

**POLITICAL THINKING AND ATTITUDE OF RELIGION:  
STUDY OF POLITICAL RESISTANCE OF KIAI AHMAD RIFA`I  
KALISALAK AL-JAWI ON COLONIALISM OF THE NETHERLANDS**

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*Abstract*

*This study aims to find a form of political resistance of Kiai Ahmad Rifa`i Kalisalak al-Jawi and his followers (Rifa`iyah) against the colonialism of the Dutch East Indies Government in Java in the late 18th century and early 19th century. This study is a qualitative research in the form of library research. This study concludes that the political resistance of the kiai Rifa`i in opposing the Dutch colonial government was only an attempt to engage in anti-government behavior, not with physical resistance. The political thoughts and attitudes of Kiai Rifa`i's resistance were manifested in three things. First, the existence of the Dutch colonial government was a pagan government that was forbidden to obey its policies. Secondly, the traditional bureaucrats, including the headman and ulama who worked with the Dutch, were Dutch minions and they belonged to a group of wicked Muslims. Third, the practice of religion must not be mixed with the beliefs of the ancestors, which are considered heretical and polytheistic.*

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**Keywords:** *Kiai Ahmad Rifa`i, Colonialism of the Dutch Government.*

**Introduction**

Kiai Ahmad Rifa`i Kalisalak al-Jawi is one of the leaders of Islamic reformers on the island of Java. He was a scholar who preached with methods that were easily accepted and understood by the people at that time. The method of preaching he used might have been new at that time, namely by translating the good books in the disciplines of Fiqh, Usuluddin and Sufism into Javanese, so that it was expected to be easily understood by Javanese people, indeed this step seemed to be exclusive given that Javanese was only easily understood by Javanese, and difficult to understand by people in other areas.

In his missionary journey, Kiai Rifa`i found many challenges and disturbances both from the Dutch and from the indigenous clerics who disagreed with Rifa`i's views because Rifa`i kiai were considered to have taught heresy and deviated from what was generally believed by most Muslims. Therefore, the position of the kiai Rifa`i was faced by two parties who opposed it. From here, the author is interested in examining more closely related to the leadership of kiai Rifa`i as an ulama who in his da'wah activities and political resistance to the Dutch government and scholars who opposed his views.

### Political Behavior

The main concern of understanding political behavior lies in the relationship between political knowledge and political action.<sup>1</sup> A person doing an action is certainly motivated by one or several factors that drive the action, from the factors underlying it, there will be a causal bond why the political action or behavior he did. In this case, Max Weber took the term charisma which includes three types of power in religious political contestation, as follows. First, traditional authority which demands its validity is based on a belief. Second, rational and legal power based on trust. Third, the personal charismatic power of someone obtained from devotion, holiness, certain heroism, or an exemplary trait of someone, and from the pattern of order shown by him.<sup>2</sup>

### Biography of Kiai Ahmad Rifa'i Kalisalak al-Jawi

Ahmad Rifa'i was born in 1786, in Tempuran Village, Kendal Regency, Central Java. His father was a prince in Kendal, named Muhammad bin Sujak Wijaya. Ahmad Rifa'i is the eighth (youngest) child. At the age of seven he no longer had parents and was raised by his brother-in-law, named Kiai Haji Asy'ari. His brother-in-law is a well-known religious leader of the pesantren in Kaliwungu.<sup>3</sup>

Thus, his teenage years were in a strong environment of religious life because Kaliwungu was an area that had long been known as the center of Islamic development in the Kendal region and beyond. In this environment he was taught a variety of Islamic religious knowledge which is commonly studied by the pesantren world such as Nahwu, Sharaf, Fiqh, Badi', Bayn, Hadith, and Al-Quran.<sup>4</sup>

