

## Raising Political Awareness and Journalist Ethics: Study of Muhammad Abduh's Role through al-Waqā'i' al-Misriyyah

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**Abstract.** Role of Muhammad Abduh (1849-1905) in the publication of al-Waqā'i' al-Misriyya (الوقائع المصرية, Egyptian Events) an official Egyptian gazette. It had a profound impact on the field of journalism in the context of the rising popularity of al-Waqā'i' al-Misriyyah during his editorship (1880-1882), establishing its reputation as the leading Egyptian newspaper. His illustrious article highlights the establishment's unprecedented socio-cultural and religious reform, amid phenomenal and competitive growth of independent press. His writing was instrumental in developing national consciousness toward modernization programs and influencing public opinion in Egypt. It allowed for better development of formidable national spirit and awakening of their higher ideal and convention in language, literature, and culture, as well as mobilizing social awareness of intense political and cultural dynamics. His career spanned the period of Riyad Pasha and Sharif's administration and subsequent political unrest. The research is based on qualitative and documentation techniques. It reviewed accumulated data by way of descriptive, analytical, historical, and comparative methods. The finding shows that al-Waqā'i' has assumed unprecedented influence and success during the editorship of Abduh through his dynamic and productive articles and rigorous daily basis of production of the newspaper that helps to raise public issues and concern and attract awareness of the global political situation as well as defending the significance value, norms and ethics of journalism.

**Keyword:** al-Waqā'i' al-Misriyyah; Egypt; Muhammad Abduh; press

**Abstrak:** Artikel ini membahas peranan Muhammad Abduh (1849-1905) dalam penerbitan surat kabar al-Waqā'i' al-Misriyyah (الوقائع المصرية) sebagai ketua editorialnya sejak tahun 1880. Dampak yang besar kepada bidang kewartawanan ini penting dalam konteks kebangkitan jurnalistik Mesir, khususnya *al-Mu'ayyad* dan al-Waqā'i' al-Misriyyah, sebagai surat kabar resmi pemerintah bagi mengembangkan permodelan dan mempengaruhi pandangan umum di Mesir. Abduh memberikan kontribusi yang signifikan dalam mengembangkan harkat bahasa, meningkatkan kekuatan pengaruh jurnalistik, dan menggerakkan kesadaran masyarakat umum terkait politik dan budaya yang intens dalam perkembangan semangat nasionalisme dan kesadaran sosial di Mesir. Artikel ini menyorot idea-idea yang dilontarkan Abduh tentang pembaharuan sosial dan spiritual, serta persoalan-persoalan pendidikan, agama dan sosio-budaya dalam

tulisan Abduh yang diterbitkan al-Waqā'i' al-Misriyyah. Data penelitian dikumpulkan melalui Teknik dokumentasi. Data-data tersebut disajikan secara deskriptif, analitik, dan komparatif. Penelitian ini berkesimpulan bahwa perkembangan yang dinamik dan produktif terdapat di masa kepemimpinan Abduh menggerakkan surat kabar al-Waqā'i' al-Misriyyah yang berhasil mengangkat persoalan masyarakat dan menarik kesadaran tentang ihwal mutakhir dalam dunia politik dan akhbar serta mempertahankan kepentingan etika dan nilai kewartawanan.

**Kata kunci:** al-Waqā'i' al-Misriyyah; Mesir; Muhammad Abduh; surat kabar

## A. Introduction

The article examines the significant ideas and role of Muhammad Abduh (1849-1905) in the classical and highly reputed newspaper al-Waqā'i' al-Misriyya (الوقائع المصرية) [Egyptian Events] as its chief editor in 1880. This highly stimulative and encouraging work involved many dynamic positions and roles he assumed in the newspaper's bureaucratic structure. His active role had brought meaningful influence and connection in a wide-ranging intellectual network and activism forthcoming from his impressive career as a leading activist and journalist of the modern intellectual movement of late 19<sup>th</sup> century Egypt. With the mediation of newspaper, it provided a significant medium for his modernist project, as a mouthpiece that allowed him to articulate his social, political, and literary views, aiming to interpret and understand the ever-expanding political, cultural, and ethical-moral norms and values of the universal world, and developing his global religious ideas and its underlying reformist tradition. Ammeke Kateman states, "Abduh formulated his ideas in the newspapers of Cairo...responding to domestic politics, engaged with Islamic tradition, reflected his friendships and animosities – in addition to the ways they participated in global developments."<sup>1</sup>

Abduh's creative and meaningful approaches of interpretation have enabled the formation of a global and broadly international network of audiences and followers, which fascinated by the progressive ideas he espoused for educational and social reform and the deeply metaphysical and intellectual articulation of tawhid and religious enlightenment and reforms he led to uphold the imperative of moral orders<sup>2</sup>, expanding the well-being and welfare of the people, expressing the dynamic force of political, religious, cultural, artistic, and social movement, ideas, and national consciousness.

The social context and progressive nature of journalism in Egypt were instrumental in enabling the spread of his rational and pluralistic ideas (*jama'i*) to flourish. The projection of these radically global and transformative ideas was developed through his influence and writing in local newspapers that profoundly impacted the entire makeup of the socio-cultural and national fabric, in awakening their spirit toward social cohesiveness, leveraging their cultural awareness of the productive scientific and technological invention in education and

<sup>1</sup> Kateman, Ammeke, *Muhammad Abduh and His Interlocutors: Conceptualizing Religion in a Globalizing World* (Leiden, Boston: Brill, 2019), 3.

