

From Religious Movement to Political Movement: The Role of Politics in The Resistance Against Colonialism

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the political role of religious movements in the resistance against colonialism in Indonesia. The context is the transformation of religious movements into political movements, such as Sarekat Islam, which evolved into a political force advocating for the people's aspirations. The purpose of this study is to trace how religious movements transformed into political tools in the struggle against colonial domination. The method used is a qualitative study with a historical approach, based on a literature review of various online sources. This study highlights the forms of political roles carried out by religious figures and organizations, such as advocating for people's rights, forming mass organizations, and spreading nationalist ideas. The results of the study show that religious movements are not merely a moral force but also play a strategic political role. They are capable of mobilizing the masses, fostering political awareness, and challenging colonial power in an organized manner. In conclusion, religious movements played a crucial role in laying the foundations of political resistance and accelerating the emergence of national consciousness during the colonial era.

Keywords: Religious movements; colonialism; resistance; nationalism

INTRODUCTION

The transformation of religious movements into political forces in Indonesia is a significant phenomenon in the nation's socio-political history. This transformation reflects the adaptive dynamics of religious groups in responding to the challenges of the times and the needs of modern society. During the colonial period, resistance against colonial rule was

often led by religious figures, such as ulama and kiai, who used religious teachings as a moral foundation and spiritual motivation in their struggle (Marsus, 2022).

This shift is evident in the direct involvement of religious figures in the arena of practical politics, both as founders of political parties and as political actors who mobilize religion-based support to voice the aspirations of the faithful (Fadillah et al., 2024). One of the most prominent examples is the emergence of the Islamic Union, which was initially rooted in moral and religious principles but later evolved into a movement with significant political influence (Argenti, 2019).

The transformation of religious movements into political forces also demonstrates how spiritual values can be harnessed within a democratic system to advocate for the public interest. These movements not only voice religious aspirations but also champion social, economic, and legal issues deemed to represent the interests of the Muslim community (Angretnowati & Karolus, 2022). This signifies a shift from a passive, moralistic role toward active participation in the democratic process and the formulation of state policy. Therefore, the research questions in this study are, first, how religious movements transitioned into political movements in the context of colonialism; and second, to what extent did political roles shape the direction and strategies of resistance against colonialism.

The objectives of this study are to examine in depth the process of the transformation of religious movements into political forces; to analyze their political contributions in shaping collective consciousness and organizing resistance against colonial rule; and to examine how religious movements played a role in the political sphere during the colonial period, and how the strategies and structures of these movements became part of Indonesia's decolonization process.

Theoretical Framework

Social Movements and Political Transformation

Colonialism, in all its forms, created conditions of deep dissatisfaction, igniting the flames of resistance among various segments of society who felt the direct impact of discriminatory policies, suffocating taxes, and the loss of dignity and sovereignty. It was in

this context that the seeds of social movements began to grow and flourish. It is important to note that a social movement is an action undertaken by a group of individuals with the aim of bringing about change or, conversely, preserving existing elements within society. (Haris, Rahman, & Ahmad, 2019) The resistance against colonialism in all its diverse and complex forms was, at its core, a large-scale social movement. This phenomenon did not arise without cause but rather as a direct response to oppression, relentless exploitation of resources, and the deprivation of basic rights perpetrated by foreign powers on Indonesian soil.

There are distinct stages in the emergence of such social movements. Social movements develop through three main stages: Initiation, Organization, and Institutionalization. (Haris, Rahman, & Ahmad, 2019). The first stage, the *Initiation Stage (Incipient Stage)*, begins with the emergence of dissatisfaction among individuals, which then drives them to share information and communicate effectively. At this stage, leaders and agitators emerge to articulate the public interest. The second stage, *Organization (Organizational Stage)*, is marked by the strengthening of the leaders' roles. During this stage, all plans for activities and actions are formulated in an organized and systematic manner, ensuring that on-the-ground actions align with the initial planning. The final stage, *Institutionalization (Institutional Stage)*, represents the culmination of the social movement's development. Once a social movement gains broad public support, it becomes institutionalized in the form of a formal organization, with the hope that it will endure and operate over the long term.

