

# Intellectualism of ABIM (Malaysian Islamic Youth Force): Ismail al-Faruqi's Perspective

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### ABSTRACT

This study discusses the contribution and influence of al-Faruqi (1921-1986) to ABIM (*Malaysian League of Muslim Youth*). It seeks to see the impact of its modern and inclusive manhaj on ABIM's struggle and its relevance to society in Malaysia and the aspirations of contemporary da'wah. In his efforts to realize the ideals of Islamiyyah, al-Faruqi has exerted a great influence on the manhaj and ABIM's moderate and moderate approach. He has outlined significant philosophies and methodologies in his writings such as *al-Tawhid: Its Implications for Thought and Life*; *Hijrah: The Necessity of its Iqamat or Vergegenwartigung*; *Islam, Islamization of Knowledge* and *Islam and Other Faith*; and his translation of Syeikh Muhammad al-Ghazali's *Our Beginning in Wisdom (Min Huna Na'l'am)* and Khalid M. Khalid's *From Here We Start (Min Huna Nabda')* which has shaped the moderate and progressive views of ABIM and had a profound impact that shaped *weltanschauung* its dynamic Islam. This study attempts to look at the role of al-Faruqi in shaping idealism and outlining the direction of the struggle and strengthening of ABIM da'wah and its impact on the school of thought, da'wah traditions, and civilizational dialogues that it champions.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Al-Faruqi's role in the change and transformation of Islamic values in Malaysia was quite significant which saw serious involvement in the da'wah movement in Malaysia since the early 70s. His ideas and philosophy of thought have raised the strength of culture and civilization and boosted the development of da'wah in Malaysia. His works have had a great influence in initiating a rational and dynamic understanding and philosophy of Islam. His books were made mandatory texts in the Islamic movement, especially the Islamic Youth Movement of Malaysia (ABIM) which was influenced by the moderate and inclusive Islamic pattern and school of thought of al-Faruqi. His important writings include *The Hijrah: the Necessity of its Iqamat or Vergegenwartigung* (Hakikat Hijrah, 1985); *Islam, Islamization of Knowledge: General Principles and Work-Plan*; *Triologue of the Abrahamic Faiths*; *Tawhid: Its Implications For Thought and Life*; *Islam and the Problem of Israel*; *Islam and Other Faiths*; *The Cultural Atlas of Islam (Atlas Budaya Islam, 1992)* and his major works such as *The Life of [Prophet] Muhammad (saw)* by M. Husayn Haykal, *From Here We Start (Min Huna Nabda')* by Khalid M. Khalid, *Our Beginning in Wisdom (Min Huna Na'l'am)* by Syeikh Muhammad al-Ghazali has coloured the understanding of Islam in society and defended the legacy of his thought in Islamic culture and values in Malaysia.

Al-Faruqi has been in contact with ABIM since 1974, from his first visit to Malaysia to deliver a speech at the 4th ABIM Senawi Congress. He appeared at the invitation of ABIM President, DS Anwar Ibrahim and in his capacity as a professor and scholar of Islam at Temple University to deliver the historic speech. In her book, *"Debates on Islam and Knowledge in Malaysia and Egypt: Shifting Worlds"* Mona Abaza (2002) shows the beginning of al-Faruqi's relationship with ABIM which was tied up through its President, DS Anwar Ibrahim. This is explained in his analysis of al-Faruqi's idealism and perspective on the Islamization of knowledge: *"al-Faruqi visited Malaysia many times, and it seems he maintained close contacts with the student movement around Anwar Ibrahim and ABIM (Muslim Youth Movement of Malaysia). He also built up a relationship with Mahathir, during his early years in the government as an adviser on the Islamization of culture."* [al-Faruqi frequently visits Malaysia, and it seems that he has made close contacts with the student movement within Anwar Ibrahim and ABIM (Malaysian Islamic Youth Force). He also had a relationship with Mahathir, in his early years in government as an adviser on cultural Islamization].

