monogamy as the ethical norm.⁹

3. **Surah Al-Mā'idah (5:8)** — “*Do not allow the enmity of a people to hinder you from being just. Uphold justice; that is closer to righteousness.*” Abduh elevates this verse as a universal legal principle governing both public and private conduct. In his framework, justice (*ʿadl*) is not merely procedural but substantive, serving as the moral foundation of Islamic legislation and governance.¹⁰
4. **Surah Al-Baqarah (2:229)** — “*Do not take them back to harm them or to transgress. And whoever does that has wronged himself.*” Abduh cites this verse to challenge abusive practices within family law, particularly in matters of divorce and custody. He emphasizes that Islamic law must protect the vulnerable, especially women, from legal exploitation. Any interpretation that permits harm, he asserts, is both legally and ethically invalid.¹¹
5. **Surah Al-Shūrā (42:38)** — “*...those who conduct their affairs by mutual consultation (shūrā)...*” For Abduh, this verse legitimizes consultative governance as a Qurʾanic legal principle. He critiques autocratic rule and advocates for democratic participation and constitutional reform within Muslim governance. Abduh proposes that Islamic political and legal systems should be firmly rooted in *shūrā*, justice, and accountability.¹²

⁹ U Abdurrahman, “Penafsiran Muhammad ‘Abduh Terhadap Alquran Surat Al-Nisā’ Ayat 3 Dan 129 Tentang Poligami” 14 (2017): 25–46, <https://doi.org/10.24042/adalah.v14i1.1139>; M Ichsan, “POLIGAMI DALAM PERSPEKTIF HUKUM ISLAM (Kajian Tafsir Muqaranah),” JURIS (Jurnal Ilmiah Syariah), 2018, <https://doi.org/10.31958/JURIS.V17I2.1196>; Masiyan Syam and Faisal Haitomi, “Poligami Dalam Surah An-Nisa’ (4): 3 (Aplikasi Pendekatan Kontekstual Abdullah Saeed).” 9 (2020): 66–84, <https://doi.org/10.29300/jpkth.v9i1.2752>; Laily Rahma Wati et al., “Poligami Dalam Al Quran Perspektif Penafsiran,” Reflection : Islamic Education Journal, 2024, <https://doi.org/10.61132/reflection.v2i1.398>; Khairul Hamim, “Comparison Between Double Movement Theory and Nazariyyat Al-Hudud Theory on Polygamy Laws,” El-Mashlahah, 2022, <https://doi.org/10.23971/el-mashlahah.v12i2.4903>; Man Baker, “Polygyny in Islam: A Call for Retrospection,” British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies 50 (2021): 397–409, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13530194.2021.1975258>.

¹⁰ Mohsen Goudarzi, “Mecca’s Cult and Medina’s Constitution in the Qurʾān: A New Reading of Al-Mā'idah,” Der Islam 101, no. 1 (April 4, 2024): 25–73, <https://doi.org/10.1515/islam-2024-0003>.

¹¹ A Munim, “Post-Divorce Custody of Children According to Positive and Islamic Laws” 2 (2020): 20–27, <https://doi.org/10.30659/LDJ.2.1.%P>; Umar Multazam, “The Concept of Child Custody (Hadhanah) After Divorce in the Perspective of Islamic Law,” Indonesian Journal of Islamic Law, 2024, <https://doi.org/10.35719/ijil.v7i1.1956>; Siti Nurjanah, “Divorce and Its Impact on Custody of Minors Using Islamic Law Perspectives,” Al-Istinbath: Jurnal Hukum Islam, 2022, <https://doi.org/10.29240/jhi.v7i1.4156>; N Nasrudin et al., “Comparative Analysis of Islamic Family Law and Normative Law: Examining the Causes of Divorce in Purwokerto, Indonesia,” Samarah: Jurnal Hukum Keluarga Dan Hukum Islam, 2024, <https://doi.org/10.22373/sjhk.v8i2.16825>.

¹² Khudzaifah Dimyati et al., “Developing Islamic Legal Philosophy-Based Assurance of Justice,” WISDOM, 2022, <https://doi.org/10.24234/wisdom.v24i4.808>; Agus Riwanto and S Suryaningsih, “Realizing Welfare State and Social Justice: A Perspective on Islamic Law,” Volksgeist: Jurnal Ilmu Hukum Dan Konstitusi, 2022, <https://doi.org/10.24090/volksgeist.v5i1.6430>; Salah Ud Din, Sharifah Hayaati Syed Ismail, and Raja Hisyamudin Raja Sulong, “Combating Corruption Based on Al-Siyasah Al-Syaar’iyyah Perspective: A Literature Review,” International Journal of Ethics and Systems, 2023, <https://doi.org/10.1108/ijoes-12-2022-0312>; Wildani Hefni, Rizqa Ahmadi, and Imam Mustofa, “Looking for Moderate Fiqh: The Thought of Mohammad Hashim Kamali on the Reformation of Rigidity and