In 1833, he went to Mecca to perform the pilgrimage through the port of Semarang and then settled there for eight years. Upon his return from Makah, Ahmad Rifa'i no longer lived in Kendal (city), but moved to a fairly remote rural area in Kalisalak Village, Limpung District, Batang Regency. This village is located in the interior of the southeastern Batang Regency bordering the Kendal Regency area which is geographically separated from city life. The considerable distance from the city center and the situation separated by the Banyuputih and Subah teak forests made this area much less directly controlled by the authorities, both Batang and Kendal in the 19th century. It was in this area that he built a religious community and began to teach religion to the students who were originally composed of children, but in further development was also visited by adults. Here he faced problems in explaining the teachings of Islam based on the Koran and what he learned in Arabic and was obtained from Acehnese scholars.<sup>5</sup> At this time that for almost 18 years he was engaged in da'wah activities and guided his students not to recognize the colonial government as a protest, until on May 19, 1859 after receiving strong reasons from the interrogation and a letter from the Pekalongan Resident, Governor General Pahud dropped his decision letter No. 35, dated May 19, 1859, the contents of which order to exile K.H. Ahmad Rifa'i.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>1</sup> David E. Apter, *Pengantar Analisa Politik*, (Jakarta: LP3ES, 1985), hal. 209-210.

<sup>2</sup> Sartono Kartodirdjo, *Kepemimpinan dalam Dimensi Sosial*, (Jakarta: LP3ES, 1986), hal. 166.

<sup>3</sup> Ahmad Adaby Darban, *Rifa'iyah, Gerakan Sosial Keagamaan di Pedesaan Jawa Tengah 1850 – 1982*, (Yogyakarta: Tarawang Press, 2004), hal. 20.

<sup>4</sup> Abdul Djamil, *Perlawanan Kiai Desa; Pemikiran Gerakan Islam K.H. Ahmad Rifa'i Kalisalak*, (Yogyakarta: LKIS, 2001), hal. 13.

<sup>5</sup> Abdul Djamil, *Perlawanan Kiai Desa.....*, (Yogyakarta: LKIS, 2001), hal.179-182.

<sup>6</sup> Ahmad Adaby Darban, *Rifa'iyah; Gerakan sosial Keagamaan.....*, (Yogyakarta: Tarawang Press, 2004), hal. 51.

Since then KH. Ahmad Rifa`i became estranged from the general public, but he did not abandon his activities in composing the book as a vehicle for Islamic da'wah. According to historical records, when preaching in Maluku he composed 4 titles of books (*Targibu al-Mitlabah*, *Kaifiyatu al-Miqasadi*, *Nasihatu as-Salihah*, *Hidayatu al-Himmah*) and 60 tanbih kebets which were then sent to students of his life in Java. KH. Ahmad Rifa`i was moved from Ambon to Kampung Jawa Tondano, Minahasa Regency, Manado and died there at the age and year of dispute. Some argue died in the year 1285 H with the age of 84 years. There is another opinion he died in 1286 H with the age of 85 years.<sup>7</sup>

Included in the historical event that boasts students KH. Ahmad Rifa`i in particular and Muslims in general, on November 5, 2004, KH. Ahmad Rifa`i was awarded the National Hero Title from President RI Dr. H. Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono.<sup>8</sup>