The existence of such movements is closely linked to political transformation. Social movements play a crucial role in this transformation by challenging the status quo, raising public awareness of political issues, and forcing the political elite to respond to demands from below. Through actions such as demonstrations, petitions, and campaigns, social movements can generate significant pressure to trigger negotiations, reforms, or even revolutions, which ultimately shape a new political landscape.

Theories of Political Mobility and Ideology

Understanding how social movements, such as colonial resistance, can mobilize the masses and sustain their struggle requires an examination of theories of political mobilization

and ideology. Political mobilization does not simply refer to the number of people involved, but also to how individuals and groups are organized, persuaded, and mobilized to take collective action. One important framework is resource mobilization theory (*RMT*). From the perspective of resource mobilization theory, social movements view collective behavior as requiring organized mobilization. The importance of establishing an organization as a vehicle for the movement lies in its ability to uphold the goals to be achieved and ensure the movement's sustainability. (Putri 2022).

Resource *Mobilization Theory (RMT)* is an approach in the study of social movements that focuses on the importance of resources, organizations, and strategies in the emergence and success of social movements. Unlike earlier perspectives that placed greater emphasis on grievances or social dysfunction, RMT argues that social movements require careful mobilization of resources (such as money, expertise, labor, and networks), effective organizational structures, and strategic tactics to achieve their goals. (Edwards & McCarthy, 2004). Resource Mobilization Theory highlights three key aspects that determine the emergence and success of a social movement. These include the availability of resources whether financial, expertise, or networks; Then, there are the political opportunities that support the movement, and finally, the ability to effectively mobilize all these elements (Putri, 2022). In addition to resources, ideology plays a central role as the glue that unites the various elements within a movement. Ideology is a system of beliefs, values, and ideas that gives meaning to suffering, justifies resistance, and offers a vision of a better future. In anti-colonial struggles, ideologies can vary, ranging from nationalism which emphasizes national identity and unity to religious teachings that provide spiritual and moral legitimacy to the resistance.

The Role of Ideology (*Religion vs. Politics*) in Colonial Resistance

If we examine the resistance against colonialism more closely, we see that ideology plays a fundamental role, often serving as both the catalyst and the unifying force for anti-colonial movements. Historically, in the context of colonial resistance, religion has functioned not only as a belief system but also as a strong collective identity, providing a network of solidarity and offering spiritual legitimacy to the struggle against foreign

oppression. Religious institutions have often served as the most effective basis for mass mobilization. (Suryanegara, 2017)

Religion also provides a strong social network through places of worship, religious educational institutions (such as Islamic boarding schools or madrasahs), and organized communities, which function as centers for coordination and communication. In his book, Khoirudin states that the role of ulama and Islamic boarding schools in Indonesia as centers of resistance against colonialism serves as clear evidence that religion in this case, Islam functions not only as a spiritual guide but also as the driving force behind organized political resistance. They fostered an awareness of colonialism as an injustice that must be opposed on the basis of religious teachings, while simultaneously serving as a vehicle for consolidating the people's strength." (Khoiruddin, 2018)

Eventually, as the resistance grew and broader awareness emerged, political ideologies particularly nationalism began to play an increasingly dominant and transformative role. The transition from resistance dominated by religious sentiment to a structured nationalist movement marked the maturation of political consciousness. Nationalism succeeded in formulating more concrete goals and uniting various factions that had previously may have been fighting solely for sectoral interests. (Hadiwijoyo, 2019, p. 45) Nationalism offered a vision of a sovereign nation-state that transcended purely religious or ethnic identities, creating a more inclusive foundation for uniting diverse social groups with varied religious and cultural backgrounds. Nationalist leaders sought to build a collective identity based on geographic territory, a shared language, and a shared history, rather than solely on religious beliefs.

