

**THE DECLINING ASWAJA THEOLOGY  
KNOWLEDGE PRODUCTION:  
A Case Study of al-Jam'iyatul  
Washliyah in Medan City**

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**Abstract:** *Al-Jam'iyatul Washliyah (AW) and Aswaja theology are covered in this article. As a religious institution, AW acknowledges Aswaja's ideology as the foundation for its mission. To maintain and develop Aswaja theology, AW utilizes educational institutions and recitation of the kitab kuning (yellow book) as a knowledge production for Aswaja theology. A question concerning the state of educational institutions today and the recitation of the Yellow Book at AW in Medan City was posed in order to comprehend the information presented. A case study about AW in Medan City is the qualitative research methodology that is employed. In addition, leaders, religious authorities, educators, and AW-related documents make up the primary data source. According to his research, educational institutions that regularly support Aswaja books undergo internal changes and come to terms with the reality that teachers, or ustadh, are becoming less and less proficient in the classics. Additionally, a number of the study's leaders—who were specialists in classic literature—passed away, which caused a setback to the kitab kuning study. Thus there was a downturn in the study of the kitab kuning. The results verify the weakening of the apparatus in AW that produces Aswaja theology.*

**الملخص:** تبحث هذه المقالة في محورها عن عقيدة للجمعية الوصلية التي هي من إحدى المنظمات الدينية اخذت في منطلقتها من عقيدة اهل السنة والجماعة اساسا ومنهجيا. وكانت في محاولة للحفاظ على عقيدة اهل السنة والجماعة وتطويرها تحافظ الجمعية على الوسائل التعليمية ودراسة الكتب التراثية الدينية. ولفهم الاوضاع حول الموضوع

فيطرح في المبحث عدة اسئلة حولها. اما منهج البحث فهو النوعي بدراسة الجمعية الوصلية في ميدان يعتمد في بحثها من بيانات وتصريحات من قبل القادة الجمعية والشخصيات الدينية والمعلمين والوثائق ذات الصلة بالوصلية. عثر البحث أن المؤسسات التعليمية لهذه الجمعية تعمل مستمرة في الحفاظ على دراسة الكتب التراثية الدينية إلا أن في واقعها حدثت التدهور بسبب قلة المؤهلين والمعلمين المتخصصين في الكتب التراثية وبمرور الأيام يقل بوفاتهم. واعتمادا على هذا الواقع الحالي فيكون هو سبب التدهور و الضعف في فهم عقيدة اهل السنة والجماعة.

**Abstrak:** *Artikel ini mendiskusikan tentang Al-Jam'iyatul Washliyah (AW) dan teologi Aswaja. AW sebagai organisasi keagamaan menerima teologi Aswaja sebagai dasar perjuangan organisasi. Dalam upaya menjaga dan mengembangkan teologi Aswaja AW memanfaatkan lembaga pendidikan dan pengajian kitab kuning sebagai produksi pengetahuan tentang teologi Aswaja. Untuk memahami fakta yang dikemukakan diajukan pertanyaan bagaimana kondisi terkini lembaga pendidikan dan pengajian kitab kuning di AW Kota Medan. Metode penelitian kualitatif dengan pendekatan digunakan adalah studi kasus tentang Al-Washliyah Kota Medan, sedangkan sumber data utama terdiri dari pimpinan, tokoh agama, guru dan dokumen yang terkait tentang Al-Washliyah. Penelitian ini menemukan bahwa lembaga pendidikan AW yang secara konsisten mempertahankan kitab-kitab Aswaja mengalami dinamika tersendiri karena adanya perubahan yang berlangsung di dalamnya, serta dihadapi kenyataan semakin terbatasnya para guru atau ustadh yang mendalam penguasaan terhadap kitab klasik tersebut. Sedangkan pengajian kitab kuning juga mengalami kemunduran karena banyaknya para pimpinan pengajian yang ahli di dalam kitab klasik yang wafat, maka pengajian kitab kuning mengalami kemunduran. Temuan yang dikemukakan mempertegas bahwa produksi pengetahuan tentang teologi Aswaja di AW telah melemah.*

**Keywords:** Aswaja Theological, Al-Washliyah, Kitab Kuning, Medan City.

## INTRODUCTION

A religious organization called Al-Jam'iyatul Washliyah (AW) was founded and developed in Medan City, North Sumatra (formerly East Sumatra).<sup>1</sup> AW as a religious organization has a strong influence among the people of North Sumatra in the religious aspect. AW can also be called a representation of the diversity of the people of North Sumatra, even though AW is not the only influential organization in North Sumatra. AW influences society, especially in the aspect of da'wah and education which is one of the focuses of the organization's movement. Religious education affiliated with AW is developing in the community. However, lately, there has been an abandonment of educational institutions under the auspices of AW because they are not managed properly, so it is not uncommon to find various reports that many AW educational assets have shifted to private assets and others. AW as an organization clearly and unequivocally calls itself an organization that adheres to the Aswaja religious ideology. As a result, this Aswaja understanding is actualized in all AW doctrine and movement formats.

