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## MUHAMMAD ABDUH'S INFLUENCE ON AL-WAQAT' AL-MIŞRIYYAH: SHAPING EGYPT'S OFFICIAL GAZETTE

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### Abstrak

#### Kata Kunci:

*Al-Waqai' al-Mişriyyah, Mesir, Muhammad Abdub, Jurnalisme*

*Artikel ini membahas peran Muhammad Abdub (1849-1905) dalam upayanya sebagai ketua editorial surat kabar al-Waqai' al-Mişriyyah sejak tahun 1880. Karyanya memberi pengaruh yang besar dan signifikan terhadap kemajuan ranah kewartawanan dalam konteks kebangkitan surat kabar Mesir, al-Waqai' al-Mişriyyah, sebagai surat kabar resmi pemerintah untuk mengembangkan cita modernisasi dan mempengaruhi pandangan umum di Mesir. Artikel ini mengenalkan kolom dan rencana Abdub yang memberi pengaruh penting yang kemudian memelopori dan mengembangkan harkat bahasa, meningkatkan kekuatan pengaruh surat kabar dan kewartawanan serta menggerakkan kesadaran umum tentang percaturan politik dan budaya yang intens dalam perkembangan semangat nasionalisme dan kesadaran sosial di Mesir. Penulisan dan rencana politiknya merangkumi masa kekuasaan Riyad Pasha, Sharif dan zaman pergolakan politik. Artikel ini menyorot ide-ide yang dilontarkannya tentang pembaharuan sosial dan spiritual, serta persoalan-persoalan pendidikan, agama dan sosio-budaya yang berkaitan. Penelitian ini ditulis berdasarkan data-data pustaka yang disajikan secara deskriptif, analitik dan komparatif. Artikel ini menunjukkan perkembangan yang dinamis dan produktif di masa kepemimpinan Abdub ketika memimpin surat kabar al-Waqai' al-Mişriyyah. Abdub berhasil mengangkat persoalan masyarakat dan menarik kesadaran tentang modernisasi dalam dunia politik serta mempertabahkan kepentingan etika dan nilai jurnalisme.*

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## Abstract

### Keywords:

Al-Waqā'i' al-Miṣrīyyah,  
Egypt,  
Muhammad  
Abduh,  
Journalism

This study aims to discuss the role of Muhammad Abduh (1849-1905) as the leading editor of *al-Waqā'i' al-Miṣrīyyah* (Egyptian Events), an official Egyptian gazette. His editorial work has had a profound impact on its progress in the context of the rising popularity of *al-Waqā'i' al-Miṣrīyyah* during his editorship (1880-1882), establishing its reputation as a leading Egyptian newspapers. This study contributes to illuminating Abduh's column and writing that was instrumental in highlighting unprecedented socio-cultural and religious reform undertaken by the government, amid phenomenal and competitive growth of independent press and helped to develop a national consciousness of modernizing programs and influencing public opinion in Egypt. It allowed for better development of formidable national spirit and mainstreaming of their common ideal and convention in language, literature and culture as well as mobilizing social awareness of intense political and cultural dynamics in the Egyptian heartland. 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 main finding delineates that *al-Waqā'i'* has assumed unprecedented influence and success during his editorship 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 global political current as well as defending the significance value, norms and ethics of journalism.

## Introduction

This article examines the significant ideas and role of Muhammad Abduh (1849-1905) in his leading position in the highly reputed newspaper *al-Waqā'i' al-Miṣrīyyah* (Egyptian Events) as its chief editor in 1880. The research fills the gap in the systematic study of Abduh's career as an editor and the historical mapping of his column in *al-Abram*, *al-Muayyad*, *al-'Urwa al-Wuṣqā'* and *al-Waqā'i' al-Miṣrīyyah* that was lacking in previous literature. The problem of the study is to analyse this highly stimulative and encouraging activity which involved many dynamic positions and roles he assumed in the newspaper's bureaucratic structure that had brought meaningful influence and connection in a wide-ranging intellectual network and activism forthcoming from his impressive career as leading

activist and journalist of contemporary intellectual movement of late 19<sup>th</sup> century Egypt. The mediation of newspaper, 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 philosophy and ideas and its underlying reformist tradition. According to Ammeke Kateman<sup>1</sup> “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.”