## Teachings Kiai Ahmad Rifa`i Kalisalak al-Jawi

### 1. Field of Tawheed

In the field of Tawheed, Kiai Ahmad Rifa`i stressed the importance of faith in God Almighty and the Messenger of Muhammad. In this case the understanding is given, that the people must justify and establish in the heart, against the commands and prohibitions of Allah and His Messenger. The realization of someone's faith is the surrender of full self, submission, obedience and following orders and avoiding the prohibition of Allah and His Messenger. Further said, that faith is not just believing in Allah and His Messenger, but also must prove it by carrying out shari'ah. Submission and submission to shari'ah, is as evidence of someone who is truly a believer, and also as a differentiator with infidels and hypocrites. In the book *Riayatul Himmah* mentioned, that people who do not surrender themselves as a whole to God, then said to be infidels. For those who read the shahada but do not follow the rules of the shari'ah, and do shirk, they are called the kafirin, musyrikin and are among the devils. The teachings of K.H Ahmad Rifa`i also suggested the six pillars of faith, namely faith in God, faith in the Angel of God, faith in the Books of God, faith in the Apostles of God, faith in the Day of Judgment and faith in the Qadho and Qadar of Allah. This teaching has similarities with that developed in Muslims in general in Java. The difference lies in the details of angels and books. According to the teachings of the Rifa`i kiyai, there are also two additional angels, namely the Sayyiah angel and the Hasanah angel. Besides that in the books of Allah, the teachings of the Rifa`i kiyai detail more than four. In this case Allah is said to have sent down to the Prophets a total of 104 books, which were revealed to the Prophets Adam, Shish, Idris, Ibrahim, Moses, David, Jesus and the Prophet Muhammad. Prophet Adam brought 10 books, Prophet Shish brought 50 books, Prophet Idris brought 30 books and Prophet Ibrahim brought 10 books. Four other Prophets, namely Moses carrying one Book (Torah), David carrying one Book (Zabur), Jesus carrying one Book (Gospel), and Prophet Muhammad, carrying one Book namely Al-Qur'an. Delivered 104 books according to the teachings of K.H Ahmad Rifa`, the

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<sup>7</sup> Ahmad Syadzirin Amin, *Mengenal Ajaran Tarajumah Syaikh KH. Ahmad Rifa`i R.H.*, (Pekalongan: Yayasan Al-Insap, 1989), hal. 40.

<sup>8</sup> Redaksi Penerbit-Tanda Baca, *Ensiklopedi Pahlawan Nasional*, cet. Ke-1, (Jakarta: Penerbit Tanda Baca, 2007), hal. 66.

Book of Al-Qura`n is considered the most complete and perfect, the Law of God which is in other books has been loaded and perfected in the Qur'an.<sup>9</sup>

The difference in details regarding the angels and the Books of God, with the teachings that exist in the Islamic community in Java does not cause sharp disagreement. This is because it does not involve social aspects that can shake the community<sup>10</sup>

In addition to the pillars of faith, Kijaji Rifa`i teaches the types of Faith that exist in humans into five, namely: Faith Matbuk, faith ma`sum, makbul faith, maukuf faith, and mardud. These five types of faith have the following meanings: Faith matbuk; is the faith of angels in God, the faith of ma`sum; is the faith of the Prophets and Apostles of Allah, and the preservation of Prophets and Apostles from the damage of their faith; makbul faith, is the faith of the believers in God for receiving instructions from Him; maukuf faith, is the faith of those who do Bid'ah, their Islam follows their parents, even though they have read the shahadah, but their faith and disbelief of the law are corrupted, and if it is forbidden to die it is unlawful; mardud's faith is the faith of infidels and hypocrites, his faith is not accepted by God until the Day of Judgment.<sup>11</sup>

In the group of faith mardud explained further, that the reading of the shahadah is only for a cover, while the stone hates God and opposes the religion of Islam. The division of types of faith into the five above, will later have an impact of unrest in society. That is because those who are exposed to the fourth and fifth types of faith (maukuf and mardud), will react to the Rifa`iyah movement. Because what is alleged, including the group by the Rifa`i kiyai are the Abangan and the Priyayi who are in the traditional bureaucracy.<sup>12</sup>

## 2. Islamic Jurisprudence

In the field of Jurisprudence, Kiai Ahmad Rifa`i bases on legal sources from the Qur'an, Sunnah, Ijma and Qiyas. Taking the basic law there is no difference with the Islamic Ulema in general in Java. Its stand on ijma` and qiyas, explained that ijma` and qiyas are sources of law that stand alone outside the original source. Ijma` represents the views of Ulama collectively, while qiyas views of Ulama are individual. Qiyas is used as a source of Islamic Law as long as it does not conflict with the original source. For Muslims who are laymen in the knowledge of their religion, it is permissible to follow the opinion of the Ulema which is considered pious' fair.<sup>13</sup> In this case the Rifa`i kiyai is seen by members of his congregation as role models Ulama who are pious, have authority as Ulama commensurate with the Ulama writers of the Book in Arabic.<sup>14</sup>

According to K.H Ahmad Rifa` for laypeople practicing and understanding the teachings of Islam, it is sufficient to base themselves on the Tarajumah books. Tarajumah is placed as a bridge to understand and practice the teachings of Islam,

<sup>9</sup> Ahmad Rifa`i, *Ri`ayatul Himmah*, Juz 1 (Pekalongan: 1975), hal. 12-39.