Aswaja as an AW religious identity can be seen in the theological aspect adhering to the Ash'ariyya understanding and fiqh referring to the al-Shafi'i school of thought.<sup>2</sup> In the theological aspect, AW intensively teaches the community especially members of organizations about Aswaja theology through formal educational institutions and recitation of the *kitab kuning* (yellow book).<sup>3</sup> The two forms of Aswaja theology education are knowledge productions for introducing and teaching Aswaja theology to the public. The Aswaja theology machine has a significant impact on the Aswaja theology continuity within the AW organization. If the knowledge production is not running optimally, it is certain that the process of transforming knowledge about Aswaja theology will not run well. Since the mechanism for producing Aswaja theology through both formal and informal educational institutions has been operating

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<sup>1</sup> Kevin W. Fogg, *Indonesia's Islamic Revolution* (India: Cambridge University Press, 2019), 59.

<sup>2</sup> Al Rasyidin, "ISLAMIC ORGANIZATIONS IN NORTH SUMATRA: The Politics of Initial Establishment and Later Development," *JOURNAL OF INDONESIAN ISLAM* 10, no. 1 (June 7, 2016): 70, <https://doi.org/10.15642/JIIS.2016.10.1.63-88>.

<sup>3</sup> M Rozali, "Tradisi Keulamaan Al-Jam'iyatul Washliyah Sumatera Utara." (UIN Sumatera Utara, 2016), 97.

continuously, everything pertaining to its dynamics has an impact on the process of fortifying Aswaja theology. Aswaja's theology, as an integral part of AW in its development does not only face its own challenges from the weakening of the educational process being carried out but also the strengthening influence of the transnational movement in society, which has shifted influence in Medan City society as the basis of the AW.

The situation presented demonstrates how AW, an organisation founded on Aswaja theology, faces challenges from both the inside and the outside, which can weaken AW as a whole and cause it to lose its ideals of struggle. In the stated facts, the knowledge production and dissemination process of Aswaja theology has experienced setbacks because the various superior programs in strengthening Aswaja theology have yet to be implemented, which have been continuously initiated and carried out by previous leaders. On the other hand, the weakening of Aswaja theology is also due to a changing situation in the global world which has an impact on the Aswaja organization. Ongoing changes affect all aspects of life. Still, AW itself as a religious organization is being prepared for the changes that are taking place, so it impacts the ideological entities that the organization adheres to, including aspects of Aswaja theology which are the choices taught and developed by AW.<sup>4</sup>

Many studies have been conducted on AW to date, particularly in relation to its theological dimensions. Previous studies, like Rozali's,<sup>5</sup> concentrate on the AWs' clerical heritage. The study's conclusions clarify the dynamics in AW in terms of how the Ulama tradition developed there. Harahap<sup>6</sup> focus on the resistance of the *kitab kuning* in AW, which explains that the study of the *kitab kuning* is still ongoing today, even though it has gone through various problems. Ja'far<sup>7</sup> himself focuses on Aswaja theology in AW by explaining

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<sup>4</sup> Faisal Riza, "ISLAM AND NATIONALISM: The Role of the Universitas Al Washliyah In the Era of Post Independent 1950s," *Journal of Contemporary Islam and Muslim Societies* 5, no. 1 (July 28, 2021): 1–31, <https://doi.org/10.30821/jcims.v5i1.7971>.

<sup>5</sup> Rozali, "Tradisi Keulamaan Al-Jam'iyatul Washliyah Sumatera Utara.," 97.

<sup>6</sup> Muhammad Riduan Harahap, "Resistensi Tradisi Kitab Kuning Pada Madrasah Al-Washliyah Di Sumatera Utara" (UIN Sumatera Utara, 2019).

<sup>7</sup> Ja'far Ja'far, "Al Jam'iyatul Washliyah Dan Pelestarian Akidah Ahl Sunnah Wa Al-Jam'ah Di Indonesia," *ISLAMICA: Jurnal Studi Keislaman* 14, no. 1 (September 1, 2019): 54–81, <https://doi.org/10.15642/islamica.2019.14.1.54-81>.

the contribution of this religious organization in the development of Aswaja theology in society and many other studies. Various studies show that AW and the *kitab kuning* cannot be separated because, in local experience, AW is identified with the yellow book. The *kitab kuning* itself is always associated with the Aswaja doctrine in it. Unlike existing research, this research will look at the final process of the *kitab kuning*, precisely after the Aswaja theology knowledge production in AW is paralyzed, and what will happen next.

This research framework uses qualitative methods that are descriptive and in-depth to answer the main research questions. The approach chosen is a case study that focuses on AW as one of the large organizations in the city of Medan. Primary data sources consist of leaders, religious figures, teachers, and documents directly related to the object under study. Meanwhile, other data is secondary to complement the information that becomes the research. Data collection was carried out in several stages, namely observation of the objects under study, such as offices, madrasas, councils, and others, to confirm the data to be collected. Another process is carried out by interviews, either openly or privately, with predetermined data sources. Then, a study of documents directly related to the main focus of the research to complement or correct the previous data collection process. Data analysis is carried out by collecting data, organizing data, categorizing data, validating data, and concluding. Analysis systematically produces findings that are able to answer research questions and, at the same time, ensure the correctness of the data. The theory used as a framework for thinking in this research refers to knowledge production. Knowledge production is something related to the institutionalization of knowledge,<sup>8</sup> so religious institutions or organizations are an important part of knowledge production in the religious field.