<sup>2</sup> Amin, Osman. "Muhammad 'Abduh the Reformer", *The Muslim World*, Vol. 36, Iss 2 (April, 1946), 153.

literature,<sup>3</sup> and ultimately toward national progress, religious reform, and universal freedom while simultaneously brought into consciousness the ongoing secular onslaught amid the revolutionary upheaval in Egypt.

Since his school days, Abduh had developed an interest in writing and scholarship by contributing his work to local magazines and newspapers, such interest and activity never faded until the end of his life. The momentous experiences and exposure gained throughout the years greatly helped to widen his horizon of evolving religious views and concerns, a theme that attracted much discussion among the young generation of the Muslim community in the Islamic world.

In the process of modern advancement and progress of the Egyptian land, the part played by newspapers and journalism was far more important than most of the western countries, which reflected an interesting fact that most of the pioneers of modern religious movement and reformism started their career as writer and journalist in newspaper, such as Mustafa Kamil (1874-1908), Sa'ad Zaghlul (1859-1927), Ahmad Mahir (d. 1945), Taha Husayn (1889-1973), 'Abbas Mahmoud al-'Aqqad (1889-1964), Muhammad Husayn Haykal (1888-1956) and Muhammad Abduh (1849-1905). Abduh's technical achievement in journalism alone is enough to remember him as one of Egypt's precursors to modern journalism in the colonial age.

One of the most important periods of his journalistic career was during his incumbency as its editorial and later was officiated to become the chief editor of the Egyptian Government Gazette, "al-Waqā'i' al-Misrīyyah (October 1880-September 1882).<sup>4</sup> Despite the newspaper being the official tongue and channel of the government, he showed his independent voice and exclusive views, in bringing out the reality of the socio-cultural and economic conditions of the ordinary people. This is especially highlighted in his critics of the establishment, and his defense of the rights of the oppressed, the leftist group and opposition, and the fate of the workers, activists, and their local representative, meant to safeguard the liberal democratic space and principle and their inalienable right to freedom of expression.

His writings expressed a significant pattern of balance and moderate viewpoints, of justifiably fair reporting in casting social aspirations, inculcating social empathies and current matters of concern, while upholding progressive and rational policies and values. This has significantly improved governmental bureaucratic functions, besides influencing public opinion on the ways issues and policies are being highlighted to raise public awareness of their rationale and consequently find practical solutions to the problems.

Toward this objective, the present paper aims to comprehensively discuss the immense role of Muhammad Abduh as editor-in-chief of the Egyptian State Gazette, "al-Waqā'i' al-Misrīyyah (1880-1882) in his effort to enhance the standard of journalism in Egyptian national context.

Previous literature has been identified in past undertakings that largely focuses on

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<sup>3</sup> Suwahyu, Irwansyah, 'Telaah terhadap Konsep Pembaharuan Pendidikan Islam Muhammad Abduh', *Al-Tarbawi Al-Haditsah: Jurnal Pendidikan Islam*, Vol. 7, Iss 1 (2022), 1.

<sup>4</sup> Al-Sawi, Ahmad Husayn, 'Muhammad 'Abduh and Al-Waqā'i' al-Misrīyah' (Unpublished M.A. Thesis, Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research, McGill University, 1954), 2.

common themes of Islamic modernism and the role of Abduh as the leader of Islamic thought in Egypt.<sup>5</sup> These were centered on general ideas of reform<sup>6</sup> inaugurated by Muhammad Abduh as well as his liberal philosophy and ideas, the integrative doctrine of reason and religion, and the historical conflict between religion and science, with few studies devoted to his career and writings in al-Waqā'i al-Misriyyah. Among these were kitab *Tārīkh al-Ustādh al-Imām al-Shaykh Muhammad 'Abduh* (historical biography of Muhammad Abduh) compiled by his chief disciple, Muhammad Rashid Rida,<sup>7</sup> in three volumes. This relatively classic reference became our primary source, providing this study's original tools and materials. Rida had recorded an extensive biography of Muhammad Abduh and his illustrious career, compiling his major articles and writings (second volume, 1908) and poems and eulogies composed at the time of his death (third volume, 1909). The first volume presents a complete biography of his life and work, and his unpublished articles reissued in *Tārīkh*.

C.C. Adams produced another classic source on the life of Muhammad Abduh<sup>8</sup> in his book *Islam and Modernism in Egypt: A Study of the Modern Reform Movement Inaugurated by Muhammad Abduh*, he extensively described his distinguished career as a Muslim theologian and reformer, his early life and background, intellectual and philosophical work, and influential impact and involvement in journalism which he fills at the request of the Egyptian government. The University of McGill's Master of Art's thesis by Ahmad Husayn Sawi<sup>9</sup> entitled "Muhammad 'Abduh and Al-Waqā'i al-Misriyyah" mainly provides an informed and detailed study of Abduh's journalistic career as leading editor of the Egyptian official gazette Al-Waqā'i al-Misriyyah that clarifies his thought and journalistic venture in light of their historical setting and backdrop.

