

## **INVESTING IN THE UMMATIC CAUSE: THE PHILANTHROPIC ACTIVITIES OF 'ABD ALLĀH IBN 'ALAWĪ AL-'AṬṬĀS (D. 1929)**

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### **Abstract**

'Abd Allāh ibn 'Alawī al-'Aṭṭās (d. 1929) was born into a wealthy family and became a well-known Hadrami property-owner in Batavia (Jakarta). He lived in a dynamic era in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, which witnessed the awakening of the Hadrami community in the Netherlands East Indies or colonial Indonesia. As a strong supporter of Islamic reformism, he was heavily involved in disseminating the idea of progress and sponsoring a number of revivalist efforts, particularly in the field of education. His substantial financial contribution in this regard earned him a prominent reputation, although this was not always understood by his own community. However, his revivalist and philanthropic activities are rarely

studied in depth. This article will discuss al-'Aṭṭās' financial support toward the promotion of the *ummatic* cause in the Netherlands East Indies. The question of how his financial contributions were directed to improve the conditions of the *ummah* will be addressed thoroughly. This study uses the historical method and employs a number of primary sources that have not been widely used. It also utilizes research about charity and philanthropy to enrich the discussion. This study will, hopefully, broaden our understanding of the role of philanthropic activities in an effort to infuse revivalism in the Muslim society through one of its main proponents in the Netherlands East Indies.

**Keywords:** 'Abd Allāh ibn 'Alawī al-'Aṭṭās, *Ummatic Cause*, Philanthropic Activities, Islamic Reformism, Netherlands East Indies.

## A. Introduction

The end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century witnessed the emergence of several wealthy Hadrami traders in the Netherlands East Indies. They were industrious migrants or local-born individuals whose fathers or grandfathers came from Ḥaḍramawt, South Yemen, brought about by the growing economic attraction available in the Dutch colony. Around the same time, Islamic reformism began to spread throughout the Islamic world. The decline of Islamic civilization and intellectual responses by various Muslim reformists and activists in the Near East soon grabbed the attention of this migrant community and pulled them into its dynamic revivalist current. The Hadramis were among the earliest groups in colonial Indonesia to be exposed to this idea, mainly due to their vast Near East contacts and relatively better economic situation. This led

to what is termed by Natalie Mobini-Kesheh (1999) as “the Hadrami awakening,” an urge for a resurgence that gave impetus to the appearance of a modern Islamic movement within the Hadrami community in the region. Despite its later derailment to a more nationalistic, and even clannish struggle within the Hadrami community, this movement was originally aimed at advocating the enhancement and welfare of the Muslim community in general. This defines the use of the term “*ummatic cause*” in the title of this article. Awakening, Islamic revival, reformism, and also Muslim unity (or Pan-Islamism) in this context are inter-related (Hirano, 2008).

The reformist movement in the Netherlands East Indies set up organizations and schools and even published periodicals, which were generally regarded as non-profit. Consequently, financial resources became crucial for this movement, through which the Hadramis gained their importance. Reform-minded Hadramis then actively funded the revivalist movement within and without their community. ‘Abd Allāh ibn ‘Alawī al-‘Aṭṭās, the main focus of this article, was one of the most well-known charitable contributors to this cause.

Many books and articles discuss the Hadramis in the Netherlands East Indies and other regions in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. They cover topics from Islamic reformism to entrepreneurship, socio-political roles, and Sufi networks. A noteworthy book by Deliar Noer (1994) has a small but indispensable section on the Arab Hadramis. It discloses their partaking in the modern Islamic movement in the Netherlands East Indies in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, underlying their initial contribution to the movement.

Mobini-Kesheh (1999) focuses on the awakening and identity formation in the community, while Ulrike Freitag (2003) analyzes the activities of these Arab migrants in relation to the political development of their homeland, Ḥaḍramawt. Another book written by Hamid Algadri (1988) criticized the Dutch colonial policy toward the Arab community. Several international conferences on the Hadramis were followed by book publications (Freitag & Clarence-Smith, 1997; De Jonge & Kaptein, 2002; Abushouk & Ibrahim, 2009), augmenting academic contributions related to this community. This also includes several unpublished theses and journal articles.

Of the above-mentioned scholarships, very few have discussed the role of ‘Abd Allāh ibn ‘Alawī al-‘Aṭṭās in depth. A doctoral thesis by Kazuhiro Arai (2004) is one of the exceptions, as it chooses the al-‘Aṭṭās family, including ‘Abd Allāh ibn ‘Alawī al-‘Aṭṭās, as the main topic of study.

Some authors take the economy of the Hadramis as their focal point - as evident in articles by Freitag and Clarence-Smith (1997) and De Jonge and Kaptein (2002), among others - but they usually discuss the commercial activities and expansion of the Hadramis. This only explains the process that helped to generate wealth among the Hadramis or their category of livelihood, not their deliberate financial support in the *ummatic* cause. Academic research that specifically studies the pattern of charitable or philanthropic contributions among the Hadrami community and their financial support during that period needs particular attention. It is difficult not to consider this issue as important, since the revivalist movement, or any other kind of movement, would not have been able to spread its idea or achieve its goal without

financial assistance. Therefore, this study has the objective of understanding how these philanthropic activities lent their assistance to the *ummatic* cause, with a particular focus on the role of ‘Abd Allāh ibn ‘Alawī al-‘Aṭṭās.