## **AW AND ASWAJA THEOLOGY**

AW is considered to be a “original” organisation from North Sumatra, growing and developing as an Islamic organisation. AW certainly cannot be separated from the community groups in the area of origin,

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<sup>8</sup> T. V. Rasmussen, “Knowledge Production and Social Work: Forming Knowledge Production.,” *Social Work and Social Sciences Review* 15, no. 1 (2011): 28–48.

namely the Mandailing.<sup>9</sup> The Mandailing is an ethnic group with an ethnicity that is always associated with the Batak community. Still, it is distinguished that a Muslim society dominates the Mandailing. On the other hand, Batak is the mention of Christian community groups. AW and the Mandailing community have a direct connection because this ethnic group established AW as a religious organization. However, before the name AW became known, there was an educational organization called *Maktab Islamiyah Tapanuli (MIT)*, a traditional Islamic educational institution in Medan City.<sup>10</sup> MIT was founded by scholars who understand the Aswaja religion, so the initial process of teaching Aswaja theology occurred at MIT. MIT as an educational institution is an educational institution that inspired the establishment of an association called the Debating Club which ultimately initiated the establishment of AW.

According to AW's religious lineage, which begins at MIT and continues with the Debating Club and AW, this process is a way for the organizations involved to represent the Aswaja theology. The influence of Aswaja theology, which became the religious understanding of the founding group of the organization, formed the acceptance of Aswaja as an AW ideology as a religious organization. Aswaja theology is a theological school affiliated with a religious understanding developed by the Ash'ariyah theory school, which is also the dominant theoretical school believed by the Indonesian people.<sup>11</sup> For this reason, AW and Aswaja are connected and mutually reinforcing streams in their movements. Aswaja is a religious understanding that is also generally accepted by traditional Islamic groups in Indonesia, such as Nahdlatul Ulama (NU),<sup>12</sup> Persatuan

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<sup>9</sup> Ja'far Ja'far et al., "Discovering the Legacy of Mandailing Ulama: Education, Intellectuals, and Politics in North Sumatra in the Early 20th Century," *Ulumuna* 26, no. 2 (December 28, 2022): 296–336, <https://doi.org/10.20414/ujis.v26i2.502>.

<sup>10</sup> Muaz Tanjung, *Maktab Islamiyah Tapanuli 1918-1942: Menelusuri Sejarah Pendidikan Islam Awal Abad Ke-20 Di Medan* (Medan: IAIN Press, 2012), 5.

<sup>11</sup> Martin van Bruinessen, *Overview of Muslim Organizations, Associations and Movements in Indonesia*, *Contemporary Developments in Indonesian Islam Explaining the "Conservative Turn"*, ed. Martin van Bruinessen (Singapore: ISEAS, 2013), 21.

<sup>12</sup> Isnatin Ulfah, "DARI MODERAT KE FUNDAMENTAL: Pergeseran Pemahaman Dan Ekspresi Keagamaan Perempuan NU Di Ponorogo," *Al-Tahrir: Jurnal Pemikiran Islam* 14, no. 1 (May 1, 2014): 93, <https://doi.org/10.21154/al-tahrir.v14i1.73>.

Tarbiyah Islamiyah (PERTI), and others.<sup>13</sup> As one of the religious organizations that chose Aswaja as a religious sect, efforts to strengthen ideology will be carried out in that organization. Religious organizations affiliated with Aswaja generally have strong religious traditions with traditions that have developed in society.

AW embraces Aswaja in religious rituals and declares itself to be an organisation founded on Islam. The jurisprudence adheres to the schools of al-Shafi'i and al-Shafi'iyya, which are strictly maintained in their religious life.<sup>14</sup> In the field of theology, it is adopting the religious understanding of the Ash'ariyya school, especially related to doctrines and discourses related to divinity. Efforts to accept and defend religious doctrines containing Aswaja can be seen in all the activities carried out by the organization. As a religious organization, AW focuses on da'wah and education. The da'wah aspect in its development could have been clearer because the da'wa project carried out by AW later did not show a clear direction within the organization. While in the aspect of education is a part that is still being maintained until now. This educational aspect is an important part of AW apart from being a network dissemination as well as an effort to strengthen the ideological project that the organization adheres.

AW as an organization that accepts Aswaja as a religious sect, is directly related to the belief among AW, especially its early generations, that Muslims will be divided into many groups, so among the groups called survivors are Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jama'ah. This religious doctrine became the basis for many religious organizations or certain groups to place their vote on Aswaja because it was based on a religious doctrine that stated that the survivors of a divided group were AW among one of the religious organizations who chose Aswaja as their religious sect. The prominent identity of

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<sup>13</sup> Syafiq Hasyim, "New Contestation in Interpretation Religious Texts: Fatwa, Tafsir and Shariah", *The New Santri: Challenges to Traditional Religious Authority in Indonesia*, ed. Norshahril Saat and Ahmad Najib Burhani (Singapore: ISEAS Publishing, 2020), 48.