It provides an important context and background of his practice in journalism and his writings in various Egyptian newspapers that became classics in this field. Sawi referred to mainly sources and reviews in the printed pages of Al-Waqā'i al-Misriyyah, held in the archives of the National Library of Cairo. These included materials not published by Rashid Rida as well as local news making headlines during the outbreak of the Urabi revolution.

Sawi also referred to the writings of Dr. Ibrahim 'Abduh<sup>10</sup> on the rising social and intellectual development of Egypt in the later part of the 19<sup>th</sup> century which explained the functions of various machinery and organs of broadcasting and printing machines in Egypt, and the consequential thriving of Al-Waqā'i al-Misriyyah, with visible power in the shaping of journalistic field and political adab that became the platform and outlet for Abduh's

<sup>5</sup> Aasia, Yusuf, "Islam and Modernity: Remembering the Contribution of Muhammad 'Abduh (1849-1905)". *ICR Journal*, Vol. 3, Iss 2 (January, 2012), 355-369.

<sup>6</sup> Fadzil, Siddiq. *Shaykh Muhammad Abduh: Tokoh Gerakan Islah* (Shah Alam: UNISEL Press, 2023); Hafiz Zakariya. "Muhammad 'Abduh's Reformism: The Modes of its Dissemination in Pre-Independent Malaysia", *International Research of Shariah, Muamalat and Islam*, vol. 2, no. 4 (2020), 43-54.

<sup>7</sup> Muhammad Rashid Rida, *Tārīkh al-Ustādh al-Imām al-Shaykh Muhammad 'Abduh* (Kaherah: Matbaah al-Manar 1931), vol. 1.

<sup>8</sup> C.C. Adams, *Islam and Modernism in Egypt: A Study of the Modern Reform Movement Inaugurated by Muhammad Abduh* (Cairo: The American University of Cairo, 1933).

<sup>9</sup> Sawi, Muhammad 'Abduh and Al-Waqā'i al-Misriyyah', 1954.

<sup>10</sup> Ibrahim 'Abduh, *Tārīkh al-Tibā'ah wa al-Sahāfah fī Misr Khilāl al-Hamlah al-Faransīyah* (Kaherah: t.tp., 1949), vol. 3.

writings on the emerging socio-historical, economic and bureaucratic issues.<sup>11</sup>

A short account of Abduh's biography by Mark Sedgwick<sup>12</sup> had brought to light certain aspects of his influential life and career, which discussed, inter alia, his historical struggle to remove the influence of theological and dogmatic teaching of al-Azhar and their orthodox views from his mind, as well as his intermediate position in the ideological conflict of contemporary Islamic trends and movements, especially connected with their religious creed and legal opinion and fatwa.<sup>13</sup> It also addresses his early career and meeting with al-Afghani, and his editorial post in the periodicals al-Mu'ayyad and Al-Waqa'i' al-Misriyyah and its meaningful challenge under the reactionary Khedival state authorities.

The most recent publication on Abduh was penned by Alias, Adibah Yasmin; Saidin, Mohd Irwan Syazli; and Hamil, Jamaie Haji in their article "The Influence of Muhammad 'Abduh towards the Emergence of Fundamentalist-Reformist of Kaum Muda in Tanah Melayu (1900-1930)". The paper provided an overview of Abduh's pervading influence on the modern religious thought in Malaya brought through al-Azhar and Cairo-based activists that connected the al-Manar school of thought with its more widespread struggle in West Sumatera, Java, and Malaya that marked the advent of Kaum Muda. Although the paper had not delved into Abduh's formative career in the field of journalism, it was instrumental in providing an overview of his conceptual ideas and philosophical impact in the shaping of public thought.

Wilfrid Scawen Blunt's (1840-1922) historical writing, *Secret History of the English Occupation of Egypt*, was immensely crucial. It provided a personal narrative of events surrounding the British government's occupation of Egypt, first published in 1907. Blunt's writing relates his sympathies with the Indigenous struggle, denouncing the British atrocities and promoting the cause of the victims.<sup>14</sup> It offers an inside look at the political machinations that led to the British overthrowing and taking control of Egypt, and the political intricacies that shaped Britain's diplomacy reflecting the socio-political climate of the time under the Khedive and Ottoman rule.

The history of the press in the Egyptian Realm as well as traditional scholarship of al-Azhar was encapsulated in Al-Jabartī's *'Ajā'ib al-Āthār fī al-Tarājim wa'l-Akhhbār* (The Marvelous Chronicles: Biographies and Events),<sup>15</sup> that chronicle the history of Egypt, covering eighteenth century, up to French occupation (1798-1801) and early reign of Muhammad 'Ali (1805-1848). Of particular interest is the historical background of the press

<sup>11</sup> Ryle-Hodges, William, 'Muhammad 'Abduh's Politics of Adab: Knowledge, Journalism and Policing Public Sociability in 19<sup>th</sup> Century Egypt,' (Unpublished PhD Thesis, University of Cambridge, 2020), 1.

<sup>12</sup> Sedgwick, Mark. *Muhammad Abduh* (Cairo: AUC Press, 2003), 1.

