

Islamic Organizations in North Sumatra: A Historical Analysis on Newspaper Publication in 1915-1942

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Abstract—Newspapers are an important historical source in a historical writing that contains information about past events. Information about Islamic organizations in its activities in North Sumatra is found in newspapers from 1915 to 1942, considering that Islamic organizations have a long struggle in Indonesian history because it has contributed to the dynamics of Indonesian politics. The purpose of this paper is to track the progression of Islamic organizations in North Sumatra and its activities in various aspects based on newspapers ever published in North Sumatra in 1915-1942. The method used is the historical method with social history approach. Information had been obtained in a number of newspapers including the activities of several Islamic organizations in North Sumatra from the aspects of politics, education, social, and economics. The conclusion is Islamic organizations had contributions as the embryo of the independence movement of Indonesia, but some of them were still have not been highlighted in the tradition of Indonesian historiography. These findings support that some Islamic organizations in Indonesia should be more highlighted in the historical writings in Indonesia.

Keywords—Newspaper, Islamic organizations, North Sumatra.

I. INTRODUCTION

In the beginning of the 19th century, newspapers in the Dutch East Indies were only published in Dutch with Eurocentric content (among which the most popular *De Locomotief*, *Javassche Courant*, *Java Bode*, *Het Nieuws van den Dag voor Nederlandsch-Indie*, and *Bataviasch Nieuwsblad*). *Deli Courant* and *De Sumatra Post* appeared in Medan as the most popular Dutch newspaper. Newspapers began to be widely published by indigenous intellectuals in the early 20th century, both in Dutch and in local languages. But the Malay newspaper (in common Malay language) is the most widely published. Since then newspapers published by the indigenous people have their own consumers from the natives who are literate in Latin. Reading

newspapers like Europeans slowly became a habit followed by indigenous peoples. Malay newspapers became rivals for Dutch newspapers. During this period the seeds of nationalism and the discourse of independence of the “Indies” from the Dutch colonialism increasingly spread. Indonesian historians agree that the Malay newspaper which had been published in the Dutch East Indies played a major role in assisting the Indonesian movement and struggle for independence.

The emergence of a number of Malay newspapers was also in line with the emergence of organizations founded by indigenous peoples, both ethno-nationalist, nationalist, political and religious. Not infrequently also a number of organizations also established press institutions to publish their own newspapers. In general, the development and movement of an organization can be monitored through the news in newspapers published in its time. Nationalist and Islamist organizations are the most prominent in their progress, especially since the spirit of nationalism spread throughout the Dutch East Indies, and Budi Utomo became a model for the trend of movements emulated by the youth of that era.

II. METHOD

This article is the result of research that has been done to answer the problem, namely: (1) What newspapers have been ever published in North Sumatra in the period 1915-1942? (2) What Islamic organizations are reported in newspapers in North Sumatra in the period 1915-1942? (3) How does the newspaper report about the development of Islamic organizations in North Sumatra in the period 1915-1942? By using the historical method, this study uses sources that contain historical facts from local newspapers that were published in that period and aligned them with historical sources from relevant books and research articles.

III. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

A. Newspapers in North Sumatra, 1915-1942

There are many newspapers that have been published in North Sumatra in the period 1915-1942. Based on the results of the study, it is known that the newspaper that was successfully identified was published in North Sumatra about 50 newspapers titles. Indeed, not all newspapers are long-lived and some were short-lived. Generally, it was caused by media controls carried out by the Dutch colonial government and the police' controls over newspapers suspected of being affiliated with radical movements such as the Sjarikat Islam (an Islamic union) and socialist/communist groups. Based on the fact that there were many newspaper publishers in that period, it was evident that Medan was the city of Press and the most advanced intellectual city outside Java. Even since 1918, the newspaper the *Benih Merdeka* owned by Sjarikat Islam in Medan has begun to spread ideas and enthusiasm for independence from colonialism, where it has not yet begun in other areas of the Dutch East Indies.

B. Islamic Organizations in news coverage, 1915-1942

There were 6 Islamic organizations that have been identified reported in the newspapers in the period 1915-1942. Jong Islamiten Bond, Sjarikat Islam, Muhammadiyah, Al-Jam'iyatul Washliyah became the most frequently reported. The movement of the Sjarikat Islam in Medan was widely reported by the newspapers they founded by themselves, namely the *Benih Merdeka*. With a sizeable mass control and own mass media, the movement of Sjarikat Islam in Medan is always supervised by the colonial government and the police. Even the Sjarikat Islam office itself was banned by the police for allegedly starting to affiliate with the Pan-Islamism movement (Central Islamic Society in Lahore, Pakistan) which was spreading in Asia [1]. The *Soeara Djawa* newspaper also frequently reported the Sjarikat Islam movement led by Mohammad Joenoes. While Muhammadiyah was frequently reported by the *Moetiara* and *Pelita Andalas* newspapers.