<sup>14</sup> Mhd. Syahnan and Ja'far Ja'far, "EXAMINING RELIGIOUS MODERATION OF THE AL-JAM'IYATUL WASHLIYAH FATWA COUNCIL," *JOURNAL OF INDONESIAN ISLAM* 15, no. 1 (June 1, 2021): 21, <https://doi.org/10.15642/JIIS.2021.15.1.21-46>.

AW concerning Aswaja theology is a reference to books that support Aswaja theology as a reference in their religious practice.

According to Ja'far, there are three reasons why AW adheres to Aswaja, 1) the founders of AW adhere to Aswaja, 2) the majority of Muslims in Sumatra adhere to Aswaja, 3) many AW alumni continue to the Middle East with Aswaja theology. Aswaja's theology, AW's choice has been maintained until now. To strengthen Aswaja theology as an organizational ideology, AW chose the educational path to organize organizations ideologically introduced early on to the community, especially those involved in educational institutions that were cared for and managed by AW spread across various regions in North Sumatra. This AW educational level consists of elementary to tertiary levels, all of which introduce Aswaja theology as an important part to be studied and used as a reference in diversity.<sup>15</sup> Strengthening other Aswaja theology is also carried out through ongoing recitation of the *kitab kuning* among ustadh and organizational administrators to maintain this tradition.

### **KNOWLEDGE PRODUCTION OF ASWAJA THEOLOGY**

Some theological ideas that have been institutionalized, particularly in religious organizations, give rise to knowledge production known as Aswaja theology. In this context, the production of knowledge developed by AW becomes an integral part of the organization. AW itself, as a religious organization, is a form of knowledge regime institution that positions the knowledge it possesses in the form of theology as something that is believed to be true. Knowledge production itself can strengthen and, at the same time, weaken due to the professional education process that takes place in it. One of AW's national commitments as a religious organization is participating in education, especially religious education. Participation in this field of education is an integral part of the charitable movement run by the organization. Education is important to AW because change and progress can only be made by forming a good education. AW's commitment to education can be seen in the many madrasas style Islamic education institutions that have grown and developed in

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<sup>15</sup> Syaiful Anwar et al., "Modernization and Formulation of Educational Content of Al Jam'iyatul Washliyah in North Sumatra, 1930-1942," in *International Conference on Multidisciplinary Research* (Medan City, 2018), 699-704.



North Sumatra.<sup>16</sup> The spread of AW's educational institutions is directly related to the organization's concern for education. On the other hand, education is also an identity for AW because the spread of affiliated educational institutions also marks the spread of this organization. AW's participation in education can be seen in 2 (two) aspects, a) as an effort to realize organizational goals in education, especially as a government partner to educate the nation's life, and b) as a channel for disseminating organizational ideology in society, especially to the younger generation.

Dissemination of ideology through educational institutions is important to note that the educational institutions developed by AW are part of the organization's ideological efforts for the younger generation. Ideology through educational institutions can be seen that AW, as a religious organization that adheres to the Aswaja understanding, seeks to present this understanding in managed educational institutions. One of the prominent elements related to Aswaja's ideology, especially in the theological aspect, shows Aswaja's theological identity, which is visible in it. The educational institution developed by AW as a channel for introducing and teaching Aswaja theology so that through ideological institutions, AW believes the organization can continue to grow in society.<sup>17</sup> In general, the educational institutions developed by AW have 2 (two), namely conventional educational institutions and special educational institutions. Traditional educational institutions are developed through madrasah education which is as general as other Islamic educational institutions. This model of educational institutions is often found in various regions, which is the basis for the spread of AW organizations in North Sumatra. Attempts at the ideological nation in educational institutions of this kind were also found in attempts to place the position of Aswaja theology as the main form of theological representation in the learning material.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Dedi Iskandar Batubara et al., "Management Of Education Quality Improvement At Education Council Al Washliyah North Sumatra," in *Proceedings of the 2nd International Conference on Social and Political Development (ICOSOP 2017)* (Paris, France: Atlantis Press, 2018), 354-363., <https://doi.org/10.2991/icosop-17.2018.55>.

<sup>17</sup> Rozali, "Tradisi Keulamaan Al-Jam'iyatul Washliyah Sumatera Utara.," 100.

<sup>18</sup> Mukhlis, "Interview" (Medan City, 2022).