<sup>13</sup> Hiroshi Matsumoto. 'The Islamic Reform by Muhammad 'Abduh: His Reform Idea and Movement for Institutional and Legal Reforms', *Bulletin of the Society for Near Eastern Studies in Japan*, Vol. 3, Iss. 2 (1988), 1.

<sup>14</sup> Wilfrid Scawen Blunt, *Secret History of the English Occupation of Egypt* (New York: Alfred A Knopf, 1922), Wilfrid Scawen Blunt. *My Diaries: Being a Personal Narrative of Events, 1888-1914* (New York.: A.A. Knopf, 1921).

<sup>15</sup> Al-Jabartī, 'Abd al-Rahman, *'Ajā'ib al-Āthār fī al-Tarājim wa'l-Akhhbār* (The Marvelous Chronicles: Biographies and Events), ed. by Shmuel Moreh. Max Schloessinger Memorial Series, vol. 9. 5 vols. (Jerusalem: Hebrew University, 2013); Al-Jabartī, 'Abd al-Rahman, *'Ajā'ib al-Āthār fī al-Tarājim wa'l-Akhhbār*. Jil. IV (Cairo: t.tp, 1322/1904).



introduced as official tool and machinery of the regime and its role in the time of the Ottoman Egypt.

Thus the present article aims to briefly examine the historical background of Abduh's productive career in journalism and his significant works in Al-Waqa'i' al-Misriyyah. This involves the wide-ranging influence of his intellectual ideas and impressions on the newspaper which has brought a momentous change in the entire process of production and its conventional worldview. It also looks into his effort to harmonize conventional law and shariah<sup>16</sup> under the Khedival rule which he believed would allow for the molding of comprehensive belief systems and philosophies, having significant repercussions, especially in the context of intellectual development and transformation of indigenous Egyptian nations. This was closely analyzed through his newspaper articles which aimed to develop a new consciousness of their shared identity and the conceptual substance of nationhood and identify the relationship of universal ethics and its meaningful place in the practical context of 19th-century Egypt.

This study is qualitative in nature, and designed based on the documentative and bibliographic framework. It analyses qualitatively the historical work of Abduh especially his column in Al-Waqa'i' al-Misriyya and compares this with his essays in other local magazines such as al-Ahram, al-Mu'ayyad and al-'Urwa al-Wuthqa to find its consistency and difference. Other relevant data were obtained from related primary and secondary sources including books, magazines, manuscripts, thesis, articles, and periodicals that provide an overview of his religious ideas and beliefs. The collected materials were analyzed in descriptive, analytical, historical, phenomenal, and comparative techniques using empirical and scientific approaches to make an accurate and coherent finding from the interplay of its theoretical arguments and environmental factors and its context and premise.

## **B. Result and Discussion**

The research findings and analysis of Abduh's editorial work are presented in this section which form the principal part of this study. It reflected the historical context and perspective underpinning the background of Egyptian official gazette Al-Waqa'i' al-Misriyya and its relevance with today's classic discourse on modernity and sustainable practice of journalism. The analysis provides a succinct description of Abduh's reformist ideas and their continuing relevance with today's current progression of Al-Waqa'i' in post-modern Egypt.

### **The Political *Adab***

The portrayal of Muhammad 'Abduh as a journalist and its influence in the shaping of political consciousness and the enriching of *adab* in Egyptian context was succinctly encapsulated by William Ryle-Hodges<sup>17</sup> in his article on Muhammad 'Abduh's notion of political *adab*, and the virtue of modern citizenship in late 19<sup>th</sup> century Khedival Egypt. In

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<sup>16</sup> Seiichi Kobayashi, 'Muhammad 'Abduh and His Age', *Bulletin of the Society for Near Eastern Studies in Japan*, Vol. 23, Iss. 2 (1980), 117.

<sup>17</sup> Ryle-Hodges, William, 'Muhammad 'Abduh's Notion of Political *Adab*: Ethics as a Virtue of Modern Citizenship in Late 19<sup>th</sup> Century Khedival Egypt', *Journal of Arabic and Islamic Studies (JAIS)* 21 (2021), 339–364.

it he addresses the dynamics facet of his influential newspaper writings and its interaction with largely enlightened ground of universally modern religious sphere and politically embedded traditional ethics reflecting its cultural-moral and philosophical significance: “Muhammad ‘Abduh’s engagement with Islamic ethical traditions was shaped by his practice in addressing the broad social and political questions of his context (which has) to do with nation-building and political journalism. As a bureaucrat and state publicist, he took pre-modern Islamic ethical concepts into the emerging discursive field of the modern state and the public sphere in Egypt.”