His creative and meaningful approaches to interpretation have enabled the formation of the global and broadly international network of audiences and followers, who were 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 revival he led to uphold the imperative of moral orders,<sup>2</sup> expanding the well-being and welfare of the people, expressing dynamic force of political, religious, cultural, artistic and social belief and movement, and overall national aspiration and consciousness.

The social context and progressive nature of journalism in Egypt were instrumental in enabling the spread of his rational and pluralistic ideas (*jama'ī*) 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 make-up of the socio-cultural and national fabric, awakening their spirit toward social cohesiveness, leveraging their cultural awareness of the productive

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

<sup>2</sup> Amin, Osman, ‘Muhammad ‘Abduh the Reformer’, *The Muslim World* 36, no. 2 (1946): 153. also see Hamdan Maghribi and Alfina Hidayah, “Contesting the Exegetical Approaches of Muhammad Abduh and Fazlur Rahman to the Qur’ān,” *Religia* 26, no. 1 (March 30, 2023): 40–57, <https://doi.org/10.28918/religia.v26i1.865>.

scientific and technological invention in education and literature,<sup>3</sup> and ultimately toward national progress, in the pace of 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 which attracted much discussion among the young generation of the Muslim community in the Islamic world. In the process of modernization, the experience of the Egyptian land provided a unique case, in which the part played by newspapers and journalism was far more important than most of the Western countries, reflecting 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 Mahmud 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 the precursors of modern journalism in Egypt in the colonial age.<sup>4</sup>

One of the most important periods of his journalistic career is during his incumbency as its editor and later becoming chief editor of the Egyptian Government Gazette, *al-Waqā'i' al-Misriyyah* (October 1880-September 1882).<sup>5</sup> Despite the newspaper being the official tongue and

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<sup>3</sup> Suwahyu, Irwansyah, "Telaah terhadap Konsep Pembaharuan Pendidikan Islam Muhammad Abduh", *Al-Tarbiawi Al-Haditsab: Jurnal Pendidikan Islam* 7, no. 1 (2022): 1. <http://dx.doi.org/10.24235/tarbawi.v7i1.10112>.

<sup>4</sup> see Oliver Scharbrodt, *Muhammad 'Abduh: Modern Islam and the Culture of Ambiguity* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2022).

<sup>5</sup> Al-Sawi, Ahmad Husayn, 'Muhammad 'Abduh and Al-Waqā'i' al-Misriyyah.' (Unpublished M.A. thesis, Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research, McGill University, 1954). Muhammad 'Abduh, *Al-A'māl Al-Kāmilah Li Al-Imām Al-Syaikh Muḥammad 'Abduh*,

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 defence of the rights of the oppressed, the leftist group and opposition camp, and the fate of the workers, activists, and their local representative, meant to safeguard the liberal democratic space 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 made way for the improvement of governmental bureaucratic functions besides influencing public opinion on the ways issues and policies are being highlighted to raise public awareness of its rationale and consequently find practical solutions to the problems. Toward this objective, the present paper aims to discuss comprehensively the immense role of Muhammad Abduh as editor-in-chief of the Egyptian State Gazette, *al-Waqāi' al-Miṣrīyyah* (1880-1882) in his effort to enhance the standard of journalism in Egyptian national framework.

Previous writings have been identified in past literature that largely focus on common themes of Islamic modernism and the role of Abduh as the leader of Islamic thought in Egypt.<sup>6</sup> These were centred on general ideas of reform<sup>7</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-Waqāi' al-Miṣrīyyah*. Among these

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ed. Muḥammad 'Imārah (Beirut: Dār al-Syurūq, 1993).