C. News coverage on the Islamic Organizations progression

1) Sjarikat Islam

Sjarikat Islam (SI) is an Islamic organization formed with the aim of fighting Dutch colonialism. The *Bentara Negeri* newspaper reported that the organization held a congress on June 20-26, 1916 in the city square of Bandung. The Congress was only attended by Muslims and people who were invited. At the meeting, S.I. requires the establishment of *Kweekschool* (teacher school) for Islamic religion teachers. R.K. Mangoenatmodjo, who was the leader of the *Soeara Djawa* newspaper, preached the election of Mohammad Samin as President of SI. Furthermore, Sjarikat Islam held a *Vergadering* (Meeting) on February 17, 1918, at *Oranje Bioskoop*, Medan which was attended by 700 members. The meeting was attended by white people, natives, and European planters [2].

SI held a discussion related to the *Coolie* (contract laborers) and the fate of the nation. This is related to "hoax" from Dutch newspaper *Deli Courant*, which supports the capitalists. This meeting was to explain the fate of contract laborers in the field

which were very different from those written by *Deli Courant*. In *Vergadering* on February 17, 1918, Mohammad Samin made a speech about the origin of contract laborers in Sumatra, and called for the freedom of them. In his speech the rights and conditions of contract laborers were treated inhumanely, they were given very severe punishment, and the human rights of contract laborers were lost. Under these conditions Mohammad Samin called for the nation to rise up to face the foreigner (Dutch) that oppressed this nation [3].

K. Mangoenatmodjo in an edition of *Benih Merdeka*, Mohammad Joenoes made an article addressed to Radimin as Commissioner of SI Medan Deli, related to the speech and Mohammad Samin's article which he said was very dangerous from a Dutch perspective, so that there was a difference of opinion on S.I members. Some agreed, but some were opposed to the Mohammad Samin movement [4]. On June 27, 1918, an indigenous meeting was held in the case of *Gemeenteraad* candidates (City Council). But the indigenous were not given the right or were involved in the election and those who were entitled to choose only those who were fluent in Dutch [5]. Since then, they began to be highlighted by the colonial government and spied on by the police.

In 1919 SI Medan Deli made 4 work plans and conditions, namely the movement affairs, household affairs, *Gemeente* affairs (Municipal affairs), and business affairs. S.I Association of Tapanuli and Djamiatoel Moehabbab appealed to the *Zelfbestuur* government (Indigenous government) and representatives of the Dutch East Indies Government in Medan to give land rights for the people [6]. Mr. Notosuroto (a poet) who is a Javanese, was an advocate of the thoughts of *Associatie van Oost en West* (East and West Association) in the Netherlands. As a result, the students in the Netherlands were labeled as being ungodly or Communist because they were affected by SI [7].

The Sjarikat Islamic was a place for indigenous peoples to have their own press to convey objections about unfavorable conditions in the social and legal fields. This organization also created influential figures during the Indonesia independence movement such as Kyai Haji Samanhudi, H.O.S. Tjokroaminoto, Agus Salim, Abdul Muis and Semaun.

2) Jong Islamiten Bond

The Jong Islamiten Bond Medan branch was established in 1926. The *Soeara Regie* newspaper in 1927 reported a yearly celebration of the Jong Islamiten Bond Medan branch. In the news it is mentioned that its members consist of school students like MULO (*Meer Uitgebreid Lager Onderwijs*), *Kweekschool* (teacher school) and HIS (*Hollandse Inlandse School*) in Medan. The celebration was attended by important figures at that time [8]. The Jong Islamiten Bond movement is identical with the political view of nationalist figure Agus Salim. On June 4, 1929, Agus Salim was a builder of the J.I.B character had visited and gave a speech in front of Jong Islamiten Bond members in Medan. At that time Agus Salim's view that distinguished between science and religion was criticized by followers of Christianity.

At that time, Jong Islamiten Bond was expected to be an organization that could form the ideal character of Islamic intellectual youth. Historical facts also prove that from this organization there were many nationalist figures who fought for Indonesian independence such as Agus Salim, Mohammad Natsir, Mohammad Roem, and S.M. Kartosoewirjo. In Medan, development of J.I.B. quite progressive, in fact, they once independently raised funds to send envoys to attend the 5th Jong Islamiten Bond Congress in Surabaya on December 1929 [9]. In addition, members of J.I.B. Medan branch was reported to have received free English language tutoring by Mr. Swandi but did not last long [10].