This study uses the historical method. The primary sources utilized in this study mainly come from contemporary newspapers and books written by al-‘Aṭṭās. These sources, along with the secondary sources, often do not provide a complete picture of al-‘Aṭṭās’ philanthropic activities. Therefore, a careful interpretation is made to draw the most plausible conclusion. The philanthropic contribution of al-‘Aṭṭās is also analyzed, in light of several studies on philanthropy, to draw these particular activities to their fullest understanding.

## **B. Charity and Philanthropy**

Philanthropy is usually perceived as a form of charity and is associated with another more general word, which is “benevolence”. The word “philanthropy” is derived from the Greek word *philanthropia*, which means “love of mankind” (Ismail *et al.*, 2013). *Philanthropia* was initially used to describe kind behavior towards other human beings without specific reference to material giving. In a later application by the Greeks and also the Romans, it became a virtue displayed by a superior towards an inferior, from gods to humanity and especially from kings to their subjects (Irwin, 1987). The word was then absorbed into English and could generally be defined as a benevolent attitude towards mankind, mainly through charitable giving (Ismail *et al.*, 2013).

The idea and practice of giving, which is reflected in charity and philanthropy in their general sense, is maybe as old as humanity itself and can be traced throughout history. However, it only drew the attention of academicians and entered scholarship by the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. These studies were initially centered in the United States and Europe but soon broadened their scope into the other parts of the world (Singer, 2008).

As presented in some studies, religion is an important driving force behind the practice of giving (Audretsch & Hinger, 2014; Lam *et al.*, 2011). A study suggests that the motivation to give was developed in Europe, from being a traditional and religious-based idea to a non-religious idea of giving back to society. The study, however, admits that religion is still an important factor in giving in modern times (Roza *et al.*, 2014). This development may have, to some extent, persuaded the later separation of the meanings of charity and philanthropy. Charity is now defined as immediate support, mostly spiritually or religiously motivated, with the goal of relieving human suffering in particular. Philanthropy, bearing a rational and secular connotation, is understood as a continuing project that addresses the root of a problem and promotes social change (Fauzia, 2017; Singer, 2008; Spero, 2014; Monnet & Panizza, 2017). Nevertheless, its application, such as in the case of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) of several companies in Indonesia, is often irresistibly driven by economic motives and is less concerned about solving social problems. CSR does not always meet the real needs of society and, consequently, fails to eliminate the gap between corporative and community interests. In this case,

transcendental values derived from religion can offer a greater reassurance in solving this problem (Hadi & Baihaqi, 2020).

Charitable giving has a central position in the tenets of Islam. The observance of this activity is not only an integral part of worship but also maintains and strengthens the bonds of an Islamic society. Faith and community are reciprocally connected through acts of charity: “It is the building of community through faith, and the building of faith through the deepening of community” (Alterman & Hunter, 2004, p. 3). It is, therefore, crucial in the development of the *ummah* (Ismail *et al.*, 2013).

There are instruments in Islam related to charity, both obligatory and voluntarily, among which are *zakat* and *sadaqah* (alms). *Zakat* is an obligation for Muslims in which they are required to donate a portion of their wealth that reaches a specified limit (*nisab*), to be distributed to those eligible to receive it (Abdullah & Suhaib, 2011). Linguistically, it means growth and cleanliness. *Zakat* increases wealth spiritually, even though it is reduced outwardly. It is like a plant whose parts sometimes need to be cut and cleaned so as to boost its growth (Al Qardawi, 2000). Meanwhile, *sadaqah* linguistically means truthfulness, and it acts as proof of faith. It has the meaning of *zakat* in several texts of the Qur’an and Hadith, but in later Islamic history, the term is traditionally used for a voluntary donation (Al Qardawi, 2000). *Zakat* and various other instruments of charity have been practiced for centuries by Muslims as a form of obedience and worship to God, but their way of collection and distribution can evolve with the times. For example, the distribution of *zakat* and *sadaqah* in Indonesia has recently penetrated into the digital realm, and its value has reached hundreds of billions of Rupiah

(Triantoro *et al.*, 2021). As suggested by some studies, *zakat* has helped improve the poor's economy and reduce inequality (Darsono *et al.*, 2019; Johari *et al.*, 2014).

The role played by traditional Islamic charities is somewhat comparable to philanthropy. Philanthropy is also associated - particularly by social justice advocates - with the occurrence of large economic inequality in modern society. In this context, philanthropy is deemed capable of reducing the economic gap (Frankena, 1987).

However, when it comes to the philanthropic activities of 'Abd Allāh ibn 'Alawī al-'Aṭṭās, and several other pro-reform Hadramis, the purpose was not exactly the same as what has been described above. In this case, the main problem addressed was more of a civilizational gap, or inequality between the West and the *ummah*, not only in the economy but also in other fields. Charitable or philanthropic efforts were not expected from outside the Muslim society but rather were attempted by affluent figures within the Muslim *ummah* itself. In the process, Islamic reformism would identify different kinds of problems that caused the decline of the *ummah*, of which the lack of education received prominent attention. The pro-reform Hadramis still maintained the implementation of traditional charities but with a new notion that their giving was now part of the plan to strengthen and revive the *ummah*, and not simply to release them from temporal suffering.