The Relationship Between Religion, Civil Society, and the Colonial State

The relationship between religion, civil society, and the colonial state is a complex and tense interaction. Colonial states, whose primary goal was to secure control and exploitation, often viewed religion as a potential threat. They sought to suppress religious institutions deemed to incite resistance or disrupt order. Islam itself often served as the driving force behind resistance. Huda explains that religious institutions such as pesantren and ulama became centers for community consolidation. It is also explained that "the role of ulama and

pesantren in mobilizing civil society against colonialism was highly significant. They were not only centers of religious education but also hubs of socio-political movements. The extensive network of pesantren enabled the effective dissemination of information and the consolidation of resistance forces, often beyond the reach of the colonial government's strict surveillance." (Huda, N. 2019). Civil society, represented by various religious, social, and cultural organizations, played a crucial role in articulating the aspirations of the resistance. Although they often operated under severe constraints and strict colonial state surveillance, these organizations served as platforms for the public to organize, exchange ideas, and plan resistance strategies.

On the other hand, the colonial state made strenuous efforts to control and suppress every form of resistance, including that based on religion. It implemented policies that restricted the activities of religious organizations, monitored religious leaders, and even carried out physical repression. Although the colonial state sought to suppress and co-opt religious power, resistance from organized religious groups often posed a serious threat to the stability of colonial rule. Discriminatory policies and repression only served to strengthen solidarity and the resolve for resistance among communities grounded in religious values." (Fathoni, A. 2020). However, the colonial state's efforts were often not entirely successful. In fact, this pressure often strengthened the resolve to resist, driving the transformation from purely religious movements into more organized and militant political movements, which ultimately contributed to the struggle for independence.

Mujib and Rahman also emphasize that the transformation of religious movements into political movements within the context of colonialism was an inevitable phenomenon. Religion, with its transcendental values and moral principles, is capable of raising awareness of injustice and spurring resistance against oppression. In Indonesia, Islam has long been a central force in shaping collective identity and organizing resistance against Dutch colonialism." (Mujib & Rahman, 2018).

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employs a qualitative method with a historical approach. Data sources consist of a literature review encompassing history books, scholarly articles, and relevant digital documents. The analysis is conducted using a descriptive-critical approach to uncover patterns and dynamics of the political role of religious movements in the context of colonial resistance. Through this approach, the study aims to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the strategic role of religious movements in Indonesia's political history and their relevance to the discourse on national identity formation.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The Colonial Context and Early Religious Movements

At that time, around the early 20th century, the colonial power structure in the Dutch East Indies was designed to reinforce European dominance over the territory and people of Indonesia. The colonial government operated a centralized administrative system, with decision-making entirely in the hands of Dutch officials (indigenous people were not permitted to interfere). At that time, indigenous elites were only granted positions as implementers of policies, without any real authority to influence or manage the direction of governance. It was this system that ultimately created a stark power disparity between the colonizers and the colonized, while simultaneously closing off opportunities for political participation by the local population. Thus, there were no mechanisms allowing the people to voice their aspirations legally; consequently, it can be said that power was exercised unilaterally and authoritatively.

The colonial economic system of that time, which was exploitative and designed to serve the interests of the mother country, caused great distress among the indigenous population. One of the main policies implemented was the forced cultivation system, or *Cultuurstelsel*, which required farmers to grow export crops such as coffee, sugarcane, and indigo. These commodities were shipped to world markets, and the profits were used to replenish the Dutch government's coffers. On the other hand, local farmers suffered from

famine, lost productivity, and lost control over their own land (Ricklefs, 2008). In practice, this policy forced the people to work hard without commensurate compensation, demonstrating that colonialism not only oppressed politically but also systematically impoverished (Elson, 2009).