Hodges argued that since assuming his role as Director of Publications for the Khedival state and editor of the official newspaper between 1880-1882. ‘Abduh had practically articulated the modern civic notion of *adab*, a vision that was comprehensively embedded in the public sphere and people’s lives, animating their “souls”, which implied a “wide breadth of knowledge, good taste, and the virtues.” This ethical notion he conceived was contextually enshrined in his holistic approach to nation-building, underlying his response to local modernizing practice. The inception of this idea forthcoming, from “a series of newspaper articles that ‘Abduh wrote for the state newspaper, Al-Waqā’i’ al-Misriyyah” shows how he conceived this *adab* as the answer to the emerging problem of freedom, in the context of allowing free speech in the public sphere and the power of public opinion to shape governance.”<sup>18</sup>

In essence, this provided the backdrop of his enlightening work in the modern period of the history of Ottoman Egypt. It integrates the religious and ethical norms that molded an Egyptian consciousness that embraces freedom and liberty and envisions the value and ideal of patriotism. In his article on ‘Political Life’ released in Al-Waqā’i’ al-Misriyyah, 28<sup>th</sup> Nov 1881<sup>19</sup> he emphasized the progressive symbol of identity and nationhood and the fundamental motive and reason for the love of homeland:

‘Firstly, the homeland is the abode of sustenance and security, family and children. Secondly, the homeland is the place in respect of which we have both rights and obligations, the pivot of political life. Thirdly, it is about their homeland that people are raised to dignity or lowered to humility.’<sup>20</sup>

On the occasion of the formation of the Constituent Assembly on December 26, 1881, he wrote an article in favor of constitutional and representative government. In his article “Shura”<sup>21</sup> he espoused the necessity of national representation for both rulers and ruled. The partialities and propensities of rulers can be restrained through public opinion and consultation. He also propounded on the basic postulate of law. In safeguarding social institutions, a law (constitution) must be enacted. The ideal law would be an expression of public opinion based on consultation, that suits local needs and traditions.<sup>22</sup>

In this sense, his writings had manifested a sense of journalistic responsibility and inclusivity, in their treatment of domestic and foreign affairs patterned on the progressive

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<sup>18</sup> Ryle-Hodges, William, ‘Muhammad ‘Abduh’s Notion of Political *Adab*:

<sup>19</sup> Muhammad Rashid Rida. *Tārīkh*

<sup>20</sup> Al-Sawī, Ahmad Husayn, ‘Muhammad ‘Abduh and Al-Waqā’i’ al-Misriyyah’

<sup>21</sup> Muhammad Rashid Rida. *Tārīkh*

<sup>22</sup> Al-Sawī, Ahmad Husayn, ‘Muhammad ‘Abduh and Al-Waqā’i’ al-Misriyyah

model of al-Manar, al-Mu'ayyad, al-Ahram, and Thamarat al-Funun<sup>23</sup> that propounded the creative knowledge and social practice of the complex and dynamic society and projected the social utility of religion in the policing of social morality.<sup>24</sup>

### Historical Background

In historical terms, Abduh's early exposure to the world of journalism initially began with his meeting with his celebrated mentor Jamal al-Din al-Afghani in Egypt who introduced him to the nuance and practice of journalism. This relationship had drawn him into the unique experience of higher philosophical and intellectual inquiry and horizon and its conceptual and metaphysical underpinning. Al-Afghani's penetrating insight and progressive outlook deeply influenced and brought him into complex religious, philosophical, and cultural dynamics that influenced his intellectual formation<sup>25</sup>, an impression that drew him into the classic of Western tradition and philosophy<sup>26</sup>. His intellectual life was molded by the impact of rational and empirical inquiry which later realized in his struggle in the intense political scene and intrigue. This was also reflected in his mystical and philosophical writings that reveal the profound appeal of moral and ethical imperatives as well as his reflection on the influence of colonial expansion and imperialism in Egypt. In 1293/1876, Abduh actively wrote essays for the weekly al-Ahram ("The Pyramid")<sup>27</sup> aligning with his function and involvement in the controversial newspaper propaganda that upholds the widely-held aspiration of the Egyptian people for self-determination. It defends and safeguards their national heritage and interest, culminating in the organized mass uprising mobilized by 'Urabi Pasha to remove the corrupt regime of the powerful ruling elite.<sup>28</sup>

According to Masato Iizuka<sup>29</sup> in his analysis of 'Abduh's struggle in the period of 'Urabi Pasha revolt, his movement was aimed to uphold the *shari'ah*, which he took part in the wake of the resignation of the Cabinet of Riyad Pasha in September 1881. Before that, he was editor-in-chief of the Egyptian official gazette, Al-Waqa'i' al-Misriyyah unquestionably supporting the move of the reactionary Government. This changing attitude was due to his recognition of the existing effort in the creation of representative parliament, as inquired from his articles published in the periodicals Al-Waqa'i' al-Misriyyah entitled "*Ikhtilaf al-qawanin bi-ikhtilaf ahwal al-umam*" (laws should change by the conditions of

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<sup>23</sup> Daulay, Maslina, 'Inovasi Pendidikan Islam Muhammad Abduh', *Jurnal Darul 'Ilmi* 1, no. 2 (2013), 77-101.

<sup>24</sup> Kedourie, Elie, *Afghani and Abduh: An Essay on Religious Unbelief and Political Activism in Modern Islam* (London: Frank Cass & Co., 1966).

<sup>25</sup> Scharbrodt, Oliver, *Muhammad 'Abduh: Modern Islam and the Culture of Ambiguity* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2022).

<sup>26</sup> Browne, Edward G., *The Persian Revolution 1905-1909*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Mage Publishers, 2006).

<sup>27</sup> Iswanto, 'The Concept of Islamic Education Muhammad Abduh and its Implications on Islamic Education in Indonesia', *Studia Religia Jurnal Pemikiran dan Pendidikan Islam* 4, no. 1 (2020), 157-166.