### **C. Pro-reform Hadramis and Philanthropy**

In her study related to post-reformation Indonesia, A. Fauzia (2017) finds the importance of Islamization and



modernization in the emergence of Islamic philanthropy. Interestingly, Islamization and modernization were also experienced by the Hadrami community in the Netherlands East Indies and the Straits Settlements in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. Islamization occurred in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, along with the transmission of Islamic reformism from the Near East to Southeast Asia. At the same time, this reformism brought the proposal of modernization, as Freitag (2003) discussed in the introduction of her book. The Hadramis did not set up *zakat* institutions or charity foundations to the extent of what occurred around a century later in Indonesia. However, the very idea and practice of benevolence and charity were present, despite its ethnic preference. The first modern Islamic association founded by the pro-reform Hadramis in Batavia (Jakarta) in 1901 was called Jam'iyyat Khayr, which can be translated as "Benevolent Society." One of its initial aims was to assist the Arabs in Batavia regarding marriage and death (al-Masjhoer, 2005). This association soon expanded the scope of its aims, programs, and beneficiaries.

A few examples of Hadramis' charitable activities can be mentioned here. A periodical described one of the pro-reform Hadramis as an important person behind the foundation of the Red Crescent Society in the Netherlands East Indies. The institution had sent donations to war victims in Libya and the Balkans around the time of the First World War. This personality, Muḥammad ibn 'Abd al-Raḥman ibn Shihāb (d. 1930), also led a committee to help the Palestinians and actively aided the victims of natural disasters in Batavia and another city in the Netherlands East Indies ("Tatimmah li-Tarjamah," 1930a; "Tatimmah li-Tarjamah," 1930b). The initial

meeting of the Red Crescent Society in 1912 was held in the Jam'iyat Khayr building in Pekojan, Batavia (Mandal, 2002). These benevolent acts of charity were evident not just in the Netherlands East Indies. For example, four leading Hadrami families in Singapore had endowment (*waqf*), most of which were allocated for public charity, such as alleviating the situation of the poor, mosque maintenance, helping pilgrims, and providing food for those in need (Freitag, 2003).

While those charities were generally short-term in nature, another kind of benevolent activity could be put under the category of long-term projects and was aimed at solving the root cause of the *ummah's* problems. This long-term project was the establishment of modern Islamic schools. The schools at that time did not usually act as business enterprises, and the government or private benefactors would often cover their costs. This was particularly true for a school founded by Jam'iyat Khayr in Batavia in 1909 - another source put it as 1906 ("Tatimmah li-Tarjamah," 1930a) - which was free of charge (al-Mashhūr, 1984). However, this did not mean that all reformist schools were free of charge. Nonetheless, when they were charged, the function was mainly to cover costs that were not paid off by donations and not to accumulate profit. The following decades witnessed the growth of Hadrami schools in Southeast Asia, some of which bore the family names of the benefactors. In 1913, Sayyid 'Umar al-Saqqāf established Madrasah Alsagoff in Singapore. In the following year, Sayyid Ḥasan al-'Aṭṭās founded Madrasah al-'Aṭṭās in Johor Bahru, and another one in Pahang almost 10 years later. Other religious schools, al-Mashhūr and al-Junayd, were founded in Penang and Singapore, respectively. These

schools were responsible for spreading Arabic language and religious knowledge among the Arab community and other sections of the Muslim society (Othman, 2006). The case was also the same with the non-'Alawīs or the Mashāyikh community. In one meeting in Surabaya, for example, several wealthy Hadrami traders collected f 48,000 for the initial establishment of schools under the administration of al-Irshād ("Haroes diboeat toeladan," 1342H).

'Abd Allāh ibn 'Alawī al-'Aṭṭās was one of the members of this Hadrami community who played an important role in the revivalist movement. He was also well known for his financial contributions, as discussed thoroughly below.

#### **D. 'Abd Allāh ibn 'Alawī al-'Aṭṭās and Philanthropy**

'Abd Allāh ibn 'Alawī al-'Aṭṭās was born in Batavia, most probably in 1843 or 1844; if we were to accept the information that he was 85 years old at the time of his passing ("Sajid Abdullah," 1929; "Saorang Arab ternama," 1929). He studied in Makkah under several leading scholars, including *Sayyid* Aḥmad ibn Zaynī Daḥlān (d. 1886) ("Al-Sayyid al-Marḥūm," 1929), the Shāfi'i *Muftī* of that city who was frequently visited by pilgrims from the Netherlands East Indies (Hurgronje, 1970; Steenbrink, 1984). Zaynī Daḥlān was also a teacher of *Sayyid* 'Uthmān ibn 'Abd Allāh ibn Yaḥyā (d. 1931), the then-*Muftī* of Batavia (Azra, 1997). From Makkah, al-'Aṭṭās travelled to Ḥaḍramawt, visiting several prominent scholars and ascetics, after which he returned to Java ("Al-Sayyid al-Marḥūm," 1929). He continued and developed his father's business, especially in the property sector, which later earned him the title of landlord (Abeyasekere, 1987). He owned

several lands in Jakarta, such as in Cikini, Kampung Bali, and Pesing (Alatas, 2007), as well as a big house in Petamburan, whose design was a mixture of European and Oriental styles (Heuken, 2000).