6. **Surah Al-Nisā' (4:58)** — *"God commands you to render trusts to whom they are due and when you judge between people to judge with justice..."* Abduh highlights this verse as the jurisprudential foundation for the rule of law, fair adjudication, and public trust. He criticizes pre-modern legal structures that failed to guarantee equal justice and calls for institutional reforms grounded in this Qur'anic injunction.¹³
7. **Surah Al-Aḥzāb (33:35)** — *"Indeed, the Muslim men and Muslim women... the fasting men and the fasting women... the men who remember Allah often and the women who do so – for them Allah has prepared forgiveness and a great reward."* Abduh references this verse to argue for gender equity in legal and moral responsibility. He maintains that spiritual and ethical equality must be reflected in legal rights and obligations, offering a Qur'anic rationale for rethinking patriarchal interpretations in Islamic law.¹⁴
8. **Surah Al-Ḥujurāt (49:13)** — *"O mankind, We created you from a male and a female and made you into peoples and tribes so that you may know one another..."* This verse serves as the foundation for Abduh's critique of legal ethnocentrism and sectarianism. He advocates for legal principles that promote social cohesion, uphold equal dignity, and encourage intercommunal respect, while rejecting discriminatory rulings based on ethnicity or social status.¹⁵

Taken together, these examples demonstrate that Abduh's approach to legal interpretation is marked by a commitment to ethical principles, contextual awareness, and adaptability in law. He does not seek to abolish the Islamic legal tradition; rather, he aims to rejuvenate it by applying the Qur'an's universal moral principles. His interpretations serve as a pathway for legal renewal, emphasizing the centrality of human dignity, justice, and social welfare.

Integration of Reason and Revelation in Legal Interpretation

Abduh articulated a jurisprudential paradigm that integrates reason (*'aql*) with revelation

Inflexibility in Islamic Law," *Al-Istinbath: Jurnal Hukum Islam*, 2025, <https://doi.org/10.29240/jhi.v10i1.10694>.

¹³ RUHDIARA, "PRINCIPLES OF STATE ORGANIZATION IN SURAH AN-NISA' (4): 58-59." *Dusturiyah: Jurnal Hukum Islam, Perundang-Undangan Dan Pranata Sosial* 13, no. 1 (June 11, 2023): 01, <https://doi.org/10.22373/dusturiyah.v13i1.13280>.

¹⁴ Stefhani Rahmawati, "Mainstreaming of Gender Equality in Islamic Family Law: Opportunities and Challenges," *Samarah: Jurnal Hukum Keluarga Dan Hukum Islam*, 2020, <https://doi.org/10.22373/sjhk.v4i2.8110>; Khanum Shaikh, "Journeys toward Gender Equality in Islam," *Politics, Religion & Ideology* 24 (2023): 295–98, <https://doi.org/10.1080/21567689.2023.2196122>; T Orr, "Review of Gender and Equality in Muslim Family Law: Justice and Ethics in the Islamic Legal Tradition, Ed. Ziba Mir-Hosseini, Kari Vogt, Lena Larsen, and Christian Moe" 1 (2020): 149–51, <https://doi.org/10.37264/jcsi.v1i2.34>; Ade Daharis, "The Role and Position of Women in the Family According to Islamic Law: A Critical Study of Contemporary Practices," *LITERATUS*, 2023, <https://doi.org/10.37010/lit.v5i2.1475>.

¹⁵ Aziz Huq, "The Dignity of Legal Subjects," *Oxford Journal of Legal Studies*, 2024, <https://doi.org/10.1093/ojls/gqae004>; Arifinsyah, Maulana Andinata Dalimunthe, and Faisal Riza, "Islamic Theological Perspectives on Human Rights: Bridging the Gap between Faith and Universal Principles," *Pharos Journal of Theology*, 2025, <https://doi.org/10.46222/pharosjot.106.207>; Pablo Gilabert, "Inclusive Dignity," *Politics Philosophy & Economics* 23 (2023): 22–46, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1470594X231178499>; Antonio Barcellós and Maria Fernandez, "The Structuring Principles of Society in the Right: Fundamentals for Applying a Legal Theory That Forms the Right," *Social Sciences*, 2025, <https://doi.org/10.11648/j.ss.20251402.21>.