This inequality was exacerbated by a race-based social stratification system established by the colonial government, under which the population of the Dutch East Indies was divided into three main groups: Europeans, Foreign Orientals, and natives. The European class had full access to public services and legal privileges, while the native population occupied the lowest rung of the social hierarchy, with severely limited access to education, legal protection, and government positions (Hefner, 2000). Furthermore, this stratification was not merely administrative in nature but also cultural, reinforced by various narratives portraying the indigenous population at that time as a backward and irrational people, thus requiring guidance from a nation considered more “advanced.”

Colonial education policies of that time also exhibited a strong bias against indigenous groups; Dutch schools were not widely open to everyone but were intended solely for the indigenous elite who were “loyal”. In fact, this was evident from the start, as the primary objective was not to foster critical thinking but rather to produce a middle-class workforce subservient to the colonial system. The curriculum also placed greater emphasis on discipline and technical administration rather than on the development of socio-political or nationalist thought (Noer, 1996). As a result, the majority of the people remained illiterate and had no opportunity to understand the power structures that oppressed them.

The Role of Religious Institutions as a Basis for Early Resistance

During the colonial period, religious institutions such as pesantren, surau, and madrasah served as vital venues for the people to access education and moral values outside the colonial education system, as the official Dutch education system restricted access for ordinary citizen’s primarily indigenous people. This situation led many people to seek knowledge from ulama or religious teachers who wielded significant influence within their local communities. In these places, Islamic teachings not only focused on worship but also fostered a spirit of justice, equality, and self-respect as free human beings (Azra, 2002). This

eventually laid the foundation for the realization that colonialism was a form of injustice that must be resisted, rather than simply tolerated.

Religious scholars and leaders also frequently served as leaders in various forms of resistance both overt and covert because of their close ties to the people and their reputation as trusted guides; consequently, their calls to resist the colonizers garnered what could be described as fairly widespread support. Some early religious movements, such as the Padri War in West Sumatra, demonstrate that resistance to colonialism can stem from religious fervor, not merely from modern nationalism (Noer, 1996). Such resistance often took the form of education, sermons, or even community organizing to foster self-reliance and reduce dependence on the colonial system.

In addition to providing moral and religious education, religious institutions also fostered strong social solidarity among local communities. Under the oppressive conditions of colonial rule, this solidarity became a crucial foundation for the resistance movement. Many Islamic boarding schools (*pesantren*) and prayer halls (*surau*) served as gathering places for young people and the community to discuss, study, and devise cultural strategies for resistance. The values they upheld at that time such as honesty, mutual aid, and justice which were taught through religious education, also greatly strengthened each person's awareness that the colonial system was at odds with the moral teachings they fully believed in (Hefner, 2000). From this, it is evident that religious institutions here served not only a spiritual function but also acted as centers of socio-political awareness amid limited access to education and the media.

Colonial Restrictions on Religious and Social Activities

The Dutch colonial government eventually began to realize that religious institutions held great potential as centers of social and political influence among the indigenous population. Consequently, they began imposing various forms of restrictions on religious activities deemed capable of stirring up resistance. One form of control involved requiring permits for the establishment of religious schools and imposing strict oversight over the content of sermons and religious activities. The colonial authorities also monitored religious leaders active in the community and restricted their movements to prevent them from

spreading teachings deemed a threat to the stability of their rule (Ricklefs, 2008). Their aim in doing so was, of course, to control the development of ideologies that could spark collective resistance.

Restrictions at that time were also enforced through legal measures, as the colonial government issued regulations that differentiated legal treatment for religious social activities compared to European activities. Islamic organizations that at the time appeared to be social or educational in nature were required to obtain official permits and were subject to strict oversight, while Dutch organizations enjoyed greater freedom in carrying out their activities. In fact, some Islamic boarding schools (*pesantren*) and *madrasahs* deemed too politically active were immediately closed or forcibly dissolved without further ado. These restrictions demonstrate that colonialism did not merely oppress through military or economic power, but also by regulating and limiting the social and spiritual expression of its colonized people (Elson, 2009).