Al-'Aṭṭās married the first daughter of 'Abd al-'Azīz al-Musāwī al-Mawsilī, a businessman from Iraq who settled in the Netherlands East Indies (Heuken, 2000; Arai, 2004). From this marriage, al-'Aṭṭās was blessed with four sons and five daughters. His first daughter, Fatmah, married Abū Bakr ibn 'Abd Allāh al-'Aṭṭās, who later became a prominent leader of the 'Alawī community in the Netherlands East Indies. Al-'Aṭṭās' sons - Uthmān, Muḥammad, Hāshim, and Ismā'īl - were sent to Istanbul and European cities to pursue modern education. This was something that was not only very difficult to attain but also unthinkable for most of the Hadramis at that time (Van den Berg, 1989; Haikal, 1986).

Al-'Aṭṭās travelled to several countries during his lifetime. He visited the Straits Settlements, Australia, British India, Egypt, Turkey, Palestine, and Syria ("Picture's note," 1922; Dunn, 1919). It was probably during his visit to Egypt that he became attracted to the idea of Islamic reformism (*iṣlāḥ*) and became one of its most important supporters in the Netherlands East Indies. He attended several lectures given by Jamāl al-Dīn al-Afghānī and became acquainted with Muḥammad Abduh ("Picture's note," 1922). Snouck Hurgronje, who was a friend of al-'Aṭṭās, expressed his dislike of how this wealthy property owner and several other prominent Hadramis had been promoting Pan-Islamism since the 1870s or 1880s (Hurgronje, Gobée & Adriaanse, 1994; Algadri, 1988). Pan-Islamism was only one of many reformist

ideas and activities supported by al-'Aṭṭās. He had longed for Muslim revival (*nahḍah*) and the general wellbeing of people ("Wafāh al-Sayyid 'Abd Allāh," 1929), most of which can be placed within the category of the *ummatic* cause.

Al-'Aṭṭās engaged in the establishment and activities of Jam'iyyat Khayr ("Wafāh al-Sayyid 'Abd Allāh," 1929; Mobini-Kesheh, 1999; "Saorang Arab ternama," 1929; "Sajid Abdullah," 1929). He joined an indigenous association and was appointed as an advisor to the Sarekat Islam Batavia in 1913 and 1915 ("Sarikat Islam," 1913; "De S. I. te Batavia," 1915). He was still active throughout the 1910s, despite the fact that he was already in his 60s or 70s. However, he gradually withdrew from direct involvement in the Islamic movement in the last years of his life. On June 15, 1929, he passed away, and his funeral was attended by numerous people ("Wafāh al-Sayyid 'Abd Allāh," 1929; "Al-Sayyid al-Marḥūm," 1929; "Saorang Arab ternama," 1929; "Sajid Abdullah," 1929).

During his life, al-'Aṭṭās channeled a considerable amount of his money to philanthropy. These philanthropic activities are discussed under several categories, as follows:

### **1. Islamic organizations**

As mentioned previously, al-'Aṭṭās was acknowledged as the co-founder of Jam'iyyat Khayr, the first revivalist Islamic organization in the Netherlands East Indies. He did not only help the establishment of this association but also offered great financial support through its various programs. When the association decided to bring in several teachers from the Near East,

he assisted in bringing at least one of them, Muḥammad ibn ‘Uthmān al-Hāshimī al-Tunīsī, though this teacher then ended up in al-‘Aṭṭās’ school (El Mecky, n.d.; Noer, 1994). There is no information about the total amount he spent on this institution. However, his importance to this association was reflected during his funeral. His deceased body was escorted by police and the boy scouts of Jam’iyyat Khayr. After the funeral prayer, on the way to the graveyard, the retinue passed Jam’iyyat Khayr School, where students were lined up and sang with a sad tone (“Al-Sayyid al-Marḥūm,” 1929).

Al-‘Aṭṭās lessened his support for the association in the early 1910s due to some disagreements over school policy (Noer, 1994). He established his own school in the same period, as discussed below. This period also witnessed the split of the Hadrami community in the Netherlands East Indies. This resulted in the establishment of Jam’iyyat al-Iṣlāḥ wa-l-Irshād al-‘Arabiyyah, otherwise known as al-Irshād, in 1914 and its formal recognition by the government in the following year. The remaining colonial period would witness severe conflict between the ‘Alawīs - represented by Jam’iyyat Khayr and later by al-Rābiṭah al-‘Alawiyyah - and the non-‘Alawīs, or Mashāyikh, represented by al-Irshād. As an ‘Alawī, al-‘Aṭṭās was undoubtedly expected to support his fellow ‘Alawīs in their hostility against the Mashāyikh organization. However, he stayed out of the conflict and even contributed a substantial amount of money to the early development of al-Irshād. It is unlikely that the ‘Alawīs were unaware of his support for al-Irshād.