(*naql*), arguing that divine guidance invites rational engagement rather than passive acceptance. In his view, legal rulings are not static prescriptions, but rational outcomes guided by moral objectives. His interpretation transforms legal methodology into an active ethical endeavor, asserting that the Qur'an's legal content must resonate with contextual human realities to preserve its normative vitality.¹⁶

By redefining the Qur'an as a text that encompasses both moral guidance and rational thought, Abduh rejuvenated *ijtihad* as a valid source of legal authority, challenging the prevailing medieval consensus on legal matters. His contributions laid the groundwork for contemporary *maqāṣid*-based legal reasoning, positioning ethics, not merely textual interpretation, at the center of the lawmaking process. Abduh advocated for a synergistic relationship between reason and revelation in interpretation and legislation, highlighting the centrality of ethics and rationality in efforts to reform Islamic law.¹⁷

Abduh's tafsir enables jurists to approach law not as a static set of rules but as a dynamic process of ethical deliberation. His interpretations challenge patriarchal and coercive readings of scripture, support legal pluralism, and elevate human dignity as a core legal principle. While critiques remain regarding his limited engagement with classical *fiqh* methodology or gender-specific jurisprudence, Abduh's hermeneutics continue to serve as a vital resource for legal reformers seeking to align Islamic law with justice, equity, and contemporary realities.

Rejection of Taqlid and Revival of Ijtihad

At the heart of Abduh's reformist thought is his rejection of *taqlid*, which he viewed as detrimental to intellectual and societal advancement. He championed *ijtihad*, emphasizing the jurist's duty to critically engage with both scripture and the lived realities of society. According to Abduh, Islamic law should evolve in response to changing circumstances through ethical deliberation rather than rigid adherence to precedent. This approach revitalized Islamic legal theory and resonates strongly with contemporary reformist movements.¹⁸

Abduh's philosophy opposed the uncritical following of past authorities, contending that

¹⁶ Mohammed A F Badawi and Zulfikri, "The Relevance of Muhammad Abduh's Thought in Indonesian Tafsir: Analysis of Tafsir Al-Azhar," *Millah*, 2021, <https://doi.org/10.20885/millah.vol21.iss1.art5>; Susilo, "Reinterpretation of the Meaning of Angels in Tafsir Al-Manar (Critical Analysis Studies)," *Aqwal: Journal of Qur'an and Hadis Studies*, 2023, <https://doi.org/10.28918/aqwal.v4i1.915>; Aditiya Gilang Febiyanto and Andhika Najib Azka, "The Enlightened Path: Muḥammad 'Abduh's Fusion of Reason and Revelation," *Mauriduna: Journal of Islamic Studies*, 2025, <https://doi.org/10.37274/mauriduna.v6i1.1409>.

¹⁷ D Mukhetdinov, "The Reception of Egyptian Modernism in Indonesia: Harun Nasution on Theology of Muhammad Abduh," *Islam in the Modern World*, 2020, <https://doi.org/10.22311/2074-1529-2020-16-3-49-64>; Rizki Firmansyah and Sufian Bosu, "JEJAK PENAFSIRAN RASIONAL PADA KITAB TAFSIR JUZ 'AMMA KARYA MUHAMMAD ABDUH," *MIMESIS*, 2023, <https://doi.org/10.12928/mms.v4i1.7079>; Risman Bustamam and Devy Aisyah, "Model Penafsiran Kisah Oleh Muhammad Abduh Dalam Al-Manar: Studi Kisah Adam Pada Surah Al-Baqarah" 2 (2020): 199–218, <https://doi.org/10.15548/mashdar.v2i2.1695>; Aditiya Gilang Febiyanto and Andhika Najib Azka, "The Enlightened Path: Muḥammad 'Abduh's Fusion of Reason and Revelation," *Mauriduna: Journal of Islamic Studies*, 2025, <https://doi.org/10.37274/mauriduna.v6i1.1409>.

¹⁸ Mohammad Izdiyan Muttaqin et al., "Muhammad Abduh's Thought and Its Practical Implications on Government Work Programs For 2024-2029," *Journal of Social Research*, 2025, <https://doi.org/10.55324/josr.v4i2.2424>; Muhammad Hafizh et al., "Muhammad Abduh's Typical Modern Education: His Thoughts and Reforms in the Islamic World," *Nizham Journal of Islamic Studies*, 2025, <https://doi.org/10.32332/nizham.v13i01.9697>; E Efendi et al., "MUHAMMAD ABDUH: REFORMASI DAN PURIFIKASI INTELEKTUALITAS DUNIA PENDIDIKAN ISLAM TAHUN 1866-1905M," *AL Fikrah : Jurnal Pendidikan Dan Pemikiran Islam*, 2023, <https://doi.org/10.51476/alfikrah.v3i2.501>.