<sup>10</sup> Ahmad Adaby Darban, *Rifa`iyah, Gerakan Sosial Keagamaan.....*, (Yogyakarta: Tarawang Press, 2004), hal. 32.

<sup>11</sup> Ahmad Rifa`i, *Ri`ayatul Himmah*, juz 1 (Pekalongan: 1975), hal. 39.

<sup>12</sup> Ahmad Adaby Darban, *Rifa`iyah, Gerakan Sosial.....*, (Yogyakarta: Tarawang Press, 2004), hal. 32-33.

<sup>13</sup> Ahmad Rifa`i, *Ri`ayatul Himmah*, Juz 1 (Pekalongan: 1975), hal. 238.

<sup>14</sup> Ahmad Adaby Darban, *Rifa`iyah, Gerakan Sosial Keagamaan.....*, (Yogyakarta: Tarawang Press, 2004), hal. 33.

because in it is a translation of the Qur'an and As-A-Sunnah, as well as other great Ulama books.<sup>15</sup>

The results of research from the Balitbang Religion Regional Office of the Department of Religion in Central Java, mentioned that the books of K.H Ahmad Rifa` in Tarajumah almost half discussed Jurisprudence. The Jurisprudence books which are considered big in the scope of Tarajumah are: Abyanul al-Hawaij, Ri`ayatul Himmah, Husnul Matholab and Hasanah Miqasat. This effort to realize Islamic law was one of the movements of K.H Ahmad Rifa` to change the flow, from Muslims in general oriented to Sufism at that time, to the practice of shari'ah.<sup>16</sup>

Friday Prayer Issues, K.H. Ahmad Rifa`i put more emphasis on the number of pilgrims who had 40 people who had already understood the conditions of the validity of the Friday prayer. If there is a minimum number of people who do not understand the conditions for the validity of the Friday prayer, then the Friday prayer is deemed canceled.<sup>17</sup> These requirements deviate from the Shafi'i school of thought, and in practice have the effect of conflict between the Jamaah Rifa`iyah and the Muslim Ummah in general. Furthermore the members of the Jamaah Rifa`iyah with their fanatical attitude did not want to join the congregation in public mosques, and hold their own Friday prayers.

The problem of the pillars of Islam, in the book of Tashrihul Iman, K.H Ahmad Rifa`i teaches, that the pillars of Islam are mere suwiji, that is reading two sentences of Shahadah. Because by reading the two Shahadah sentences, one person has become Islam, while the other pillars are the obligation after someone embraces Islam. The position of the four pillars besides reading the two Syahdah sentences was considered as a compulsory compulsion to be done, but it did not make his Islamic status fall. In the matter of prayer, such as qada` prayer, namely holding prayer ceremonies to compensate for the lack of obligatory prayers for the congregation. Qada` prayer ceremonies are usually performed during the month of Ramadan, and it is an obligation to be paid off before performing other worship services, such as Tarawih and Hajj. K.H Ahmad Rifa` orders require qada` to be performed because before the obligation to replace these obligatory prayers is performed, the sunnah worship is not accepted. Besides that, other compulsory worship services, for example Hajj, are also not yet legal.