On the other hand, special education institutions concentrate on introducing Islamic knowledge through the use of classical books. These special educational institutions generally make classic books a source of learning. Learning materials cover the aspects of tawhid, theology, jurisprudence, and others. Among the material that focuses on related research is the theological aspect, which clearly shows the Aswaja element. The revitalization of Aswaja theology in AW educational institutions starts from the elementary level to the top, all of which show the strengthening of Aswaja's theological aspects. The introduction of Aswaja theology in educational institutions means that through a teaching and learning process that takes place as part of the internalization process for students to understand the concepts and basics of theology taught by Aswaja. At the elementary to senior education level, which is a stage of the development of religious thought, the process of internalizing Aswaja theology is very easy. However, on the other hand, the religious theology student group is flexible because it will continue to develop along with the development of the thinking maturity of the group.

The organization's authority is reflected in the curriculum policies created in AW schools. Still, educational institution managers have the authority to regulate and determine the curriculum taught to them. These educational institutions manage all policies related to the curriculum for special education institutions.<sup>19</sup> Usually, the manager of an educational institution has authority, especially in special educational institutions with educational curricula that are developed on a tour-based basis, so that the determination of all policies related to the curriculum is the authority of the educational institution itself which is usually recognized as a reference in educational development. In the curriculum developed by AW in special educational institutions, the ideological basis is used to determine learning resources. In its development, several sources of teaching materials used as references are sources that have long been taught in these educational institutions.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Erde, "Interview" (Medan City, 2022).

<sup>20</sup> Hasan Asari, "'ULAMĀ' TRAINING AND MODERNIZING AL WASHLIYAH MADRASAH," *Journal of Contemporary Islam and Muslim Societies* 3, no. 2 (December 30, 2019): 22, <https://doi.org/10.30821/jcims.v3i2.6323>.

Generally, the learning model used is one-way; the teacher is the main source. Usually, the teacher will read the text of the classic book, which is the teaching material. Then, the text's reading, meaning, and understanding will be explained. In the learning process, usually, the teacher will explain the text that has been read, then the element of teacher subjectivity greatly influences the text being taught. In the context of explanations related to books that contain Aswaja theology, usually, the teacher will provide explanations to students not only focusing on the text that is the reference but also, not infrequently, extending to aspects that are developing in society.<sup>21</sup> In this context, in terms of theology, Aswaja will be a reference for understanding that is produced because apart from being related to doctrines originating from the book, which is the teaching material, it will also be equipped with an interpretation of the explanation from the book being read. In the learning process, Aswaja's theological position as a source of truth, all forms of theology outside of Aswaja, will be considered to deviate from religious doctrine.

The various books that have been used as teaching materials which have been maintained until now, show the strong dominance of Aswaja theology in the learning process. To clarify regarding learning reference sources that take place in AW. The following are the names of books based on Aswaja theology maintained as references in AW educational institutions.

Table 1. List of Title of Aswaja Theology Books in Madrasah AW

No	Book Title	Author	Information
1	<i>Pelajaran Iman</i>	Arsyad Thalib Lubis	Tajhizi
2	'Aqid al-Diniyah	Abdul Rahman Segap	Ibtidaiyah
3	Kifayah al-Awwam	Ibrahim Bayhuri	Ibtidaiyah
4	Al-Dasuqi Umm Barahin	Al-Dasuqi	Ibtidaiyah
5	Al-Husn al-Hamidiyah	Husain Affandi	Tsanawiyah
6	Hashiah al-Sharwaqi	Ibrahim al-Syarqawi	Aliyah/Qism al-'Ali

The table indicates that all AW educational institutions use reference books based on Ash'ariyya theology, specifically Aswaja theology, in the field of theology. The books which are the teaching materials given to AW educational institutions, start from the

<sup>21</sup> Ja'far Ja'far, "Khazanah Kitab Kuning Di Madrasah Al Jam'iyat Al Washliyah," *Jurnal Pendidikan Agama Islam Al-Thariqah* 2, no. 2 (December 31, 2017): 124-34, [https://doi.org/10.25299/althariqah.2017.vol2\(2\).1041](https://doi.org/10.25299/althariqah.2017.vol2(2).1041).

preparatory level (*tajhizi*), usually carried out non-formally in madrasas, or in local terms, it is called 'Ngaji Arab' (learn arabic). This 'Ngaji Arab' in the people of Medan City and its surroundings refers to implementing education that uses Arabic books as teaching material. The practice of non-formal education of the 'Ngaji Arab' is still ongoing in society. However, there is a shift that initially the level of this *tajhizi* is usually preparation for continuing to Madrasah Ibtidaiyah (MI). Nonetheless, children who have also completed secondary formal education are taught using this educational model in addition to their regular studies, either junior high school (SMP) or elementary school (SD).

At the educational level of *tajhizi*, the choice of reference for the field of theology is the textbook faith written by Arsyad Thalib Lubis. This book is thin in shape and prepared for the *tajhizi* class, who still need to be ready to receive heavy and deep learning. In this faith textbook, the pillars of faith are presented, which also shows that the elements of Aswaja theology are very strong, especially in grouping faith into several forms, such as faith in Allah, faith in the Prophet, faith in books, and others.<sup>22</sup> At the MI level, AW educational institutions also use several books that are popular in other educational institutions with Aswaja theological affiliations, such as traditional Islamic boarding schools. Several books are used as learning resources at this MI level, such as '*Aqaid al-Diniyah* by Abdurrahman Syihab, *Kifayah al-Awwam* by Ibrahim Bayhuri, *al-Dasuqi Umm Barahin* by Al-Dasuqi. In general, the books mentioned are related references to Aswaja theology because they focus on efforts to strengthen the theological discourse developing among Aswaja circles. The book *Kifayah al-Awwam*, for example, is a book that talks about the nature of God, such as form, qidam, baqa', and others. The discourse on the nature of God developed in the book is part of the Aswaja theology, which recognizes the nature of God as an inseparable part of the essence of God.