Their censure against the school he founded (Hachimi, 1916) may be seen as an expression of disapproval of his independent behavior. However, in the end, the 'Alawīs reclaimed this eminent personality.

In its 1923/4 issue, an *Irshād Magazine* expressed gratitude and mentioned al-'Aṭṭās by name as the only 'Alawī among the association's main benefactors ("Haroes diboeat toeladan," 1342H). The magazine did not mention the amount of al-'Aṭṭās' donation to al-*Irshād*. However, according to Noer (1994), al-'Aṭṭās gave f 60,000 in 1915 to al-*Irshād*, which was higher than any other individual contribution to al-*Irshād*, and larger than any of his other recorded contributions. The Captain of Arabs in Batavia and founder of al-*Irshād*, Shaykh 'Umar Manqūsh, donated f 25,000, and another wealthy Mashāyikh, Sa'īd ibn Sālim Mash'abī, gave f 15,000 to al-*Irshād*. Considering the sequence of gratitude in the above article ("Haroes diboeat toeladan"), there is a probability that the real amount given by al-'Aṭṭās is actually lower than those given by the Mashāyikh mentioned above. Nevertheless, an *Irshād* figure admits the former amount and describes how Shaykh Aḥmad Sūrkatī highly respected al-'Aṭṭās and prayed for him every time his name is mentioned (Badjerei, 1996). Al-*Irshād* has never forgotten al-'Aṭṭās' support. On June 18, 2012, al-*Irshād* was awarded a certificate as a token of appreciation for al-'Aṭṭās' past contribution to a descendant of his as well as to several others (Alatas, 2018).

Al-'Aṭṭās' support for al-*Irshād* cannot be seen as a form of partiality in the conflict, as an endorsement for al-*Irshād* in their fight, or defense, against the 'Alawīs. Instead,

this may be seen as an investment by an 'Alawī in the Mashāyikh organization so that the ties between the two parties would not be fully broken, despite their growing tension and clash. Al-'Aṭṭās was not someone who liked to be involved in conflict or fostered hostility. The course of his life shows his strong inclination for unity and peace, even with people of different ethnicities and religions. During the bloody conflict between the Arabs and the Chinese in Surabaya and several other cities in Java, he was trusted as the chief of the committee for Arab-Chinese peace. This committee managed to stop the conflict in a relatively short time ("De Chineesch-Arabische relletjes," 1912; "Al-Sayyid al-Marḥūm," 1929). Therefore, his contribution to al-Irshād could be seen as a plan to create a bridge when the separation between the two parties could no longer be avoided. Later, Ismā'īl, one of the al-'Aṭṭās' sons who was at that time a member of the People's Council (*Volksraad*), tried to reunite the Hadramis, the 'Alawīs and the Mashāyikh ("Een Bond van Arabieren," 1918; "Een Arabische bond," 1919), but to no avail.

On the other hand, al-'Aṭṭās' assistance to al-Irshād may also be seen as a support for the continuation of the revivalist movement. Throughout the conflict, al-Irshād showed eagerness towards more progressive ideas, while the 'Alawīs were forced to rearrange their revivalist ideas within the framework of their established traditions. Thus, al-'Aṭṭās lent his support to the revivalist cause and put aside his personal interests as an 'Alawī. In taking this action, he may have farsightedly believed that the enmity between the two parties, albeit their hostility, was only temporary,



while the revivalist cause was expected to be long-lived. Therefore, it is safe to infer that while many Hadramis had to negotiate their support in giving either for the *ummah* or their particular society and clans, following the 'Alawī-Irshādī conflict, this attitude was rejected by al-'Aṭṭās. He remained faithful to the *ummatic* cause during his lifetime, and his assistance to any particular group would be better understood in this context. However, it is interesting to note that despite his alignment with reformist ideas, al-'Aṭṭās did not completely abandon tradition. For example, he wrote a book of *mawlid* entitled *Hādzā mawlid al-Nabī al-Karīm* (al-'Aṭṭās, 1927). The celebration and reading of *mawlid* was, and is, a popular tradition among the 'Alawīs and has a strong Sufi (*tasawuf*) background. Al-Irshād did not reject the holding of *mawlid* celebration but criticized the practice of standing (*qiyām*) in the middle of *mawlid* recitation as an innovation (*bid'a*). Besides that, it did not usually include *mawlid* recitation during the celebration (As'ad, 2020).

Other sources indicate that al-'Aṭṭās did not give a hand just to Arab organizations. His close contact with Ahmad Dahlan, the founder of the organization called Muhammadiyah, was mentioned by Muḥammad ibn Shihāb during al-'Aṭṭās' funeral. According to Ibn Shihāb, al-'Aṭṭās used to go back and forth to Yogyakarta to discuss several things with Dahlan, among which he emphasized the importance of founding a big Islamic organization ("Al-Sayyid al-Marḥūm," 1929). One story reveals that due to concerns about the missionary movement in Central Java, al-'Aṭṭās gave an amount