When al-Faruqi attended the Third International Conference on the Islamisation of Knowledge held in Kuala Lumpur, he brought the idea of reform and reconstruction of thought and culture that was nurtured through IIIT and built a strong network with Islamic networks in Malaysia such as ABIM (Angkatan Belia Islam Malaysia). Its influence received widespread attention with support and mandates by the government. This statement was expressed by Furlow (2005) in his study: *"The Third International Conference on the Islamization of Knowledge convened in 1984 in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, and co-sponsored by the IIIT and the Malaysian Ministry of Youth and Culture also was important for bringing the IIIT's ideas to Malaysia. One participant at this conference was Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad who stated his support for the IIIT's approach to Islamization."* Thus, this study intends to highlight the influence of al-Faruqi and its impact on the formation of ABIM da'wah cadres and recruits and its implications for intellectual aspirations and its moderate and moderate line of struggle as a respected and influential da'wah movement in the Muslim world.

## 2. METHODS

This study method is qualitative which includes literature studies and content analysis. The basic material was analyzed using Miles & Huberman analysis techniques namely data reduction, data presentation and conclusion drawn. The source of information is supported by authoritative primary and secondary data and is analyzed descriptively, interactionistically, historically, empirically, discursive, thematic and synthesized based on Fazlur Rahman's hermeneutic theory, Tariq Ramadan's ethical approach, the contextualist perspectives of Khalid Abou el-Fadl and Abdullah Saeed and Norman Fairclough's methods of critical discourse. The research focus is directed towards the concept of Islamic intellectualism according to al-Faruqi, particularly the ideas

of Tawhid and the Islamization of knowledge, and their relevance to the orientation of thought and the intellectual movement of ABIM in Malaysia.

The data sources for this research consist of primary and secondary sources. Primary sources include the main works of Ismail Raji al-Faruqi, such as *Islamization of Knowledge* and *Al-Tawhid: Its Implications for Thought and Life*, as well as official ABIM documents in the form of manifestos, organizational reports, speeches by key figures, and internal publications. Secondary sources include books, scientific journal articles, and previous research that discusses al-Faruqi's thoughts, Islamic intellectual movements, and the dynamics of ABIM in the social, educational, and political context of Malaysia. Data collection was carried out through documentation techniques and systematic literature review by selecting relevant, credible, and academically authoritative sources. The collected data was then analyzed using content analysis and thematic analysis, by identifying key concepts in al-Faruqi's thought, grouping major themes such as Tawhid, the role of Muslim intellectuals, the Islamization of knowledge, and social transformation, and analyzing their relationship to the intellectual direction and praxis of the ABIM movement.

### 3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The idealism and views defended by al-Faruqi have a strong influence on ABIM's thought patterns and his legacy continues to impact his intellectual aspirations and traditions and harakat da'wah. His prolific works have been consistently translated and published by ABIM such as *The Hijrah: the Necessity of its Iqamat or Vergegenwartigung* (Hakikat Hijrah, 1985), and *Islam and Culture* (1983). In addition, Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka (DBP), Malaysian Institute of Translation and Books (ITBM) and Thinker's Library have also translated his major works such as *Atlas of Islamic Culture* (1992), *Islamization of Knowledge* (1991), *Islamic Arts* (1990), *Islamic Mind and Culture* (1990), *Tauhid: Its Implications to Life and Thought and Trilogy between the Abrahamic Religions*, and *Islam and Other Beliefs* (ITBM, 2008).

In his efforts to blow this aspiration of reform and nahdah, al-Faruqi has established a complete network of cooperation with the government. The peak was marked on 11-14 January 1981 when al-Faruqi led a delegation to Malaysia to study and conduct a comprehensive review of the Islamic policies put forward by the government. This was recorded in his letter to the President of ABIM dated January 26, 1981: "*The opportunity which H.E. Dr. Mahathir bin Mohamad, Deputy Prime Minister of Malaysia, has afforded me and my colleagues to study the Government's policies, has confirmed beyond doubt our conviction that the political condition of Malay Muslims is far better than that of their counterparts in other Muslim states.*" (1981) During his visit, the President of ABIM met him at his hotel in the Hilton to discuss the prospects and direction of ABIM's struggle.