<sup>28</sup> Adnan Mohamed Yusoff, Noor Lizza Mohamed Said, Amiruddin Mohd Sobali, 'The New Approach of al-Shaykh 'Abd Allah al-Ghadamsi and al-Imam Muhammad 'Abduh in Developing the Muslim Society', *Islamiyyat* 1 (2016), 3-13.

<sup>29</sup> Masato Iizuka, 'Muhammad 'Abduh in the Period of 'Urabi Movement: A Struggle for the Application of the Shari'ah', *Bulletin of the Society for Near Eastern Studies in Japan* 33, no. 2 (1990), 20-35.



nations)<sup>30</sup> and “*al-shura wa’l-qanun*” (the parliament and the law) which espoused for the national programs of reform and unified convention of law as well as the contextual application of shariah.

### Abduh’s Journalistic Career

Abduh took up his career as a journalist and newspaperman of the periodical *Al-Waqā’i’ al-Misriyyah* in October 1880 until September 1882. In addition to writing articles and reports in headlines, he also runs in ex-officio as Head of the Press Bureau, responsible for monitoring and filtering foreign news in Turkish and Arabic, and commits his best effort to raise its standard in terms of style and content. In this capacity, it is amazing and unprecedented to see this profound and magnanimous role he assumed as described by Muhammad Rashid Rida<sup>31</sup> in his accounts in his *Tārīkh*, of an extraordinary look in this double function of:

“a turbaned Azhari participating in the affairs of a Government whose activities were far removed from the world of scholars and men of religion, looking out from a window of his editorial office onto the Ministries and Law-Courts and Services of the Government, reforming the literary style of their servants and directing them to improve their work; then looking from another window onto the Egyptian nation, rectifying its morals and reforming its corrupted customs...; then looking from a third window onto the Arabic press, teaching it a refined editorial style and training it to write the truth.”<sup>32</sup>

Given his position as leading editor of *al-Waqā’i’ al-Misriyyah* was parallel with the nationalist movement led by ‘Urabi Pasha, and as everyone involved in public affairs in no way can be separated from political activities, ‘Abduh came to the scene in the center stage, in which he played an immensely significant role. Since the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Egypt has undisputedly become the epicenter of Arabic thought and culture, and its Arabic newspapers have made a huge impact on the cultural, literature, social, and political development throughout the Arab world. The first Arab newspaper, under the autocratic rule of Muhammad ‘Ali, arguably *al-Waqā’i’ al-Misriyyah* was established as a state organ, and was also the first newspaper in the Arab region as a whole under direct Ottoman rule. After that period, many competing independent newspapers emerged in Egypt, in a relatively free environment, compared to the Ottoman provinces which allowed no such liberty in publishing.

*Al-Waqā’i’ al-Misriyyah* arguably was the first Arab newspaper in the world. Founded by Muhammad ‘Ali Pasha in 1828, it remained the only periodical in Egypt that lasted for forty years, serving as a historical recorder and training school for authors and guiding aid for oriental readers. This was made possible by the instrumental role of the printing machine which was introduced by Napoleon Bonaparte earlier as a tool of propaganda in the wake of his sacking and occupying of Egypt in 1798. After a period of stagnation, wherein it was

<sup>30</sup> Kurzman, Charles, ed., *Modernist Islam, 1840-1940: A Sourcebook* (Oxford & New York: Oxford University Press, 2002).

<sup>31</sup> Muhammad Rashid Rida. *Tārīkh*

<sup>32</sup> Muhammad Rashid Rida, *Tārīkh al-Ustādh al-Imām al-Shaykh Muhammad ‘Abduh* (Kaherah: Matbaah al-Manar 1931), vol. I, 139; Al-Sawi, Ahmad Husayn, ‘Muhammad ‘Abduh and *Al-Waqā’i’ al-Misriyyah*’, 2.

markedly overcome by the growing popularity of other rival independent newspapers, *al-Waqā'i* gained a new breath and reaching the peak of its fame and prosperity under the skilled leadership of Muhammad 'Abduh. After that, in the changing political context and atmosphere, it returned to its erstwhile position as a common official newspaper.

Muhammad 'Abduh was the successor to Rifa'ah Rafi' al-Tahtawi (1801-73), who first led the periodicals in 1841 under the direction of Muhammad 'Ali, whose legacy was continued by Muhammad 'Abduh forty years later. In the hands of 'Abduh, *Al-Waqā'i* reached its highest achievement of transformation, starting to be published daily with renewed interest and influence, connecting to a global audience and foreign networking, with a higher level and standard rarely imagined in history. His sustained and pioneering effort has left a lasting force of intellectual imprint in it.

*Al-Waqā'i* was revived by Khedive Ismail (r. 1863-79) after its stagnated and underdeveloped era of 'Abbas I (d. 1854) and Sa'id (d. 1863). Less than a month after 'Abduh's appointment, Bulaq's printing house has been summoned to continue its publishing which was previously banned by the regime. Under the reign of Ismail, *al-Waqā'i* emerged as one the most authoritative and reputed newspapers, far surpassing its previous condition. In less than two years under his leadership, 'Abduh had brought the periodicals into unprecedented reform of editorial practice with a heightened level of professionalism and values while maintaining its elite standard as the official state's mouthpiece, which served as vehicle and intermediary for people's aspiration and interest and espoused strong and impressive values and ideal of freedom and justice that widely influence social and religious practice in that relatively uncertain period.