of money to Ahmad Dahlan for Islamic proselytism. According to this story, not long after that, Ahmad Dahlan founded Muhammadiyah, which later became the biggest modern Islamic organization in Indonesia (Assegaf, n.d.). Muḥammad Ḍiyā' Shihāb informs in *Shams al-Zahīrah* (al-Mashhūr, 1984) that he heard from Ismā'īl ibn 'Abd Allāh ibn 'Alawī al-'Aṭṭās that the amount given to Dahlan was f 20,000. The great-grandson of Ahmad Dahlan acknowledges that al-'Aṭṭās financially supported Dahlan to counter missionary activities (Abu Taqī Mayestino, 2020). Despite this, it is quite certain, as understood by this study, that the direction and development of Muhammadiyah has in some way realized al-'Aṭṭās' dreams. Muhammadiyah established several hospitals, in line with al-'Aṭṭās' funding for a hospital, as discussed below. More importantly, Muhammadiyah founded many Islamic schools and universities that provide religious instructions and modern curriculum. This is greatly in line with Muhammad Abduh's educational ideas and programs (Shabir & Susilo, 2018). Al-'Aṭṭās was also keen to develop modern education in tandem with Islamic education, and he also received influence from Muhammad Abduh. Al-'Aṭṭās' concern and contribution to education are analyzed next.

## 2. Education

Al-'Aṭṭās' support for Islamic associations was primarily related to their educational programs. The main product of these associations was a modern type of Islamic school. For example, his involvement in Sarekat Islam soon

resulted in a plan to establish an Islamic school for teachers (*Mohammedaansche kweekschool*). In June 1916, Sarekat Islam Congress in Bandung appointed a committee for the above purpose. This committee would work for three successive years, collecting as much as f 80,000 for the project. If, after three years, the plan could not be realized, the collected money would be given to other Islamic schools. ‘Abd Allāh ibn ‘Alawī al-‘Aṭṭās was entrusted as the chairman of this committee, and his son-in-law, Abū Bakr al-‘Aṭṭās, as the treasury, while O.S. Tjokroaminoto, the leader of Sarekat Islam, took the position of vice chairman. During this time, al-‘Aṭṭās gave f 1,000, while his son-in-law gave f 500 (“Uit Nederlandsch-Indie, S. I.-congres,” 1916; “S.I.-congres,” 1916). Unfortunately, no further information could be traced by this study regarding the continuation of this plan.

Education played an important role in al-‘Aṭṭās’ revivalist idealism. This made him closer to Muḥammad Abduh’s educational approach, despite his early departure with Jamāl al-Dīn al-Afghānī’s Pan-Islamism, which had a strong political tone. In 1912, he initiated his own educational institution called Alatas School. He enshrined his family’s name in the institution, in line with the same trend in the Straits Settlements during that period. Al-‘Aṭṭās did not lead the school directly but entrusted the administration to Muḥammad al-Hāshimī from Tunisia. Al-Hāshimī initially came to Batavia for a teaching post in Jam’iyyat Khayr, but al-‘Aṭṭās diverted the plan and appointed him as the director of Alatas School instead (El Mecky, n.d.; Noer, 1994).

The school was short-lived, and it stopped operating at the end of 1918 (“Kennisgeving,” 1918). The reason for its closure is not clear, though a source from al-’Aṭṭās’ family suggests that there was tension between al-Hāshimī and one of al-’Aṭṭās’ sons (Alatas, 2007). Another possibility needs to be considered as well, that is, the ‘Alawī-Irshādī conflict may have created unresolved complications for the school. Al-’Aṭṭās’ attitude to not being involved in the quarrel seemed inadequate to keep the school running completely free from this conflict. Two of al-Hāshimī’s writings in *Pertimbangan* (Hachimi, 1916: 3; Hachemi, 1917) indicate how he was involved in the controversy with both the ‘Alawī and the Irshādī. Since the ‘Alawī-Irshādī conflict was far from resolved at that time, replacing the director would not really solve the problem. Besides, by then, al-’Aṭṭās was already too old to supervise the school personally.

Many details about the development of Alatas School remain vague. However, an article written by al-Hāshimī brings to light the background and curriculum of this school. At the end of 1916, the total number of its teachers and students were eight and 75 respectively. Al-Hāshimī made it clear that al-’Aṭṭās bore all the costs of this school but did not give information regarding the specific amount. Al-Hāshimī writes that :

“Alatas memandang kamoendoerannya bangsa-bangsa Moeslimin dari pada sekalian bangsa, maka berpikirlan ia, bahoea tida ada djalan boeat kemadjoean, melinken peladjaran jang tinggi, maka itoelah sebabnja ia mendirikan saboeah sekola jang

menjoekoepe segala peladjaran oentoek orang-orang Moeslimin.”

(Al-'Aṭṭās contemplated the decline of the Muslim nations compared to the other nations, so he thinks [and concludes] that there is no way for progress except through [the implementation of] high learning, so that is why he established a school that provided all the lessons [needed] for Muslims). (Hachimi, 1916)

This statement underlines al-'Aṭṭās' main strategy in his revivalist endeavors and philanthropy, not only in the case of Alatas School but also in many other efforts. For him, the main problem of the *ummah* was their civilizational decline, which created inequality among nations. Thus, his philanthropy was directed towards *ummatic* progress, and the solution to achieve this was through good education and high learning. High learning may be best understood through the courses offered by the school, which were basically a combination of religious sciences and non-religious sciences, such as Arithmetic, Geometry, Physics, Logic, Astronomy, History, and Geography (Hachimi, 1916).