3) Muhammadiyah

Muhammadiyah was established in East Sumatra (now North Sumatra) on 1 July 1928 or around 15 years (1912) after Muhammadiyah was first established by Kyai Haji Ahmad Dahlan in Yogyakarta. The movement and propagation of Muhammadiyah followers turned out to have started a year earlier (1927) at a place on Jalan Nagapatam, Kampung Keling, Medan. The movement at the time was in the form of routine activities such as recitation and organizational meetings. Muhammadiyah's early followers in Medan at that time were Minang people (ethnic from Minangkabau/West Sumatra) who had long lived in urban areas in East Sumatra. These are the ones who then gather new members who agree with Muhammadiyah's goals both from the Minang, Mandailing (Tapanuli) and other ethnic groups [11].

The early days of *dakwah* (preaching) were the most difficult for Muhammadiyah [12]. The efforts made by HR Mohammad Said and his colleagues are to increase the activities of Islamic *dakwah* to the community such as the way of praying is good and right, straightening the direction of the Qibla, the matter of prayers using tie, the feast of death, pilgrimage to the grave, feast day prayers and etc. [11]. The methods and objectives of the *dakwah* that were directly felt by ordinary people turned out to be quite successful. Muhammadiyah is easily accepted in the midst of society and this has an impact on expanding the reach of *dakwah* and increasing new Muhammadiyah branches in areas outside Medan.

Muhammadiyah which was established outside Medan before 1930 is located in Glugur, Pancur Batu, Tebing Tinggi, Binjai, Pematang Siantar, and Kisaran. In addition, those established after 1930 are also found in Indrapura, Pematang Bandar, Labuhan Bilik, Rantau Prapat, Gunung Sitoli, Tanah Karo, and Pangkalan Brandan. Overall, Muhammadiyah until 1932 had 135 branches in Sumatra, 15 branches in Borneo, 23 branches in Celebes (Sulawesi), 225 branches in Java, and 18 branches in Timor and 416 branches on other islands in the eastern region [13].

Muhammadiyah until 1932 had 7 departments/sections responsible for its own affairs, namely: Tablig Affairs, Education and School Affairs, Helper of General Tribulation, Library, Carpentry Affairs, Youth Affairs, Aisiyah (Ladies Affairs). The achievement of the expansion of the Muhammadiyah organization's *dakwah* movement did not stop there. In the report of the *Pelita Andalas* newspaper about the 10th Jubileum Conference of the Muhammadiyah held in East

Sumatra in 1937, it was illustrated the rapid progress of the Muhammadiyah organization in East Sumatra. The conference which was attended by 800 participants claimed very encouraging progress at that time [14].

Muhammadiyah Youth has a contribution in the struggle for Indonesian independence. In addition to fight the Hezbollah army, some of the Muhammadiyah Youth and Hizbul Wathan also joined the Pesindo unity. Abdul Malik Munir from Hizbul Wathan was one of the leaders. In Langkat and Asahan, Muhammadiyah youths and Hizbul Wathan also joined Napindo [11]. Thus, it was proven that Muhammadiyah had a big role in the struggle for Indonesian independence. In various reports, it was enough to illustrate that the positive enthusiasm of the community, especially the Muslims in East Sumatra, towards the Muhammadiyah missionary movement at that time was already extraordinary. The achievement of Muhammadiyah in the context of expanding Islamic preaching, especially in the colonial era, was very successful in Sumatra, especially in West Sumatra and East Sumatra where the influence and shadow of large Islamic organizations such as Nahdlatul Ulama was not as dominant as in Java.

4) Al-Jam'iyatul Washliyah

Sheikh Mohammad Ya'kub and other philanthropist took the initiative to raise funds for the construction of the *maktab* (Islamic learning place) which was later built in Kesawan, downtown Medan and completed on March 19, 1918. That *maktab* is named Maktab Islamiyah Tapanuli (MIT). In his time, MIT was classified as a modern educational institution, because it already used a class system, but still had the traditional characteristics marked from the memorization system which became one of its learning methods [15].

It started from the discussion and debate activities of MIT students which became the embryo of the emergence of a new Islamic organization which later became known as Al-Jam'iyatul Washliyah on November 30, 1930 [16]. Within 10 years, Al-Jam'iyatul Washliyah branches had been established in almost all regions in East Sumatra to Tapanuli and Aceh. The rate of development of Al-Jam'iyatul Washliyah was fairly rapid as a new Islamic organization after Muhammadiyah which also had a large influence in East Sumatra. The achievements of Al-Jam'iyatul Washliyah at that time were quite encouraging and were seen in the news in the newspapers [17].