The Transformation Toward a Political Movement

In the early 20th century, religious movements in Indonesia began to shift direction; moving away from their previous focus on *da'wah* and moral education, they began to shift, at least in part, toward more organized political resistance. One of the main drivers of this change was a growing awareness of the limitations of resistance based solely on spiritual means. At that time, as colonial oppression continued and the scope for religious activity became increasingly restricted, religious leaders began to realize the need for a new, more structured, and strategic approach moving forward. They began forming organizations that not only played a role in social and religious spheres but also advocated for the political interests of the people (Noer, 1996). This step signaled a shift from cultural resistance toward structural struggle.

The emergence of a native middle class a product of colonial education also influenced the upheavals taking place, as they helped accelerate this transformation. The younger generation, educated in Dutch schools, began to think more modernly and critically about the social inequalities in their country. While they often remained rooted in religious values, they possessed a far sharper political perspective. The connection between the educated class and

religious leaders opened up opportunities for collaboration between these two important groups. Ultimately, the movement which had previously focused on morality began to evolve into a discourse on political rights, social justice, and national independence (Azra, 2002).

The Modernization of Education and Political Awareness

Political awareness did not emerge suddenly but developed gradually, leading the indigenous population to realize that religion served not only as a moral guide but also as a source of energy for social change. Significant changes began to take place when Western education reached the indigenous population, particularly through institutions such as the HIS (Hollandsch-Inlandsche School) and the ELS (Europese Lagere School), which were established by the colonial government at that time. Although the colonizers' initial aim in establishing these schools was to produce a compliant and cheap local workforce, they ultimately and unwittingly opened up new spaces for modern ideas about justice and equality that would eventually change everything (Ricklefs, 2008). Students from among the santri and the indigenous elite began to be exposed to fundamental ideas such as human rights, nationalism, and democracy (albeit within a still very limited context). This exposure became the seed for the growth of critical awareness among the entire indigenous population and ultimately led to social movements opposing the colonizers.

At that time, around the same period, many Indonesian Muslim figures were studying in the Middle East and later returned with ideas for Islamic reform that were quite revolutionary. Figures such as Jamaluddin al-Afghani and Muhammad Abduh provided inspiration to reinterpret religious teachings, which were no longer viewed as purely spiritual matters but also as a social force capable of driving societal transformation toward the better (Azra, 2002). In the hands of young Islamic scholars, Islamic teachings began to be linked to concepts of liberation and resistance against oppression. These ideas then spread through Islamic educational institutions such as pesantren, as well as organizations like Muhammadiyah, which began introducing modern education grounded in Islamic values (Noer, 1996).

The Influence of Global and Regional Political Thought

The growing political awareness among religious communities in Indonesia did not emerge in a vacuum. From the late 19th century to the early 20th century, the Islamic world was experiencing a major wave of intellectual renewal, particularly in Egypt, Turkey, and India. Figures such as Jamaluddin al-Afghani called for the unity of the Islamic world (pan-Islamism) as a response to Western domination, while Muhammad Abduh emphasized the importance of rationality and social reform within Islamic teachings (Lapidus, 2002). These ideas spread widely through print media and Indonesian students studying abroad, particularly in Mecca and Cairo. Political developments in Asia such as the rise of nationalism in India and Japan's victory over Russia in 1905 also stirred the imagination of the Indonesian people. Japan, which at that time was the first Asian nation capable of defeating a European power, offered hope that Eastern nations would not forever remain under Western domination (Shiraishi, 1997). This victory became a symbol of revival and sparked optimism that colonialism could be systematically resisted, rather than merely through sporadic uprisings.