<sup>6</sup> Aasia, Yusuf, 'Islam and Modernity: Remembering the Contribution of Muhammad 'Abduh (1849-1905)', *ICR Journal*, 3 no. 2 (2012): 355-369. see Alfina Hidayah and Hamdan Maghribi Maghribi, "From Modernism to Neo-Modernism: A Religio-Political Context of Muhammad Abduh and Fazlur Rahman," *SHALIH: Journal of Islamicate Multidisciplinary* 7, no. 2 (December 4, 2022): 109–24, <https://doi.org/10.22515/shabih.v7i2.6066>.

<sup>7</sup> Fadzil, Siddiq, *Shayekh Muhammad Abduh: Tokoh Gerakan Islam* (Shah Alam: UNISEL Press, 2023).

were kitab *Tārikh al-Ustādh al-Imām al-Shaykh Muḥammad ‘Abduh* (historical biography of Muhammad Abduh) compiled by his chief disciple, Muhammad Rashid Rida<sup>8</sup> in three volumes. This relatively classic reference became our main source that provided the original tools and materials for this study. Rida had recorded an extensive biography of Muhammad Abduh and his illustrious career, compiling his major articles and writings (second volume, 1908), as well as 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 which were reissued in *Tārikh*.

Another classic source on the life of Muhammad Abduh was produced by C.C. Adams<sup>9</sup> in his book *Islam and Modernism in Egypt: A Study of the Modern Reform Movement Inaugurated by Muḥammad Abduh* that extensively described his distinguished career as a Muslim theologian and reformer, 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 thesis by Ahmad Husayn Sawi<sup>10</sup> entitled “Muḥammad ‘Abduh and Al-Waqā’i’ al-Misriyyah” particularly 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 a classic 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, which included materials not published by Rashid Rida

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<sup>8</sup> Muhammad Rashid Rida, *Tārikh al-Ustādh al-Imām al-Shaykh Muḥammad ‘Abduh*, vol. 1 (Cairo: Matba’ah al-Manar, 1931).

<sup>9</sup> C.C. Adams, *Islam and Modernism in Egypt: A Study of the Modern Reform Movement Inaugurated by Muḥammad Abduh* (Cairo: The American University of Cairo, 1933).

<sup>10</sup> Al-Sawi, Ahmad Husayn, ‘Muḥammad ‘Abduh and Al-Waqā’i’ al-Misriyyah.’ (Unpublished M.A. thesis, Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research, McGill University, 1954).

as well as local news making headlines during the outbreak of 'Urabi revolution. Sawi also referred to the writings of Dr Ibrahim 'Abduh<sup>11</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-Waqāi' al-Miṣriyyah*, with visible power in the shaping of journalistic field and political *adab* that became the platform and outlet for Abduh's writings on the emerging socio-historical, economic and bureaucratic issues.<sup>12</sup> A short account of Abduh's biography by Mark Sedgwick<sup>13</sup> 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. It also addresses his early career and meeting with al-Afghani, and his editorial post in the periodicals *al-Mu'ayyad* and *Al-Waqāi' al-Miṣriyyah* 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<sup>14</sup> 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

<sup>11</sup> Ibrahim 'Abduh, *Tārīkh al-Tibā'ah wa al-Sahāfah fī Miṣr Khilāl al-Hamlah al-Faransiyah*, vol. 3 (Cairo: n.p., 1949).

<sup>12</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).

<sup>13</sup> Sedgwick, Mark, *Muhammad Abduh* (Cairo: AUC Press, 2003).

<sup>14</sup> Alias, Adibah Yasmin; Saidin, Mohd Irwan Syazli; Hamil, Jamaie Haji, 'The Influence of Muhammad 'Abduh towards the Emergence of Fundamentalist-Reformist of Kaum Muda in Tanah Melayu (1900-1930)', *KEMANUSLAAN* 30, no. 2 (2023): 119-141.

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.