Another book used as teaching material at MI is a book that also contains Aswaja theology, namely *al-Dasuqi Umm Barahin*. This book is used as a reference for studying monotheism or theology

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<sup>22</sup> Saiful Akhyar Lubis et al., "The Effectiveness of Qirā'atul Kutub Learning in Improving Reading Skills of the Yellow Book At Madrasah Aliyah Muallimin," *At-Tarbiyat: Jurnal Pendidikan Islam* 04, no. 03 (2021): 467–75.

in AW educational institutions, which include the laws of reason related to the obligatory nature, the nature of *jaiz* and the impossible nature. In addition, it also discusses the heart of the Prophets, which refers to the doctrine that Prophet must have the characteristics of *siddiq*, *amanah*, *tabligh* and *fatahah*. The discussion about the obligatory nature of Allah and the Prophet becomes an important discourse in Aswaja theology and is the main ingredient in every Aswaja theological discourse. The use of the books referred to at the MI level is a choice determined by the founders of AW, which is still maintained today, so the selection of the books referred to is an integral part of AW as a religious organization based on Aswaja theology. Thus, efforts to introduce the Aswaja doctrine of divinity from an early age were carried out to maintain and, at the same time, disseminate organizational ideology through educational institutions.

At the advanced education level, right at the Madrasah Tsanawiyah (MTs) level, the AW Islamic education institution also strengthens Aswaja theology through the subject of tawhid, which uses the book *al-Husun al-Hamidiyah* written by al-Jasr al-Tarabalisi as a reference. Kitab *al-Husun*, like other Aswaja theological books, also clearly shows the theological doctrine which strengthens understanding related to the concept of divinity, especially regarding the acknowledgment of faith in Allah which accepts the obligatory nature and rejection of the impossible attribute of Allah must also follow. The follow-up discussion is also followed by faith in the Prophet, which includes mandatory and *jaiz* characteristics and is also complemented by a discussion regarding the miracles received by the Prophets in carrying out their duties and functions as treatise carriers. The discourse developed in Kitab *al-Husun* shows that Aswaja's theological understanding of mandatory and impossible attributes for Allah and the Messenger is a form of acceptance of this theology regarding the existence of attributes in the substance of God.

In further education at the Madrasah Aliyah (MA) level, it is also seen that Aswaja theology is an important part of the learning process developed in AW. At this MA level, in terms of monotheism lessons, the Book of *Hasyiah al-Syarqawi* is used, which also continues the previous book taught, namely the Book of *Umm Barahin*. The selection of monotheism books related to Aswaja theology is a choice made to strengthen Aswaja theology which is the identity of the AW

organization. *The Hasyiah al-Syarqawi* book itself, like the book used as teaching material, also talks about God's obligatory, impossible, and *jaiz* nature. In its language, the book is also equipped with an explanation of the law of reason about the importance of knowing the attributes of God. Learning Aswaja theological books, referred to as references in formal educational institutions in AW, is generally carried out in one direction, namely the teacher or *ustadh* as the main source of learning.<sup>23</sup> Technical learning is done by reading books by explaining literally what is mentioned in the book's text. The teacher will usually explain the material being read to complement the knowledge.

The one-way learning model shows that actual material sourced from books is referred to not as the main goal because, in the learning process, it will usually develop on other issues that are still related to the theme being conveyed.<sup>24</sup> However, not infrequently, the discussion also focuses on the linguistic aspects of the book because the learning process is carried out not only to extract information from the book's text but also as part of an effort to develop student's abilities in the field of Arabic. Aswaja theology, the main reference source for learning at AW educational institutions, shows that education is a form of ideological Aswaja theology because students are taught only to recognize one theological school. However, there are discussions related to other theologies in the context of showing weaknesses in the theological arguments built by other groups. In formal education, Aswaja's theological identity is an important part that is continuously maintained because it is specifically related to the theological identity adopted by AW as a religious organization.

Being a teacher at an AW educational institution has its specifics. A teacher is measured by the ability to read and understand books which are mandatory teaching materials at these educational institutions. Teacher competence in accessing Arabic reference sources is an important part of the ongoing learning process. Becoming a teacher at an AW madrasa must also be followed by understanding Aswaja theology. Understanding and acknowledgment of Aswaja theology is an absolute requirement because it is directly

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<sup>23</sup> "Researcher Observations to AW in Jl Ismailiyah and Muallimin Univa." (Medan City, n.d.).