Colonial Suppression of Religious Symbols

Colonial suppression of religious symbols was part of the Dutch strategy to exercise total control over the indigenous population not only politically and economically but also ideologically and spiritually. Mosques, Islamic boarding schools (pesantren), religious study groups (majelis taklim), and religious texts began to be viewed as elements with the potential to foster collective awareness of colonial injustice. Religious spaces, which had originally served as places of worship and moral education, came under surveillance because they were suspected of becoming breeding grounds for ideas of resistance against colonial rule (Noer, 1996). The Dutch government realized that the solidarity formed through religious networks could become a social force that threatened its dominance. Consequently, surveillance of ulama, kiai, and religious teachers was intensified, particularly those who began voicing social criticism through sermons or informal teaching.

Control over these religious symbols was exercised not only through surveillance but also through legal policies restricting preaching activities and the distribution of religious

literature. Sermons delivered outside colonial control were considered a form of agitation, and books containing values of liberation, nationalism, or the Islamic revival were strictly censored. In some cases, even da'wah and Friday sermons required permits, and the content of sermons was strictly scrutinized (if deemed potentially disruptive to colonial order, they were immediately banned). Clerics deemed radical were exiled to remote locations such as Tan Malaka, who had previously experienced political exile or detained without trial whatsoever. These restrictions meant that religious messages containing social criticism had to be conveyed implicitly either through symbols, parables, or subtle educational approaches (Boland, 1985).

One of the most obvious forms of oppression carried out by the colonial authorities was the surveillance of Hajj pilgrims. The colonial government viewed the Hajj not only as a religious ritual but also as a potential political threat, as many Islamic leaders in the Middle East were voicing anti-colonial sentiments a development that made the Dutch fear that such sentiments would spread to pilgrims from the Dutch East Indies. For this reason, the Hajj journey was made more difficult, and pilgrims returning from Mecca were often suspected of harboring revolutionary ideas and were placed under surveillance. Colonialism actively constructed a narrative that the Hajj could serve as a vehicle for spreading subversive ideas, and this gave rise to the notion that political Islam was something that must be strictly monitored (Laffan, 2003). In this regard, colonialism did not merely regulate the administrative aspects of religion but also sought to reconstruct the symbolic meanings of religion so that they remained aligned with the colonial interests that benefited the colonizers.

The Process of Articulating Political Demands from a Moral to a Structural Basis

Initially, expressions of religious resistance against colonialism took the form of da'wah and moral appeals that emphasized the values of justice, equality, and the rejection of oppression. However, as collective consciousness grew and access to education increased, this approach began to transform into a more structured and political movement. Religious leaders no longer relied solely on sermons or informal education but began establishing religious social organizations that later evolved into systematic political forces (Noer, 1996). This was marked by the emergence of Sarekat Islam, which initially focused on the economic

solidarity of the Muslim community but later evolved into a political organization with a membership structure, a program of struggle, and leaders who vocally articulated the people's demands against the colonial government of the time.

This transformation reflects a shift from an ethical and spiritual-based struggle to a concrete form of political advocacy. Here, da'wah is no longer merely individual or cultural in nature but has transformed into a means of mass mobilization and the formation of national political consciousness. Religious organizations began adopting modern political methods such as drafting manifestos, participating in the Volksraad, and establishing religion-based political parties. This process demonstrates that religious moral values were not abandoned but rather transformed into a source of legitimacy for the political struggle demanding structural change and national independence (Benda, 1980). Consequently, the articulation of demands was no longer merely normative but also strategic and organized, transforming religion into a socio-political force capable of directly challenging colonial hegemony.

From Da'wah and Jihad to Mass Organizations and Political Parties

Initially, public resistance to colonialism primarily took the form of religious da'wah and calls for jihad of a spiritual nature. However, increasing pressure from the colonial government such as restrictions on religious activities and the suppression of Islamic symbols led religious leaders to realize that a moral struggle alone was insufficient to oppose a system that was structurally oppressive (Azra, 2002). Subsequently, religious preaching evolved into a collective call to fight for the rights of the Muslim community in social and political life, one of the outcomes of which was the establishment of mass-based religious organizations such as Sarekat Islam (SI). This organization was initially founded as a platform for indigenous merchants to resist the dominance of Chinese merchants protected by the colonial authorities, but it later evolved into a political movement demanding social and political justice for the Indonesian people. In its forums, SI voiced opposition to racial discrimination, economic monopolies, and legal inequities, using religious language that resonated with the people (Noer, 1996).