such practices hinder both intellectual growth and social progress.¹⁹ Instead, he promoted independent reasoning, urging scholars to engage thoughtfully with Islamic sources while remaining responsive to modern contexts. He argued that the law should adapt through ethical reasoning and rational interpretation, allowing it to address emerging societal needs. By advocating *ijtihad*, Abduh fostered a dynamic and reflective relationship with tradition, aiming to harmonize faith with contemporary ethical principles. In doing so, he made a significant contribution to the development of modern Islamic thought and legal reform.²⁰

Critical Reflections and Scholarly Debates

Despite its considerable influence, Abduh's rationalism has been critiqued for potentially weakening traditional legal authority. Critics often highlight the risks of legal subjectivism and its perceived alignment with secular legal systems. Yet, these critiques underscore the significance of his thought as an important challenge to established jurisprudence, rather than as a fully developed legal framework.²¹ Abduh's rational approach has inspired reformist movements seeking to reaffirm the relevance of Islamic law. However, detractors argue that his reluctance to articulate a coherent and consistent moral rationalism limits the development of a robust alternative to conventional legalism, leaving reformist theories vulnerable to accusations of subjectivism or secular influence. Nevertheless, Abduh's epistemological outlook remains a formative influence in contemporary debates over the relationship between tradition and reform in Islamic law, highlighting the enduring need for reasoned engagement with both scripture and the evolving demands of society.²²

Conclusion

This study reaffirms that Muhammad Abduh's rational and sociologically informed exegetical method constitutes a transformative paradigm in Qur'anic interpretation, one that continues to shape contemporary Islamic legal and intellectual discourse. Through critical examination of *Tafsir al-Manar*, *Tafsir Juz 'Amma*, and *Risalat al-Tawhid*, the research demonstrates Abduh's enduring commitment to harmonizing revelation with reason and grounding Islamic law in ethical reasoning, scientific awareness, and educational advancement. Positioned between the poles of traditionalist dogmatism and secular detachment, Abduh articulated a reformist hermeneutic rooted in *ijtihad*, moral autonomy, and epistemic integrity. While his thought was shaped by the socio-historical context of the 19th century and is not

¹⁹ Muhamad Haris et al., "Muhammad Abduh's Thought and Its Practical Implications on Government Work Programs For 2024-2029," *Journal of Social Research* 4, no. 2 (January 25, 2025): 175–95, <https://doi.org/10.55324/josr.v4i2.2424>.

²⁰ Hafiz Zakariya, "MUHAMMAD 'ABDUH'S REFORMISM: THE MODES OF ITS DISSEMINATION IN PRE-INDEPENDENT MALAYSIA," *International Research Journal of Shariah, Muamalat and Islam* 2, no. 4 (June 10, 2020): 43–54, <https://doi.org/10.35631/IRJSMI.24005>; Elly Warnisyah Harp et al., "Pemikiran Muhammad Abduh," *Mimbar Kampus: Jurnal Pendidikan Dan Agama Islam* 23, no. 2 (July 10, 2024): 1176–85, <https://doi.org/10.47467/mk.v23i2.3814>.

²¹ Ilham Kuncahyo et al., "Efforts to Reform Islamic Law: An Analysis of Muhammad Abduh's Thought," *Interdisciplinary Journal of Social Science and Education (IJSSE)*, April 2, 2024, 21–30, <https://doi.org/10.53639/ijssse.v2i1.17>.

²² Aasia Yusuf, "Islam and Modernity: Remembering the Contribution of Muhammad Abduh (1849-1905)," *ICR Journal* 3, no. 2 (January 15, 2012): 355–69, <https://doi.org/10.52282/icr.v3i2.560>; Aditiya Gilang Febiyanto and Andhika Najib Azka, "The Enlightened Path: Muḥammad 'Abduh's Fusion of Reason and Revelation," *Mauriduna: Journal of Islamic Studies* 6, no. 1 (January 13, 2025): 625–43, <https://doi.org/10.37274/mauriduna.v6i1.1409>.



without limitations, particularly in relation to spiritual mysticism and gender inclusivity, his intellectual legacy remains a pivotal resource for rethinking Islamic legal theory and practice. The study's primary contribution lies in reframing tafsir as an ethically oriented, contextually responsive, and intellectually dynamic enterprise. Future research is encouraged to extend Abduh's hermeneutical model to emerging domains such as ecological jurisprudence, digital ethics, and transnational Islamic legal reform.

CRediT Authorship Contribution Statement

Ahmad Nabil: Conceptualization, Methodology, Writing -original Draft. Supervision, Methodology, Writing - review & editing, **Tasnim Abdul Rahman:** Supervision, Writing - review

Declaration of Competing Interest

The authors declare that they have no competing financial interests or personal relationships that could influence the work reported in this paper.

Data Availability

Data will be made available on request.

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