<sup>24</sup> Amir, "Interview" (Medan City, 2022).

related to the existence of organizations that claim to be adherents of the Aswaja school of thought, especially in the field of theology. Efforts to maintain a book-based learning model have become separate identities for AW educational institutions attached to the organization. As an organization founded by ulemas, AW has its influence in the midst of North Sumatran society. Its identity as a traditional Islamic organization is related to preserving classic books in its educational institutions. In its development, the learning of Aswaja theology in AW educational institutions has experienced its dynamics, especially in the ongoing developments that also affect AW. There is a decline in the quality of learning due to the weak human resources of the existing teaching staff, as well as the loose selection of prospective students who only sometimes have a base or background of adequate understanding of Arabic and grammar. The revitalization of Aswaja theology in AW has its problems, especially for people who live in urban areas who also come into contact with other theologies, especially those brought by transnational Islamic groups.<sup>25</sup>

### THE WEAKENING OF THE ASWAJA THEOLOGY

In general, the *kitab kuning* has a significant influence on the formation of Aswaja theology. Related sources regarding Aswaja theology are produced through the *kitab kuning*, which is the main book as a reference for Aswaja theology. The *kitab kuning* itself has an important position because, apart from being in Arabic, not everyone can easily read and understand it. Hence, the *kitab kuning* among AW tends to be sacred because it is considered a source of truth regarding the interpretation of Islamic teachings. The *kitab kuning*, which is an integral part of the organization's traditional religious sources, makes it a center for producing knowledge about Aswaja theology. The *kitab kuning* continues to be an identity that AW always tries to maintain, even though, in fact, there has been a significant shift in the abilities of teachers or figures regarding the *kitab kuning*. This shift

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<sup>25</sup> Hasan Asari and Zainal Abidin, "KITAB KUNING AND TRAINING OF 'ULAMĀ': The Experience of Madrasah Al Qismul Ali Jalan Ismailiyah Medan," *MIQOT: Jurnal Ilmu-Ilmu Keislaman* 44, no. 1 (October 26, 2020): 93, <https://doi.org/10.30821/miqot.v44i1.750>.

was part of the initial process of weakening the production of *kitab kuning*-based knowledge among AW.

The revitalization of Aswaja theology teaching among AW is also done through non-formal educational institutions, namely the study of the *kitab kuning*. This study of the *kitab kuning* is a recitation activity carried out specifically to discuss the *kitab kuning* with various types of books. The recitation of the *kitab kuning* is generally dominated by the ustadh, who are involved as administrators or groups that are used as role models in the diversity of society in the city of Medan.<sup>26</sup> This study of the *kitab kuning* has its role in revitalizing Aswaja theology among the AW community because, through this study, Aswaja's theology is known, studied, and studied specifically from its source. The activity of reciting the *kitab kuning* has been going on for a long time among AW administrators because the predecessors and founders of AW also usually had special recitations related to the *kitab kuning*, which were continuously maintained and maintained, even though in its development, it also experienced its ups and downs and for the continuation of the recitation of the yellow book in Medan, carried out at home in turns.<sup>27</sup> This study of the yellow book although it discusses almost all fields of Islamic scholarships, such as tawhid, fiqh and tasawuf, and others. However, the issue related to tawhid has received the congregation's attention in studying the *kitab kuning*.

The study materials are all based on a special book that aligns with Aswaja's religious views. In the field of recitation of the book of tawhid, one of the books used as a reference in the study is the book of *Jawharat al-Tawhid* by Ibrahim Hasan al-Laqqani. This book is one of the books used as a reference among adherents of Aswaja theology. Because everyone must read the book aloud during this activity, every study participant needs to have a copy of it. Each participant is required to read the book and demonstrate their comprehension of its text. It is not uncommon for differences in reading and understanding among the study participants to be reconciled by the leader, who is recognized for the depth of knowledge of the book being read.<sup>28</sup> The implementation of the study of the yellow book is led by a figure who

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<sup>26</sup> Rozali, "Tradisi Keulamaan Al-Jam'iyatul Washliyah Sumatera Utara.," 97.

<sup>27</sup> Wahab, "Interview" (Medan City, 2022).

<sup>28</sup> Wahab.



is considered to have an in-depth understanding of the book being read, especially in terms of grammar. AW's yellow book is important because it is the main source of religious understanding. The yellow book is the basis for the group's diversity, so everything related to religious sources must be based on the yellow book. Limited door-to-door recitation of the yellow book is attended by certain groups, especially groups connected to the AW organization.

A significant number of participants in the Yellow Book study are alumni of AW who have pursued higher education in the Middle East, and some are affiliated with the prevailing social traditions. Studying the yellow book as non-formal education is an important part of maintaining the yellow book tradition among people connected to AW in Medan City.<sup>29</sup> Through the yellow book, various doctrines related to Aswaja, including the theological aspect, are discussed and understood based on the book's main source. In the theological context, reading the book of tawhid also strengthens understanding among the participants involved in the recitation. In further developments, the study participants, who also generally work as preachers, will disseminate the Aswaja theological doctrine to the public. The recitation of the yellow book is also developing in several other places with a form of book-based recitation developed by AW figures or administrators who are also involved as preachers in the people of Medan City.