This transformation was also evident in the movement's strategy. Whereas the struggle had previously been more symbolic and scattered, during this phase, an awareness began to

emerge of the importance of a structured organization with clear political objectives. Islamic leaders began to form broader networks, establish schools, publish mass media, and organize mass rallies as a means of articulating political demands. Da'wah, which had originally been spiritual in nature, began to be directed toward building political awareness among the faithful. The struggle against colonialism was no longer viewed merely as an individual religious obligation but also as a collective duty requiring an organized socio-political strategy.

Religious movements did not abandon their religious elements but interpreted them more progressively, where teachings such as amar ma'ruf nahi munkar (enjoining what is good and forbidding what is evil) were translated into social advocacy and the establishment of educational institutions and alternative economic systems. This gave rise to various organizations such as Muhammadiyah, which not only emphasized da'wah but also built hospitals, schools, and extensive social networks. Religious movements began to shift from the symbolic to the institutional level and from a moral orientation toward a more structural struggle (Liddle, 1996).

Case Study on Political Movements Following Religious Movements

The transition from a movement rooted in purely religious sentiment to a structured political movement is a key phenomenon in the history of resistance against colonialism. This process demonstrates how society adapted in the face of colonial domination.

Sarekat Islam (SI): The Transformation from a Muslim Merchants' Organization to a Nationalist Political Movement

One of the most illustrative examples of this transformation is Sarekat Islam (SI). Founded in 1911 under the original name Sarekat Dagang Islam (SDI) as a platform for indigenous Muslim merchants, the organization initially aimed to defend economic interests against the dominance of Chinese merchants and Dutch colonial policies. However, the SI quickly transformed into a mass nationalist political movement, attracting millions of members across various regions. A clear example of this shift was the SI's major congresses, which no longer focused solely on economic issues but began to voice radical political

demands such as autonomy and even independence, as well as open criticism of the colonial government. As explained, Sarekat Islam (SI), which grew out of Sarekat Dagang Islam (SDI), was a pioneering organization in the awakening of Indonesian national consciousness, transforming the economic struggle into a massive political struggle. (Latifah, 2022). This transformation demonstrates how a strong religious base can serve as the foundation for effective political mobilization, transforming economic and religious aspirations into an inclusive nationalist movement.

The efforts, movements, and struggles of the Sarekat Islam against colonialism including through massive mass mobilization leveraged existing commercial and religious networks within society. They actively organized public rallies in various regions often attended by thousands to tens of thousands of people to criticize colonial government policies and foster national consciousness. This was further emphasized by the fact that the Islamic Union's public rallies served as a vital means of uniting the people's strength and spreading the idea of resistance against the colonizers (Abdullah, 2019). In addition, the SI also persistently raised funds from members and supporters to support the organization's activities, including the establishment of public schools that taught nationalist values. It is also explained that this fundraising demonstrated the indigenous movement's financial independence from colonial influence, a crucial aspect of the struggle (Purwanto, 2017). They also actively published newspapers and magazines as vehicles for propaganda and political education, disseminating nationalist ideas and widely highlighting colonial injustices. This was underscored by the fact that SI's publications played a central role in shaping public opinion and igniting anti-colonial sentiment among the people (Shiraishi, 2018).