The President also handed him a letter explaining ABIM's stance on Islamic policies and initiatives taken by the government. The letter was replied to by al-Faruqi after returning to America,

which suggested that ABIM respond positively to the government's commitment to inculcate Islamic values and support the government's vision to uphold and enliven Islamic teachings in administrative matters and administrative procedures, for the benefit of the ummah. This was emphasized in his letter dated January 26, 1981: "*it is therefore my and my colleagues' judgment that you ought to respond to Dr. Mahathir's gesture of good will (his removal of restrictions and stopping of harassment) with an equal or superior gesture of support and cooperation.*" (1981) In the letter, al-Faruqi expressed his joy at the cooperation and commitment exhibited by ABIM, and expressed his confidence in the aspirations of the struggle defended and the ideal manhaj of its movement: "*Malaysia is also especially fortunate to have a vigorous Islamic movement led by you with responsibility and clear vision, in pursuit of the universal rational goals of Islam. My colleagues and I are proud and happy to be associated with you*" (1981).

Al-Faruqi has great confidence in the future of ABIM and has extended his support to garner substantive support from the Saudi government, in facing the challenges of the great financial crisis faced by the Islamic movement, as shown in his letter to the President of ABIM. He had asked Mahathir to appeal the ABIM case in Saudi Arabia, the aim of which was to secure an immediate allocation of millions of dollars to be channelled into the ABIM building, so that proper preparations for construction could begin immediately. "*I have asked Mahathir to plead ABIM's case in Saudi Arabia, the purpose of being to obtain a quick release of the million dollars committed to the ABIM building, so that the necessary preparations for construction could begin forthwith. Indeed, I have asked him to seek far more funds from the Muslim states represented at the summit, for Islamic da'wah in Malaysia and Southeast Asia.*" (1981) [In fact, I have asked him to obtain more allocations from the Muslim countries representing the summit, for the purpose of Islamic preaching in Malaysia and Southeast Asia.

With the desire to uphold reparations and islah and to revitalize the spirit of brotherhood as "fellow Muslims", he convinced ABIM to stay away from conflict with the government and work towards unity, which is quite important for the rise of Islam and the resilience of the ummah. al-Faruqi also said "*in light of this great objective, every dispute or difference loses its significance. Our and your task is to pull together behind his leadership, to spare no erg of energy in fulfilling this crucial Islamic goal... it is therefore my and my colleagues' judgment that you ought to respond to Mahathir's gesture of good will (his removal of restrictions and stopping of harassment) with an equal or superior gesture of support and cooperation. It is not only becoming, but imperative for the Islamic movement publically to proclaim its slate clean of any condemnation of the Government's policies of Malay reconstruction... in the name of Allah and the interest of the Islamic world movement, I renew my appeal to you to do everything in your power to break the frigid ice that has formed between the movement and the government and to move closer toward shura and cooperation in obedience to Allah Ta'ala and His Prophet (saw)*" (1981).

Based on this great objective, every dispute or contradiction is meaningless. My task and my brother are to mobilize the common strength behind his administration, leaving no stone unturned in the accomplishment of this important Islamic purpose... it is thus my and my colleagues' assessment that you should respond to Mahathir's signal of good will (his removal of sanctions and cessation of disruption) with a signal similar or more of support and cooperation. It is not only fast, it is also mandatory for the Islamic movement to publicly proclaim its record free from any criticism of the government's policies in the effort to reconstruct the Malays... In the name of Allah and the importance of the movement of the Islamic world, I renew my appeal to you to do everything in your power to break down the cold fortress that has been formed between the movement and the kingdom and to advance closer to the shura and cooperation in obedience to Allah Ta'ala and His Messenger (saw)]. Al-Faruqi's last visit to Malaysia was on 23-31 July 1984, when he attended the 4th Islamic Education Conference in Kuala Lumpur jointly organised by IIIT, Washington and the Government of Malaysia. He was present to give a keynote address and present his paper entitled "*Toward a Critical World Theology*". His papers and legacy of thought are now widely developed in police planning on Islam in Malaysia and in the manhaj of the ABIM movement.