Al-'Aṭṭās believed that general sciences are important to the achievement of progress. He decried the tendency among traditional Muslim scholars to prevent sciences, such as Mathematics, from being taught. These non-religious sciences are crucial for modern agriculture, industry, and trade. By ignoring these sciences, the *ummah* deteriorated and was left behind in their worldly affairs. Pursuing sciences is not to be confronted with

religion since he maintained that the Prophet himself urged Muslims to learn science, even from the Magi (al-'Aṭṭās, 1909). For al-'Aṭṭās, human reason and sciences are pivotal for the development of the *ummah*. Ignorance had caused Muslims to decline, while the West had achieved advancements in their civilization through science and reason (al-'Aṭṭās, 1909). Reason (*'aql*) is a great treasure that makes believing in God possible for human beings. It helps them to understand knowledge, to differentiate between guidance and deviation as well as to differentiate themselves from animals (al-'Aṭṭās, 1919).

Al-'Aṭṭās was not only involved in commercial activities, but also contributed to knowledge by writing and publishing a book about bookkeeping entitled *Perkakas boeat Pendjaga Harta Orang jang Berniaga (Tools for Safeguarding the Property of Those involved in Business)*. This book was written to help people maintain and increase their wealth and encourage the application of ethics in commercial activities (Al Attas, 1890). He wrote this book in the Malay language, possibly motivated by a desire to spread this knowledge to the local Muslim traders. Along with the school, his books can be considered a means to transmit knowledge and educate people.

### **3. Publication and Printing**

Al-'Aṭṭās contributed to printing and publication, but not as extensively as he did in organizations or education. He published a number of books to spread

knowledge to the society and donated them to Ibn Nabhān, a publisher in Surabaya (“Al-Sayyid al-Marḥūm,” 1929). He also authored several books dealing with revivalist ideas (“Wafāh al-Sayyid ‘Abd Allāh,” 1929). After he passed away, 500 books from his personal collection were given to the library of al-Rābiṭah al-‘Alawiyah, but they were seized and lost during the Japanese occupation (al-Mashhūr, 1984). He gave financial assistance to a Malay weekly called *Pertimbangan*, with Razoux Kuhr as its editor, and made it a periodical for the Arabs. However, it was short-lived (“De ‘Pertimbangan’ herleeft,” 1917; Dunn, 1919). According to his family, he financed another periodical called *Boro Budur*, with al-Hāshimī as the editor. Nevertheless, it only ran for some years (Alatas, 2007). It is also possible that *Pertimbangan* and *Boro Budur* were part of his businesses and not his philanthropy.

#### 4. Hospital

According to Muḥammad ibn Shihāb, al-‘Aṭṭās aided the Red Cross Society in establishing a hospital in Tanah Abang, Jakarta. He financed half of the costs needed to complete the hospital and required it to be opened to the general public (“Al-Sayyid al-Marḥūm,” 1929). Our identification of the institution’s name, Palang Merah (Red Cross) is based on the closest understanding derived from the Malay-Arabic text (*fālang mīrā*). However, this study has not been able to trace the existence of such a hospital under this name in Tanah Abang, Jakarta. According to the al-‘Aṭṭās family, the hospital financed

by al-'Aṭṭās with a similar scheme was Cikini Hospital, which is also in Jakarta and still exists today. According to this story, a Dutch foundation had approached al-'Aṭṭās intending to buy his big house in Cikini and convert it into a hospital. Al-'Aṭṭās agreed to sell his house at half price, with the requirement that the hospital is open to the general public - this meant that it should treat not only Europeans but also all other populations, including the indigenous Muslims (Alatas, 2007). It is probable that Ibn Shihāb, or the writer of the *Ḥaḍramawt* periodical, wrongly stated this hospital's name and location. The transaction of the building in Cikini between al-'Aṭṭās and the Dutch foundation is confirmed by a historical source, but the story about the discounted price can only be obtained from al-'Aṭṭās family.

The house in Cikini was originally a mansion built in 1852 by Raden Saleh, a famous Javanese painter. It was bought by al-'Aṭṭās after 1869 (Heuken, 2000). The Dutch institution that finally bought the house was Vereeniging voor Ziekenverpleging (Nursing Association), which later became Queen Emma Hospital. This institution had been planning to build a hospital since 1895 (Heuken, 2003). On July 1, 1897, it rented al-'Aṭṭās' house in Cikini, famously known as Raden Saleh Castle, with the anticipation to buy and convert it into a hospital ("Ziekenverpleging," 1898). The reference to Raden Saleh as the initial owner of the building sometimes appeared in contemporary news, but the name of al-'Aṭṭās as the current landlord was not mentioned. A report on the Golden Jubilee of the hospital, however, clearly points out



that the house at that time was owned by “Sayyid Alatas,” who previously bought the house from Raden Saleh and was then ready to sell it again to the Nursing Association (“Gouden jubileum,” 1947). Again, there was no mention of the discounted price here. A more in-depth research into the early history of this hospital may give more light on this. This Nursing Association is in fact, a Protestant institution (“Geslaagd,” 1924). If the story were true - and it is unlikely that al-’Aṭṭās was not aware of the religious background of the buyer - al-’Aṭṭās’ philanthropy would open a new dimension; that is, his giving was not only restricted to his own co-religious fellows. However, the interest of the *ummah* was still present, since he required the hospital to open its doors to people in general.