### Abduh's Writings in *al-Waqā'i al-Misriyyah*

In the context of his role as theoretician and revolutionary and proponent of Islamic revival, his painstaking works in the periodical *Al-Waqā'i al-Misriyyah* arguably make innovative use of his polemical and political writings in the newspaper to anticipate a resurgence (*nahda*) of a national movement for legal and institutional reform in the emerging Egypt's colonial and capitalist economy. In this, his journalism - reminiscent of al-Afghani and his political activism - was targeting the elite for "failing to uphold the rule of law and to distribute the benefits of modernization", <sup>33</sup> while justifying its appeal for wider intellectual and power dynamics transition. The enriching discourse of nationhood, ethics, and law in his newspaper articles has shaped the movement at modernizing the state, in which "he was pioneering journalism as a form of moral education (*adab*) to mobilize the souls of the reading public" <sup>34</sup> in the process of promoting bureaucratic and state reform projects.

The enlightening movement of rationalism in the French Revolution had also found resonance in his article and seminal work, *Al-Islam wa'l-Nasrqnriyyah ma'al 'ilm wa'l-Madaniyyah* (Islam and Christianity about Science and Civilization) <sup>35</sup> in which 'Abduh

<sup>33</sup> Ryle-Hodges, William, 'Muhammad 'Abduh's Politics of Adab.

<sup>34</sup> Ryle-Hodges, William, 'Muhammad 'Abduh's Politics of Adab.

<sup>35</sup> Muhammad 'Imarah, ed., *Al-A'mal al-Kamilah lil Imam Muhammad 'Abduh*, vol. 3, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Beirut: Dar al-Syarq, 1982).

categorically defends the compatibility of reason and revelation. In this, he adopted the ideas of renowned Western scientist and thinker, John William Draper (1811-1882) in his work *History of the Conflict between Religion and Science* (1874)<sup>36</sup> of the proposed harmony between faith and reason.

This also applied to his ethico-legal writings in the periodicals which were intrinsically imbedded with aspects of utility in legal theory, which implied the centrality of *maqasid al-shariah* as a principal framework in formulating and deriving legal rules and opinions. This idea was rooted in the consideration of justice and public utility and pragmatic need, which emphasized aspects of utilization and benefit and its practicality the ranging of which was justified by its context and exigency. In this perspective, he gives precedence to reason over the literal meaning of the shariah, “in that it has the final decision on the question of happiness and in the distinction between truth and untruth and between harmful and useful things.”<sup>37</sup>

According to Sawi, during Abduh’s incumbency in the editorship of *al-Waqā’i’*, he introduced institutional reform. This was accomplished due to his transcendental and pioneering work in treating religious, educational, social, and moral problems, as reflected in his newspaper articles, which have been widely read and highly esteemed by various audiences. This subsequently helped to bring significant change in the governmental policy, “contributing towards the modern revival of the spiritual, cultural and social life of the Egyptian and Muslim peoples”<sup>38</sup>, and liberating them from such stagnant and dead traditions. Some of his newspaper articles on theology and legal topics issued in *al-Waqā’i’*, to name a few, were: “Attainment of eminence by virtue” (in praise of General Garfield, the President of the United States, for his skillful conduct of highly civilized and democratic rule in the United States), “The necessity of marriage for mankind” (that describes the need and virtue of marriage and its religious merit to have an essentially harmonious familial life), “Tendency to poverty or foolishness of peasants” [*Hubb al-Faqr wa Safh al-Fallāh*] (on the extravagant spending of the Egyptian peasants on luxurious and superfluous things that lead to moral decadence and poverty) (*Al-Waqā’i’ al-Misriyyah*, no. 969, 20<sup>th</sup> Nov 1880, Jan 1881)<sup>39</sup>.

In addition, he also wrote profound articles on “Civilisation”, “Untoward consequences of bribery”, “Integrity and its requirements”, “Much ado about nothing”, “Our association and their talks”, “Misplacement”<sup>40</sup>, “*Ma huwa al-faqr al-haqiqi fi al-bilad*”<sup>41</sup> (the real poverty of the country – of adopting new methods in agricultural process, to facilitate the labour to grow their crops), *Kalām fi Khata’ al-‘Uqalā’* (*Al-Waqā’i’ al-Misriyyah*, no. 1082, 4, 7 and 19<sup>th</sup> April, 1881) (the error of the intelligentsia – criticizing the obsession of the intellectuals with modern foreign ideas that were abruptly enforced on the immature masses.

<sup>36</sup> Fuyumi, Katsuhata, ‘Muhammad ‘Abduh and John William Draper’, *Annals of Japan Association for Middle East Studies* 25, no. 1 (2009), 165-185.

<sup>37</sup> Muhammad ‘Abduh, *The Theology of Unity*, tr. Ishaq Musa‘ad & Kenneth Cragg (London: Allen & Unwin, 1966).