### 3.1. Implications of Thinking

ABIM's work and struggle were heavily influenced by al-Faruqi's Islamic weltanschauung and its proactive and inclusive framework of thought. The basis of his movement and the principle of his struggle are rooted in his understanding of Islam which emphasizes the principles of tawhid, human kindness and universal Islamic idealism. This is realized in ABIM's struggle to defend moral aspirations, demand change and islah, enliven harakat da'wah, mobilize civil society, and fight for civil rights and democratic principles. The desire and idealism of this struggle are fully described by John O. Voll (1994): "*ABIM called for a more political and economic system based on the principles of Islam and a rejection of capitalism and socialism. Anwar Ibrahim, the leader of ABIM during the 1970s, emphasizes that the Islamic resurgence is not essentially anti-Western but is part of the long historical process of bringing Islamic practice into line with the demands of the Quranic revelation and would be taking place whether or not the West had expanded. For him, the ideal of tawhid means that there must be a constant effort to improve human society. He notes that in a pluralist society like Malaysia, Islamic political action must involve cooperation with non-Muslims, and he emphasizes that a truly Islamic society will be democratic and tolerant*"

This tawhid philosophy is also highlighted by ABIM in its policy and policy approach, as formulated by Haji Amidi Abdul Manan (2005 -), the President of ABIM in his policy speech during the 41st ABIM Sanawi Congress: "The courage of the Malays is born from the change of the 'sarwa view' which is tauhidic in nature. It frees the Malays from all harmful oppression. Fostering a clear view of life in its functions and rules, as well as fostering a life system based on the word shahadah which ultimately elevates the dignity of the Malays." He also added: "All the strength of nation-

building should be centred on upholding human dignity. Which elevates the value of the human self and is driven by the ability of reason. It is not a matter of rights and sentiments alone, which ultimately traps us in a narrow and detrimental *asabiyah*." (2012) From his writing efforts and contributions of thought, al-Faruqi has brought enlightenment and power of influence to ABIM. His struggle from the beginning was motivated by his ideas and thoughts to demand change and awakening. This is emphasized by Hazarudin Baharudin (2002, 37) in his thesis: "It is through the ABIM movement that all the big ideas inspired by al-Faruqi such as the Islamization process have been popularized in Malaysia, through workshops, symposia and seminars held. Not only that, but al-Faruqi was invited to present a paper in a program organized by ABIM."

The basic philosophy of ABIM's struggle is clearly inspired by al-Faruqi's framework of thought which is upheld in usrah and tamrin activities and cadre training. ABIM's philosophy of struggle was also influenced by the idealism brought by Islamic movements around the world such as the Jamaat-i Islami in Pakistan and the Ikhwan al-Muslimun in Egypt and the campaign for change and nahdah ideals pioneered by revivalists such as al-Mawdudi, Syed Qutb, al-Faruqi, and al-Attas, as recorded by John Obert Voll (1994, 347): "*ABIM leaders were influenced by the ideas and experiences of the Jamaat-i Islami in Pakistan and the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, and by scholars in the emerging global network of Muslim revivalists like Ismail al-Faruqi, a Palestinian teaching in the United States, and a noted Malaysian scholar, Syed Naquib al-Attas*".

This widespread influence of al-Faruqi was also championed and pioneered by former ABIM presidents such as Dato Seri Anwar Ibrahim (1974-1982) and Dr. Muhammad Nur Manutu (1991-1997), who led its struggle and leadership since the late 70s who sought to stimulate and develop the influence and school of thought of al-Faruqi among the leadership and the grassroots. This aspiration for change was also reinforced by ABIM's initiative to disseminate and translate al-Faruqi's books. Efforts to continue his legacy and extend his legacy of thought are also mobilized through WADAH (Wadah Pencerdasan Ummah Malaysia) and PKPIM (National Association of Islamic Students of Malaysia).