## 5. Others

Most of al-’Aṭṭās’ philanthropy mentioned above was of the modern type, such as support for modern associations as well as the establishment of modern Islamic schools and publications. However, he also engaged in other acts of charity which were typical of other wealthy members of his community, such as providing land for graveyards. In the middle of 1908, he endowed his land in Kampung Kodja, Tanjung Priok, Jakarta, with a graveyard, not only for Arabs but for Muslims in general (“Gemeenteraad van Batavia,” 1908). The availability of a burial ground, where extended family members can be buried close together, is a special concern for the Hadramis and, from time to time, wealthy individuals among them would readily turn their lands

into *waqf* for this purpose. Al-'Aṭṭās apparently was not an exception in this.

Lastly, al-'Aṭṭās donated to a cause that is not merely another form of traditional charity but for the defense of the Prophet and Islam. An article in *Djawi Hisworo*, published in January 1918, that insults Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) triggered a strong reaction among the Muslims (Alfan, 2016). A committee under the name of Tentara Kandjeng Nabi Muhammad (The Army of My Master Prophet Muhammad or TKNM) was set up under the leadership of Tjokroaminoto and supported by the Hadramis. An amount of f 3,177 was promised, mostly from wealthy Arab traders, to safeguard the honor of Islam and the Prophet from abusive attacks by others (Mandal, 2002). Al-'Aṭṭās gave a donation of f 1,000 to TKNM (Dunn, 1919). This type of giving is distinct from other acts of charity and philanthropy by al-'Aṭṭās, but understandably so due to the important position of the Prophet as the best human being (*khayr al-bariyyah*) and the most beloved (*al-ḥabīb*) for Muslims, especially for al-'Aṭṭās, who himself was a descendant of the Prophet.

At first sight, it seems that 'Abd Allāh ibn 'Alawī al-'Aṭṭās was not really organized in donating his money, and his giving tended to be done when there were opportunities, such as during the establishment of Jam'iyyat Khayr and al-Irshād as well as the arrival of al-Hāshimī to lead Alatas School. Some of his efforts were also not really successful, such as the short-lived Alatas School and *Pertimbangan*, but others, such as Jam'iyyat Khayr, al-Irshād, and Muhammadiyah, survive until today.

However, he was not the only person who had a share in those institutions and the absence of his support proved less likely to erase their existence. Al-'Aṭṭās may have had some impediments in implementing his revivalist ideas and channeling his donations. Yet, his philanthropic strategy was focused and not sporadic. His aim was to revive the *ummah*, primarily through modern education and the spread of revivalist ideas. The traces of his efforts are still present today and continuously benefit the *ummah* through the institutions he supported, though his name hides in the shadow.

## **E. Conclusion**

Philanthropy is usually related to the idea of justice, an effort to reduce existing inequalities and give back to society, which is directed at social good or something that can benefit as many people as possible. Al-'Aṭṭās' philanthropy does not entirely depart from the same idea, though it does not totally detach from it either. His philanthropic drive is rooted in the gap between the Muslim and Western civilizations and the injustice experienced by the *ummah* as an implication of this gap. However, it is not expected of the West to remove this gap - rather, it is an internal problem of the *ummah* and their own responsibility to raise themselves and keep up with other nations. Therefore, the main philanthropic activities of al-'Aṭṭās were not about "giving back" to society in general, but rather more about giving to his community, that is, the *ummah*, so that they could regain their greatness and live together healthily with other nations.

This background, however, helped to channel al-'Aṭṭās' donations primarily to long-term projects, especially educational and pro-revival institutions, which were aimed at solving the fundamental problems of the *ummah*. It seems that for him, the traditional modes of aid, despite remaining important and would meet religious rewards, could not fully address the contemporary problems of the *ummah*. More significant change could be expected only by addressing the root of the problem behind its declining condition. Thus, as a strategy, the most significant portion of his philanthropy was directed towards education, which he believed would help elevate the Muslim civilization.

Al-'Aṭṭās' philanthropy did not always succeed or last long. For example, the school he founded, Alatas School, only lasted for six years, and the plan to establish a school through Sarekat Islam did not appear to materialize. The institutions that received his charity may not always develop in line with his ideals, especially because his ideas were likely criticized by some people, particularly those who adhered to tradition. Yet, this does not mean that his financial contributions were not important. Al-'Aṭṭās invested in several modern Islamic associations in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century that still survive until today. Jamiat Khayr, al-Irshād, and Muhammadiyah are among such associations that have played important roles in Indonesia, especially in education.

Finally, this study shows that certain Muslims had deeply been involved in philanthropic activities in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century in the Netherlands East Indies. Al-'Aṭṭās' philanthropy was aimed at long-term projects but was not driven by a secular motive. In other words, his various

contributions were based on religion but were directed at social change to awaken the *ummah* from its deterioration. This is an investment in the *ummatic* cause, which does not only expect rewards in the hereafter but also seeks worldly civilizational outcomes.

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