Not only expanding Islamic *dakwah* in East Sumatra, Al-Jam'iyatul Washliyah also followed business charities such as Muhammadiyah, especially in the field of public education. Al-Jam'iyatul Washliyah has built many schools (Islam education) in villages in East Sumatra under the name "Madrasah Al-Jam'iyatul Washliyah" [17]. Besides that it also extends Islamic *dakwah* to areas that have not been religious or who have embraced religions other than Islam, such as in Batak and Karo regions [16].

Al-Jam'iyatul Washliyah played a role from the beginning in the struggle for Indonesian independence. Many of its members joined the young generation, namely the Indonesian Youth Front. The youths of Al-Jam'iyatul Washliyah also fought in maintaining Indonesian independence at the beginning of the

proclamation. Among the intellectuals of Al-Jam'iyatul Washliyah, who were well known at that time were Bahrum Djamil, Anas Tanjung, Abdul Malik Munir, and M.K. Yusny. Various organizations, active political parties formed their respective laskar with their ideologies such as the Indonesian National Party (PNI) which was named Barisan Pelopor and Islamic organizations such as Al-Jam'iyatul Washliyah joined the Hezbollah army [15].

5) Others Islamic Organization

In addition to several Islamic organizations that have been mentioned previously, there are also other similar organizations that have existed in North Sumatra, namely: the Komite Memelihara Sji'ar Islam and the Pergoeroean Ketoehanan bagian Putri (P.K.pi). Insufficient news was obtained about the three organizations. The Komite Memelihara Sji'ar Islam was reported in the *Moetiara* newspaper in 1935. As a newly established organization, this committee consisted of all Islamic associations that were not political and from an Islamic community [18]. The committee was then inaugurated in conjunction with the commemoration of Isra' and the Mi'radj of the Prophet Muhammad in the building owned by Muhammadiyah. As a committee which is based on Islam, this committee aims to fight for the benefit of the Islamic ummah, such as inviting entrepreneurs to dismiss their Muslim employees to celebrate the Islamic holiday [19]. There is no more specific information about its existence, especially how it contributes to the Indonesian independence movement.

The existence of the *Pergoeroean Ketoehanan bagian Putri* (PKpi) is also quite interesting. Although only successfully identified from an article, but the information that was obtained was adequate to describe the movement of this organization. Quoting from the news of the *Moetiara* newspaper in 1935, PKpi at that time was inaugurating a *langgar* (small mosque) called *Langgar Poetri* Islam in Jalan Puri, Medan. The effort originated from the women's initiative in Medan whose number of members had reached three hundred of people. Badarijah Sjamsuddin as the chairperson of PKpi at that time led women to get a decent and advanced education, the *langgar* that was inaugurated was one of the efforts to achieve its objectives [20].

IV. CONCLUSION

Newspapers had a big role in the movement of a society. In the Dutch East Indies, there were many newspapers published mainly in the first half of the 20th century. In East Sumatra, only about 50 newspapers have been published, especially in Malay, and published by Indonesian. It is no exaggeration if in that era it is worth mentioning as the peak of the progress of the Indonesian press. Newspapers kept the collective memory of the people of their day. Besides that, it also contains the souls of the age that can be felt and imagined as to what past society understands the events that occur around them. The existence of major Islamic organizations in East Sumatra (now North Sumatra) such as Jong Islamiten Bond, Sjarikat Islam, Muhammadiyah, Al-Jam'iyatul Washliyah, *Comite Memelihara*

Sji'ar Islam, and *Pergoeroean Ketoehanan bagian Putri*. The existence of local newspapers in the Dutch colonial era played an important role in changing society, especially the struggle for Indonesian independence. The *Pedoman Masyarakat*, *Pelita Andalas*, *Pewarta Deli*, *Sinar Deli*, *Moetiara*, *Sinar Zaman*, *Seruan Kita*, and *Oetoesan Sumatra* are the most identified newspapers reporting on these Islamic organizations. In addition, the news from the newspaper is classified as credible and objective so that it is in line with the historical narratives contained in the books on the history of East Sumatra or North Sumatra.

Research findings are not satisfactory and there are deficiencies, especially in the heuristic stage. The number of Malay language newspaper fragments published in the colonial period is indeed very difficult to obtain and the number is limited. The number of newspapers accessed at some library in Medan is less satisfying. It would be far better if the results of this study were continued by multiplying sources from libraries or other archive agencies, especially the collection of the National Archives of the Republic of Indonesia and the National Library in Jakarta.

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