The problems contained in Jurisprudence, such as Friday prayers, the Five Pillars of Islam and praying, are issues that shake the public. The severity of the delivery of teachings about Friday prayers, which considers the Imams ineligible. This is because most imams in public mosques are classified as wicked and Bid`ah experts. Therefore his prayer was invalid, and the Rifa`iyah santri were forbidden to worship the priests at the public mosque. K.H Ahmad Rifa`i firmly stated that wicked priests and Bid'ah experts were princes who served the Dutch.<sup>18</sup> With the ban on his students to pray in congregation with Muslims in general, the pilgrims of Rifa`iyah become exclusive in social relations.

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<sup>15</sup> Ahmad Adaby Darban, *Rifa`iyah, Gerakan Sosial Keagamaan.....*, (Yogyakarta: Tarawang Press, 2004), hal. 33.

<sup>16</sup> *Laporan Penelitian Potensi Lembaga Sosial Keagamaan, Seri IV*. (Semarang: 1983), hal. 35.

<sup>17</sup> Serat Cebolek, Pupuh III Pangkur: 15, dalam serat Cebolek, Terbitan proyek penerbitan buku sastra Dep. Pendidikan & Kebudayaan, (Jakarta: 1981), hal. 211.

<sup>18</sup> Ahmad Rifa`i, *Ri`ayatul Himmah*, Juz II (Pekalongan: 1975), hal. 190-194.

### **Political Thought of Kiai Ahmad Rifa`i**

In the realm of political science, the study of political thought is not something new. This can be seen from the history of existing political thought, both the classical, middle and contemporary eras. Of course, thinkers also influence and are influenced by the flow of thought in their day. Thought can be interpreted as an idea or view of an object or situation, in this case the kiai Rifa`i's thinking about the conditions of the surrounding situation. A kiai certainly relies more on the guidance of Religion, where his position as an elite of Religion is itself. Some of Kiai Rifa`i's political thoughts are as follows.<sup>19</sup>

#### **1. The pagan Dutch government**

In the doctrine of his protest against the Netherlands, the ideas of K.H Ahmad Rifa` were based on the argument that the Dutch were infidels. Besides that it is recommended to all members of the Rifa`iyah congregation to fight to save the world, by fighting against the infidel king. The struggle against disbelieving law and fighting with stable war will be a great reward.

#### **2. Traditional bureaucrat's accomplice the Dutch government**

In addition to the doctrine of protest to the Dutch colonial government, K.H Ahmad Rifa`i also taught his protest doctrine against traditional bureaucrat officials. He condemned the religious scholars and hajj who did wicked, helped and servant to the infidel king (the Netherlands). Although appointed as tumenggung, but that person is a hypocrite and does not have faith. Alim Ulama and the Hajis who assisted the Dutch as traditional officials, were considered to be takabbur, who in the future would not be a noble qadi (judge). K.H Ahmad Rifa`i in his teachings also expressed protest against the feudal nature carried out by traditional rulers. The feudal nature which he considered a reflection of oppression to the people on the one hand, and devotion to the Dutch on the other hand.<sup>20</sup>

Religious leaders, such as princes, scholars and pilgrims, by K.H Ahmad Rifa`i are considered as religious leaders who are misleading. They do not obey Allah's orders, do not judge by Islamic law, violate religious provisions. They are said to live in a wave of sin, namely the sins of Bid'ah, immorality and infidels, because they participate and support the pagan government (the Netherlands). Therefore, anyone who is married through a religious official, his marriage is considered illegitimate, and children born are also considered illegal.<sup>21</sup> The criticism manifested in his teachings was not only conveyed to his students at the pesantren, but also directly carried out at public mosques.<sup>22</sup>

#### **3. Marriage conducted by a Government Institution**

In the political thought of Kiai Rifa`i, the problems related to Jurisprudence are not different from the Muslims in general, but in matters of marriage and Friday prayer there are differences. According to kiai Rifa`i, it is not valid if a marriage is carried out by a legal institution under the government bureaucracy, marriages based on official marriage ceremonies held by the headman are legally haram because the officials are unlawful and unjust, and if there is a relationship in the marriage is considered adultery because it is not valid marriage then it must be repeated. Thus according to the kiai

<sup>19</sup> Abdul Djamil, *Perlawanan Kiai Desa.....*, (Yogyakarta: LKIS 2001), hal. 55.