Similar to other organisations, the yellow book study has its own dynamics as a recitation group. The recitation is not always implemented smoothly because it develops into a tradition of mutual correction. However, not all recitation participants are aware of reading correction as a way to build, which causes some participants to leave. Recitation because they do not accept the tradition of mutual correction that takes place in it.<sup>30</sup> The dynamics show that reciting the yellow book as an educational process and forming Aswaja theology sometimes runs more smoothly than it should. The recitation of the yellow book had not been held for some time because one of the recitation managers lived outside the city of Medan, so the recitation activities that had been carried out had all stopped. This

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<sup>29</sup> Akram, "Interview" (Medan City, 2022).

<sup>30</sup> Muhammad Riduan Harahap, "Resistensi Tradisi Kitab Kuning Pada Madrasah Al-Washliyah Di Sumatera Utara" (UIN Sumatera Utara, 2019).

yellow book recitation focuses on one particular figure; if that figure cannot attend to lead the recitation, the recitation activity will stop.

The recitation of the yellow book, which is centralized to certain figures, is the cause of paralysis of the recitation if the figure is absent. In its development, the recitation of this yellow book can stop immediately if the characters in it can no longer be actively present in activities. The recitation of the yellow book, which was initially carried out from house to house, was eventually moved to a mosque located at Al-Washliyah University. The move to the mosque was based on an attitude of openness among the recitation groups who wished that all groups could also attend the recitation of the yellow book. The implementation of the study of the yellow book at the Univa campus mosque is actively carried out every Sunday morning, attended by various groups of people to be actively involved in reciting the book.<sup>31</sup> The recitation of the yellow book, which is carried out with various types of book choices, has strengthened the Aswaja doctrine among the AW community so that groups involved in the recitation can understand the Aswaja theological doctrine from the book directly affiliated with the Aswaja. The recitation of the yellow book is carried out as an engine for the production of Aswaja theology because all the books used are based on strengthening the Aswaja doctrine.

As time passes, the frequency of the intense weekly recitation of the Yellow Book has decreased, particularly following the passing of a key character during the recitation's development. The recitation of the yellow book based on this figure continues to decline because it is difficult to find a representative figure in the field of expertise in reading the yellow book, so finally, in recent developments, the study of the yellow book based on the Univa Mosque has declined, even though the study of the yellow book in other places continues running as it should which is fully supported by the presence of donors who finance the operational costs of the recitation being carried out. However, the influence of the recitation of the yellow book, which was carried out at the Univa Mosque as an engine for the production of Aswaja theology, had a major influence on the paralysis of Aswaja theology development in AW as a religious organization that openly claims to be adherents of the Aswaja theology. The paralysis of the

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<sup>31</sup> Akram, "Interview."

Aswaja theology knowledge production is also directly related to AW leaders who do not represent a group that has in-depth knowledge related to Aswaja theology, strengthening Aswaja doctrinal education through the yellow book needs to receive more attention.

Even though the Yellow Book Study is still ongoing, it is no longer conducted regularly and according to a schedule. Recitation is only carried out based on certain interests, or there are special activities due to the limited presence of a leader who can guide the implementation of the recitation. Competence in supervising the yellow book recitation is challenging to find the right figure to accompany the implementation of recitation activities based on the classic book. The competence of figure who can manage the performance of the yellow book must have mastery and in-depth knowledge of the Arabic language and related special terms about the classics. For this reason, the recitation of the yellow book as an engine for the production of Aswaja theology is highly dependent on a figure who masters and has a good reading of these classic books. The low level of recitation of the yellow book has seriously weakened the younger generation's knowledge of Aswaja theology. The recitation of the yellow book, which has been paralyzed, resulted in the cessation of the production of learning about Aswaja theology among AW, which not only had an impact on the ideological identity of the organization but also had an impact on the existence of AW as an Aswaja-based organization.

## **CONCLUSION**

The theology of Aswaja, which has come to define AW, has been extensively practised, particularly in the traditional Islamic educational establishments that the group has established. AW becomes the primary source of Aswaja theology through education that actively studies and upholds the yellow book. The resurrection of Aswaja theology in AW was further reinforced by the appearance of different yellow book-based recitations, which specifically turned into books that were associated with Aswaja as the primary source. However, as AW developed, it encountered certain dynamics, particularly when changes happened that affected AW educational institutions and made it difficult for the organisation to both survive and adapt to changing circumstances. Education underwent

changes, most notably AW teachers' and leaders' limited access to the *kitab kuning*, the primary source of Aswaja theology. Education administrators find it challenging to find teachers or ustadh who truly study the Islamic guidance book, which is more proof that AW educational institutions need support to stay up to date with the industry's rapid changes. There were also setbacks in other areas of the yellow book recitation because of activities that concentrated on specific figures. But the death of this character directly affected the recitation's flow, which ultimately resulted in a setback for AW's knowledge production of Aswaja theology.

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