The historical writing of Wilfrid Scawen Blunt (1840-1922)<sup>15</sup> entitled *Secret History of the English Occupation of Egypt* was immensely crucial that provided a personal narrative of events surrounding the British government occupation of Egypt, first published in 1907, that relates his sympathies with the Indigenous struggle, denouncing the atrocities of the British and promote the cause of the victims.<sup>16</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 press in the Egyptian Realm as well as traditional scholarship of al-Azhar was encapsulated in Al-Jabartī's *'Ajā'ib al-Āsār fī al-Tarājim wa al-Akbbār* (The Marvelous Chronicles: Biographies and Events)<sup>17</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 introduced as an official tool and machinery of the regime and its role in the time of Ottoman Egypt.

Thus the present article aims to briefly examine the historical

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<sup>15</sup> Wilfrid Scawen Blunt, *Secret History of the English Occupation of Egypt* (New York: Alfred A Knopf, 1922).

<sup>16</sup> Wilfrid Scawen Blunt, *My Diaries: Being a Personal Narrative of Events, 1888-1914* (New York: A.A. Knopf, 1921).

<sup>17</sup> Al-Jabartī, 'Abd al-Rahman, *The Marvelous Chronicles: Biographies and Events*. Shmuel Moreh, eds., Max Schloessinger Memorial Series, vol. 9. 5 vols. (Jerusalem: Hebrew University, 2013).

background of Abduh's productive career in journalism and his significant works in *al-Waqā' al-Miṣriyyah*. 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 at harmonizing conventional law and shariah<sup>18</sup> under the Khedival rule which he believed would allow for the moulding 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 19<sup>th</sup> century Egypt.

### **Method of Study**

This study is qualitative and designed based on the documentative and bibliographic framework. It analyses qualitatively the historical work of Abduh especially his column in *al-Waqā' al-Miṣriyyah* and compares with his articles and writings in other local magazines such as *al-Abram*, *al-Mu'ayyad* and *al-'Urwa al-Wuṣqā'* 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.

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<sup>18</sup> Seiichi Kobayashi, 'Muhammad 'Abduh and His Age', *Bulletin of the Society for Near Eastern Studies in Japan* 23, no. 2 (1980): 117-136.

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 his context and perspective of the traditional and historical background of the Egyptian official gazette *al-Waqā' al-Miṣriyyah* and its relevance with today's classic discourse on modern school and practice of journalism. The analysis provides a succinct description of Abduh's reformist ideas and their contextualization with today's current development and progress of *al-Waqā'* in 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 the Egyptian context was succinctly encapsulated by William Ryle-Hodges<sup>19</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 which he addresses the significance dynamics of his newspaper writings and its interaction with a largely enlightened ground of universally modern context of the 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 which was comprehensively embedded in the

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<sup>19</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.

public sphere and people's lives, animating their "souls", which implied "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-Miṣriyyah*" show 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>20</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 moulded an Egyptian consciousness which embraces freedom and liberty and envisions the value and ideal of patriotism. In his article on "Political Life" released in *Al-Waqā'i' al-Miṣriyyah*, 28<sup>th</sup> Nov 1881<sup>21</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>22</sup>

On the occasion of the formation of the Constituent Assembly on December 26, 1881, he wrote an article in favour of the constitutional and representative government. In his article "Shura"<sup>23</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

<sup>20</sup> Ryle-Hodges, William, 'Muhammad 'Abduh's Notion of Political *Adab*.

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

<sup>22</sup> Al-Sawī, Ahmad Husayn, 'Muhammad 'Abduh and Al-Waqā'i' al-Miṣriyyah

<sup>23</sup> Muhammad Rashid Rida. *Tārīkh*

enacted. The ideal law would be an expression of public opinion based on consultation, that suits local needs and tradition.<sup>24</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 model of *al-Manār*, *al-Mu'ayyad*, *al-Abram*, and *Ṣamarāt al-Funūn*<sup>25</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>26</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>27</sup>, an impression that drew him into the classic of Western tradition and philosophy<sup>28</sup>. His intellectual life was moulded by the impact of rational and empirical enquiry 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-Abram* ("The

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<sup>24</sup> Al-Sawi, Ahmad Husayn, 'Muhammad 'Abduh and Al-Waqā'ī' al-Misrīyah

<sup>25</sup> Daulay, Maslina, 'Inovasi Pendidikan Islam Muhammad Abduh', *Jurnal Darul Ulmi* 1, no. 2 (2013): 77-101.