<sup>20</sup> K.H Ahmad Rifa`i, *Nadzom Wiqoyah*, (Kitab Asli: Tanpa Penerbit dan Halaman).

<sup>21</sup> Sartono Kartodirdjo, *Protes Movement in Rural Java*, (Kuala Lumpur: 1978), hal. 120.

<sup>22</sup> Ahmad Adaby Darban, *Rifa`iyah, Gerakan Sosial Keagamaan.....*, (Yogyakarta: Tarawang Press, 2004), hal. 42-43.

Rifa'i, the marriage held by the prince was "illegitimate" and had to be repeated again, on the grounds that the prince's faith had been damaged because he was an accomplice to pagan rulers. A marriage witness is required to be fair while a marriage guardian according to kiai Rifa'i must be a murshid (a person who in his religious knowledge, is not ungodly, honest, has never committed a major sin.<sup>23</sup>

#### 4. Friday Prayers at the Government Mosque

Likewise in regard to Friday prayers, kiai Rifa'i believes that Friday prayers in government mosques are also haram in religion. The underlying idea is that as government officials, the headman is a person who is religiously no longer holy, and therefore does not qualify to lead worship.<sup>24</sup> Besides requiring the quality of a fair and pious priest and preacher, Ahmad Rifa' also requires that the participants of Friday prayers that make Friday prayer valid must be people who know the harmony, the mandatory requirements, the legal requirements for Friday prayers. If there is one person who does not fulfill it then the Friday prayer will be canceled. In other words the participants of Friday prayers who become Ahlul Jum'ah must have enough knowledge and practice of their religion.<sup>25</sup>

The severity of the teaching about Friday prayers, which considers the Imams ineligible. This is because most imams in mosques are classified as wicked and bid'ah experts. Therefore the prayer is invalid. The kiai Rifa'i stated emphatically that the priests were princes who served the Netherlands.<sup>26</sup> With the ban on his followers, the pilgrims of Rifa'iyah became exclusive in social interaction.

#### Conclusion

The political resistance of Kiai Ahmad Rifa'i and his followers, namely by not obeying the policies and regulations made by the Dutch colonial government. In the doctrine of his protest against the Dutch colonial, the ideas of the kiai Rifa'i based his opinion that the Dutch colonial government was infidel and therefore unlawful to be followed by all its commands and rules, including the Traditional Bureaucrats who were their Dutch accomplices considered wicked and unfair because they served the Dutch. As for the political resistance of the kiai Rifa'i in opposing the Dutch colonial government, it was only an attempt to engage in anti-government behavior, and was not accompanied by concrete actions of physical resistance, because the number of followers lost so far if they had to deal directly with the government and traditional bureaucrats.

The political thoughts and attitudes of Kiai Rifa'i's resistance were manifested in three things. First, the existence of the Dutch colonial government was a pagan government that was forbidden to obey its policies. Secondly, the traditional bureaucrats, including the headman and ulama who worked with the Dutch, were Dutch minions and they belonged to a group of wicked Muslims. Third, the practice of religion must not be mixed with the beliefs of the ancestors, which are considered heretical and polytheistic.

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<sup>23</sup> Shodiq Abdullah, *Islam Tarjumah: Komunitas, Doktrin dan Tradisi*. (Semarang: Rasail. 2006), hal. 117.

<sup>24</sup> Kuntowijoyo, *Paradigma Islam, Interpretasi untuk Aksi*, (Yogyakarta: Mizan, 2008) hal. 217.

<sup>25</sup> Shodiq Abdullah, *Islam Tarjumah: Komunitas, Doktrin dan Tradisi*. (Semarang: Rasail, 2006), hal. 112.

<sup>26</sup> Ahmad Adaby Darban, *Rifa'iyah, Gerakan Sosial Keagamaan .....*, (Yogyakarta: Tarawang Press, 2004) hal. 36.

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