### **3.2. Da'wah Methodology**

ABIM's da'wah approach is clearly influenced by the fikrah and ideology brought by al-Faruqi. It highlights the principles and manhaj of da'wah which is based on *al-hikmah* (wisdom), and the method of deliberation and is based on the demands of the reality of Malaysian society (*manhaj Malizi*). This is emphasized by al-Faruqi in his da'wah treatises, which demand a realistic and inclusive approach and the way of *al-hikmah* (wisdom) in arguing with the scholars of the book – which is clearly influenced by the manhaj outlined by Ibn Taymiyah. This manhaj is referred to from the Qur'an: "Call to the way of your Lord with wisdom and good advice; and argue with them in the

best and civilized way: for your Lord knows, who has strayed from His path, and who has been guided." al-Nahl [16:125].

Sayid M. Rashid Rida in *Tafsir al-Manar*, defines wisdom as "understanding the secrets and benefits of something" (1337 H). ABIM defines it as "physical or spiritual actions, attitudes and ways that mark true Muslims who understand Islam by improving themselves over time" (2004). *Manhaj Malizi*, championed by ABIM is based on the aspirations of da'wah initiated by its former president, Dr Siddiq Fadzil (1983-1991) which means maintaining our own model without copying from external operations (2004). This requires an understanding of the different challenges in different places and environments. It looks at the contextual framework and the current reality. This was envisioned by Ahmad Azam Abdul Rahman, who led ABIM from 1997-2005, with the implication that da'wah is not necessarily similar to demands in other countries due to the different climates and scenarios of native communities that demand different approaches. In carrying out its da'wah mission, its da'wah cadres are equipped with technological knowledge and ICT as wasilah, and are trained in usrah and tamrin, are given exposure to the basic demands of da'wah operations, and an understanding of Christian missions, and Zionism, and other deviant spiritual movements such as the Baha'i and Qadiani.

ABIM's image and struggle in upholding da'wah clearly fights for the line of madhab al-Faruqi which emphasizes rabbani values, and upholds Islamic ideals and Islamist discussions. This is analyzed by Mona Abaza (2002) in her book which affirms: "*al-Faruqi's writings ring with a powerful populism, very similar in tone to present day Islamist discourse.*" This ideal of Islamiyyah is also imagined by al-Faruqi: "*Never in Islamic history has the cry of Allahu Akbar (God is the greatest) been needed on the intellectual level as it is today.*" (Mona Abaza, 2002). This influence and aspiration is manifested in ABIM's mission which is upheld as a "comprehensive Islamic movement to realize the ideals of Islamiyyah" and its proactive vision to "build and lead the khayr civilization of the ummah". The role of da'wah carried out by ABIM emphasizes the efforts to repair and reform the ummah championed by al-Faruqi, who strives to improve the weaknesses and shortcomings of the thoughts and lives of the ummah, as concluded by DS Anwar in his keynote speech at The Ismail Faruqi Award Presentation Ceremony (1995): "*he was acutely aware of the realities of the time and the condition of the contemporary ummah*". He is acutely aware of the current reality and condition of the contemporary ummah.

ABIM's da'wah approach is also influenced by the method of movement outlined by al-Faruqi based on dialogue (*hiwar*) as an alternative to traditional da'wah practices. It aims to understand and appreciate beliefs and get to know other cultures. The manhaj that he upheld is based on the principle of "*lita'arafu*" as expressed in the Qur'an (al-Hujurat: 13). This has allowed the spread of Islamic da'wah more widely, without the use of force or coercion in upholding beliefs and