<sup>26</sup> Kedourie, Elie, *Afghani and Abduh: An Essay on Religious Unbelief and Political Activism in Modern Islam* (London: Frank Cass & Co., 1966).

<sup>27</sup> Scharbrodt, Oliver, *Muhammad 'Abduh: Modern Islam and the Culture of Ambiguity* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2022).

<sup>28</sup> Browne, Edward G., *The Persian Revolution 1905-1909*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Mage Publishers, 2006).

Pyramid”)<sup>29</sup> which was aligned with his function and involvement in the controversial newspaper propaganda to uphold the widely-held aspiration of Egyptian people for self-determination and safeguard their national heritage and interest, which culminated in the organized mass uprising mobilized by ‘Urabi Pasha to remove the corrupt regime of powerful ruling elite.<sup>30</sup>

According to Masato Iizuka<sup>31</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-Waqā' al-Miṣriyyah* unquestionably supporting the move of the reactionary Government. This changing attitude was due to his recognition of the existing effort in the creation of a representative parliament, as inquired from his articles published in the periodicals *Al-Waqā' al-Miṣriyyah* entitled “*Ikhtilaf al-Qawānīn bi Ikhtilaf ahwāl al-Umam*” (laws should change following the conditions of nations)<sup>32</sup> and “*al-Syūrā wa al-Qānūn*” (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' al-Miṣriyyah* in October 1880 until September 1882. In addition to writing articles and reports in headlines, he also runs in ex-

<sup>29</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. <https://doi.org/10.30651/sr.v4i1.5050>.

<sup>30</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>31</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.

<sup>32</sup> Kurzman, Charles, ed., *Modernist Islam, 1840-1940: A Sourcebook* (Oxford & New York: Oxford University Press, 2002).

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>33</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>34</sup>

Given his position as leading editor of *al-Waqāʾiʿ al-Miṣriyyah* was parallel with the nationalist movement led by ʿUrabi Pasha, and as everyone involved in public affairs in no way can be separated from political activities, ʿAbduh came to the scene in the centre stage, in which he played an immensely significant role. Since the 19th century, Egypt has undisputedly become the epicentre 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 ʿAli, arguably *al-Waqāʾiʿ al-Miṣriyyah* which was established as a state organ, 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-Waqāʾiʿ al-Miṣriyyah arguably was the first Arab newspaper in the

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<sup>33</sup> Muhammad Rashid Rida. *Tārīkh*

<sup>34</sup> Al-Sawi, Ahmad Husayn, ʿAbduh and Al-Waqāʾiʿ al-Miṣriyyah

world. Founded by Muhammad 'Ali Pasha in 1828, it remained the only periodical in Egypt which 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 markedly overcome by the growing popularity of other rival independent newspapers, *al-Waqāi'* gained a new breath and reached the peak of its fame and prosperity under the skilled leadership of Muhammad 'Abduh. After that, in the changing political context and atmosphere, it returns 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-Waqāi'* reached its highest achievement of transformation, starting to be published daily with renewed interest and influence, connecting to global audiences 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-Waqāi'* 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-Waqāi'* 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 a 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' al-Miṣriyyah***

In the context of his role as theoretician and revolutionary and proponent of Islamic revival, his painstaking works in the periodical *al-Waqā' al-Miṣriyyah* arguably make innovative use of his polemical and political writings in the newspaper to anticipate a resurgence (*nahḍah*) 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>35</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>36</sup> in the process of promoting bureaucratic and state reform project.

The enlightening movement of rationalism in the French Revolution also found resonance in his article and seminal work, *Al-Islam wa al-Naṣrāniyyah ma'a al 'ilm wa al-Madaniyyah* (Islam and Christianity concerning Science and Civilization) <sup>37</sup> in which 'Abduh 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>38</sup> of the proposed harmony between faith and reason.

This also applied to his ethico-legal writings in the periodicals which

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<sup>35</sup> Ryle-Hodges, William. 'Muhammad 'Abduh's Politics of Adab.