<sup>38</sup> Al-Sawi, Ahmad Husayn, ‘Muhammad ‘Abduh and Al-Waqā’i’ al-Misriyyah

<sup>39</sup> Muhammad ‘Imarah, ed., *Al-A‘mal al-Kamilah*

<sup>40</sup> Muhammad ‘Imarah, ed., *Al-A‘mal al-Kamilah*

<sup>41</sup> Islahi, Abdul Azim, ‘Economic Thought of Muhammad Abduh: an Omitted Aspect of his Biography’, *MPRA Munich Personal RePEc Archive*, paper no. 68363 (2012), 1-19.

In his estimate, reform and upliftment of the nation must be developed gradually. Otherwise, it will fail to accomplish. He laments his fellow-countrymen who take pride in imitating the Europeans, trying to enjoy the fruits of their progress without proceeding through its stages and following its causes. He suggests that people should be taught gradually about democratic life using municipal and provincial councils, as practiced in Italy and France. Political awareness can be created through newspapers and local organizations. At the same time, “distinctive limitations on personal conduct and actions should be laid down” (Sawi, 1954)<sup>42</sup>, *al-Wataniyyah* (Al-Waqā’i’ al-Misriyyah, no. 1054, 6<sup>th</sup> March 1881) (patriotism – on the responsibility of the rich to reduce poverty by spending money on the poor and making cash endowment) *‘Id Misr wa Matla’ Sa’ādatuhā, Ihtirām Qawānīn al-Hukūmah wa awāmirihā min sa’ādat al-ummah* (Al-Waqā’i’ al-Misriyyah, no. 952, 13<sup>th</sup> Oct 1880)<sup>43</sup> (reverence for government laws and regulations necessary for the prosperity of the nation – appealing the people to respect the law and the authorities and to strike common understanding and cooperation between the government and the people for mutual benefit, whose welfare depend on precise interpretation of the law and its strategic goal “the country will lead a proper life if the officials use the utmost precision in interpreting the texts and limitations of the law, and in understanding its real intention”),<sup>44</sup> and et cetera.

Throughout these articles, he makes the case for the productive capital drive and production of the *fellah*, by modernizing the farms and agricultural sectors. The Egyptian lands were fertile and productive; however, such natural qualities and resources alone were not adequate; it needed fitting labor and the best technique to utilize and exploit it. The real wealth of the country is the existence of a pool of qualified workers and personnel (Al-Waqā’i’ al-Misriyyah, no. 1073, 28<sup>th</sup> March 1881).<sup>45</sup>

On another occasion, he denounces the unbearable taxes on the natives; in those trying days. Fortunately, the situation has now (1880) changed, and the illegal taxes have been abolished (Al-Waqā’i’ al-Misriyyah, no. 969, 20<sup>th</sup> Nov 1880). But alas, instead of releasing their pledged properties and farms, the peasants had fallen to a luxurious lifestyle and continued to borrow from banks and succumbed to manifold interest. He also reminded us of the harmful consequences of concentrating wealth in the hands of the few to the healthy demand of the market and the chain of goods since the majority of the population lacks purchasing power, and this would affect and reduce their efficiency and interest in an industry controlled by the few while depriving the majority.

The wide-ranging context and appeal of his spiritual and theological works make an invaluable contribution to addressing the compelling dimension of contested ideas in public space. These ideas were geared towards new consciousness, modern development, and revival and served as a tool and medium of dialogue with a wider horizon and setting of broad cultural and moral ground.

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<sup>42</sup> Al-Sawi, Ahmad Husayn, ‘Muhammad ‘Abduh and Al-Waqā’i’ al-Misriyyah

<sup>43</sup> Muhammad Rashid Rida, *Tārīkh*

<sup>44</sup> Al-Sawi, Ahmad Husayn, ‘Muhammad ‘Abduh and Al-Waqā’i’ al-Misriyyah

<sup>45</sup> Muhammad ‘Imarah, ed., *Al-A‘mal al-Kamilah*

### C. Conclusion

In conclusion, the undisputed role of Muhammad ‘Abduh as leading editor of “al-Waqā’i‘ al-Misrīyyah” has brought journalistic triumphs to al-Waqā’i‘ as the first paper of the Arab world. It has set forth dynamic progress to its editorial standards and organization, as exemplified by his fair reporting and unusually simple and balanced writing of highly literary style. It was meant to underscore institutional and social reform by adhering to the highest ethical and religious values and standards and a compellingly modern outlook. This was also reflected in terms of his editorial skills in al-Waqā’i‘ forthcoming in the significant practice and conduct of journalism, which largely helped to raise its standard and reclaim its rightful position as a leading periodical in the rising context of a nationwide movement and reflowering of its cultural, literature and art consciousness. In this spirit, he mediates the interest of the state apparatus and the masses to highlight compelling issues of broad interest and reassert their legal and social convention and responsibility to establish its underlying cause and tentative solution. Finally, to recognize the modernist ideas he brought forth and its broader implication in journalism, it is suggested that it is worthwhile to further compile and study Abduh’s articles in “al-Waqā’i‘ al-Misrīyyah” since they brought the dynamic theory of the historical current of his age and provide a solution to contemporary development of Muslim thought at the dawn of post-modern age.

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