creed. This is an important principle that colors ABIM's da'wah approach that chooses a moderate stream (*tayyar wasati*). In his da'wah efforts, al-Faruqi placed great confidence in ABIM to realize comprehensive reforms in Malaysia to defend the bastions of the faith and defend the fate of the ummah. This desire was realized by its leaders who had important positions in the government and the structure of society, as expressed by Shireen Hunter (2002): "*Its (ABIM) members and former members became a pervasive presence in responsible positions in society during the 1980s and 1990s. They hold senior positions in government and the bureaucracy, in university administrations and faculties, in the media and corporate sectors. When Anwar Ibrahim, its founder, became a member of the government of Prime Minister Mahathir Mohammed, ABIM's influence reached its peak*". On the issues of thought, education, and da'wah, ABIM takes a realistic view in seeking deliberation and dialogue with all parties, while maintaining its position as non-partisan. This attitude is also influenced by al-Faruqi's influence as an activist, who does not show political leanings, in his efforts to uphold the image of the struggle and mobilize the aspirations for change in Malaysia.

The confrontational and combative attitude shown by ABIM over the years in upholding Islamic values has been merged with a new conciliatory outlook and aspiration, patterned from the views and aspirations of da'wah advocated by al-Faruqi, which initiated a rational and progressive understanding of Islam, and defended the aspirations of freedom, civil and democratic values, as emphasized by Shireen Hunter (2002, 250): "*Its (ABIM) vision of an Islamic state emphasized democracy, pluralism, and social justice. It denounced communalism, racism, and sectarianism and spoke of the need for tolerance and mutual respect. Its advocacy of shari'a was accompanied by an emphasis on the preservation of non-Muslim rights in a democratic, multiracial society*".

### 3.3. Dialogue of Civilization

ABIM's struggle to mobilize the dialogue of civilization is clearly patterned from al-Faruqi's universal and inclusive aspirations and line of thought, which celebrates the reality and aspirations of society. This inclusive struggle is clearly imagined by Shireen Hunter (2002): "*ABIM's ideology was crafted more to speak to the realities of a multiethnic, multireligious society.*" The practicality of this cultural openness and tolerance has resulted in a clear momentum in ABIM's activities since the late 70s with a significant impact in maintaining an attitude of mutual respect and understanding, which is "very important in a multi-religious and cultural society such as Malaysia" (Muhammad Nur Manutu, 1997). This phenomenon was observed by Muhammad Nur Manutu, former president of ABIM (1991-1997), in his paper presented at the International Seminar on Civilizational Dialogue entitled "*Inter-civilization dialogue at the community level: the case of Malaysian society*" which reviewed experiments and experiences on cultural encounters and interfaith dialogue among selected Malaysian voluntary organisations: "for example, ABIM (Angkatan Belia Islam Malaysia) – one of the leading Islamic organisations in the country has been engaged in interfaith dialogue with the Christian, Hindu, and Buddhist communities since the 1970s. It may be said that ABIM has

succeeded in opening up space for other races with different religious backgrounds in various matters.

In 1989, ABIM and MYM (Malaysian Young Movement) – a Chinese youth organisation with over 200,000 members joined hands to organise a "Spiritual Camp" in Port Dickson, Negeri Sembilan, which was a significant event in our history attended by Muslim and Buddhist youths who were committed to... Their experience through interfaith and cultural activities will certainly drive the process of national integration and the vision to achieve civil society." (1997) This phenomenon can be traced from the influence of al-Faruqi, and the initiative of dialogue and understanding of civilization that he advocated, as formulated by Zuriati and Engku Ahmad Zaki (2010): "Ismail Raji al-Faruqi was a strong believer in inter-religious dialogue."

#### 4. CONCLUSION

This study has shown the monumental impact and influence that al-Faruqi had on ABIM, which inspired the strength of harakat da'wah and the ideals of Islamiyyah that he championed. His basic philosophy of freedom, dialogue of civilization, the spirit of change, the tradition of cliah, uslub da'wah, and his universal theory of thought have been developed quite extensively in the policy and foundation of ABIM. His contribution in triggering this aspiration of change and transformation has shown his clear impact and influence in the struggle to defend and sketch the future and survival of the ummah carried by ABIM and his aspirations in mobilizing civil society and the creation of the khayr ummah civilization.

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