<sup>36</sup> Ryle-Hodges, William. 'Muhammad 'Abduh's Politics of Adab.

<sup>37</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).

<sup>38</sup> Fuyumi, Katsuhata, 'Muhammad 'Abduh and John William Draper', *Annals of Japan Association for Middle East Studies* 25, no. 1 (2009): 165-185.

were intrinsically embedded with aspects of utility in legal theory, which implied the centrality of *maqāṣid al-syarī'ah* 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>39</sup>

According to Sawi, in terms of the institutional reform accomplished during Abduh's incumbency of the editorials of *al-Waqā'i'*, it was due to his transcendental and pioneering work in treating religious, educational, social and moral problems in his newspaper articles, which has been widely read and highly esteemed by its various audiences and help to bring significance change in the governmental policy, “contributing towards the modern revival of the spiritual, cultural and social life of the Egyptian and Muslim peoples”<sup>40</sup>, and liberating them from the stagnant and dead tradition. Some of his newspaper articles on theological 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 skilful 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 Ṣafḥ al-Fallāḥ*] (on the extravagant spending of the Egyptian peasants on luxurious and superfluous things that lead to moral decadence and poverty) (*al-Waqā'i' al-Miṣrīyyah*, no. 969, 20<sup>th</sup> Nov

<sup>39</sup> Muhammad 'Abduh, *The Theology of Unity*, Ishaq Musa'ad & Kenneth Cragg, tr. (London: Allen & Unwin, 1966).

<sup>40</sup> Al-Sawi, Ahmad Husayn, 'Muhammad 'Abduh and Al-Waqā'i' al-Miṣrīyyah

1880, Jan 1881).<sup>41</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>42</sup>, “*Mā humā al-faqr al-ḥaqīqī fī al-bilād*”<sup>43</sup> (the real poverty of the country – of adopting new methods in the agricultural process, to facilitate the labour to grow their crops), *Kalām fī Khata’ al-‘Uqalā’ (Al-Waqā’ al-Miṣriyyah*, 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. In his estimate, reform and upliftment of the nation must be developed gradually, otherwise, it will fail to be accomplished. 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 employing municipal and provincial councils, as practised 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>44</sup>, *al-Wataniyyah (Al-Waqā’ al-Miṣriyyah*, 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) *‘Īd Miṣr wa Matla’ Sa’ādātuhā, Ihtirām Qawānīn al-Hukūmah wa awāmīribā min sa’adat al-ummah (Al-Waqā’ al-Miṣriyyah*, no. 952, 13<sup>th</sup> Oct 1880)<sup>45</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

<sup>41</sup> Muhammad ‘Imarah, ed., *Al-A‘mal al-Kamilah*

<sup>42</sup> Muhammad ‘Imarah, ed., *Al-A‘mal al-Kamilah*

<sup>43</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.

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

<sup>45</sup> Muhammad Rashid Rida. *Tārīkh*

people for mutual benefit, whose welfare depend on the 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>46</sup> and et cetera.

Throughout these articles, he makes the case for the productive capital drive and production of the *fallaḥ*, 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 labour 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>47</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, which was geared towards new consciousness and modern development and revival and served as a tool and medium of dialogue with wider horizon and setting of broad cultural and moral ground.

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<sup>46</sup> Al-Sawi, Ahmad Husayn, ‘Muhammad ‘Abduh and Al-Waqā'i' al-Misriyyah

<sup>47</sup> Muhammad ‘Imarah, ed., *Al-A‘mal al-Kamilah*

## Conclusion

In conclusion, the undisputed role of Muhammad ‘Abduh as leading editor of *Al-Waqā’i’ al-Misriyyah* 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 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 to reassert their legal and social convention and responsibility in establishing its underlying cause and tentative solution. Finally, to recognize the modernist ideas he brought forth and their broader implication in journalism, it is suggested that it is worthwhile to further compile and study Abduh’s articles in *Al-Waqā’i’ al-Misriyyah* 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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