The Serikat Islam movement was also clearly evident in its efforts to improve the economic well-being of the indigenous people through the establishment of cooperatives and collective enterprises, with the aim of reducing dependence on foreign domination. They encouraged their members to trade independently and not rely on Chinese or Dutch intermediaries, with the formation of the Sarekat Dagang Islam serving as the foundation. "The establishment of cooperatives and commercial enterprises by the SI was a concrete

manifestation of economic resistance against foreign hegemony that harmed the people” (Suryanegara, 2015). The SI was also very vocal in advocating for the rights of farmers and workers, demanding improved working conditions and fair wages, and opposing land-rental practices that harmed the people. “The SI’s movement in defending the rights of farmers and workers demonstrates the organization’s deep concern for the welfare of the oppressed common people” (Kahin, 2016). In addition, the SI was also active in the field of education by establishing schools that taught the values of nationalism and religion, as an alternative to the discriminatory and limited colonial education system. As explained, the establishment of schools by the SI was a strategic step to educate the nation and shape a generation imbued with a nationalist spirit the foundation for future independence (Soebardi, 2017).

The Islamic Union’s struggle was tangibly manifested through its active participation in the People’s Council (Volksraad), an institution established by the Dutch colonial government. Although the Volksraad was initially merely an advisory body without significant legislative power and tended to be used as a tool for colonial legitimacy, the Islamic Union strategically utilized it as a platform to voice the people’s criticisms and demands. They sent courageous and critical representatives, such as H.O.S. Cokroaminoto, to convey the people’s grievances, demand agrarian reform, and push for political rights for the indigenous population. “The SI’s participation in the Volksraad was a clever tactic to utilize existing albeit limited political channels to voice the aspirations of the oppressed people” (Ricklefs, 2020). Furthermore, the SI also organized protests and large-scale strikes, such as the railway workers’ strike in Semarang, to pressure the colonial government into meeting their demands, demonstrating the power of its mass mobilization. “The strikes organized by the SI demonstrated the people’s bargaining power in the face of a repressive colonial regime” (Kartodirdjo, 2018). Although it experienced significant internal divisions in the years that followed, the legacy of the SI’s struggle in awakening national consciousness and mobilizing the masses remains a crucial foundation for Indonesia’s independence movement. Although the SI experienced divisions, its contribution to sowing the seeds of nationalism and instilling courage in the people cannot be denied (Abdullah, 2019).

Political Parties and the Nationalist Movement

The development of SI later became the embryo for the emergence of various political parties and other nationalist movements that were openly politically oriented. A concrete example includes the Indonesian Sarekat Islam Party (PSII), which was a continuation of the Sarekat Islam struggle but with a sharper focus on the parliamentary political path. The PSII was active in the Volksraad (the Dutch-established People's Council) to voice the people's aspirations and demand changes to colonial policies from within the system. Meanwhile, organizations with a more secular nationalist platform also emerged, such as the Indonesian National Party (PNI), founded by Soekarno in 1927, which focused on the struggle for independence through mass mobilization and non-cooperation. Furthermore, the Indische Partij in the early 20th century also served as an early example. "The Indische Partij was the first political party founded on the basis of nationalism to achieve an independent Indonesia, prioritizing the unity of the Indiers (indigenous people and Indo-Europeans) against colonialism." (Ahmadin, 2015). These parties, despite their differing ideologies, shared the same ultimate goal: to achieve the independence and sovereignty of the Indonesian nation through a more structured political path. Religious education also played a role in fostering this awareness. Islamic educational institutions, such as madrasahs and Islamic boarding schools (pondok pesantren), were not merely places for the transmission of religious knowledge but also served as hubs for sowing the seeds of nationalist ideas and resistance to colonialism, thereby shaping politically conscious cadres. (Fathoni & Qomari, 2017). These political parties and youth organizations functioned as modern institutions to channel the people's political aspirations, formulate the national struggle's agenda, and organize the masses on a more structured scale.

Political Strategies in the Struggle Against Colonialism

To achieve the goal of independence, these political movements employed various adaptive and comprehensive political strategies in the fight against colonialism. Mass actions became an effective tool for demonstrating collective strength and pressuring the colonial government, for example, through large-scale demonstrations or general strikes that paralyzed economic activity. Additionally, political pressure was exerted through available

channels, such as submitting petitions and interpellations in the Volksraad to demand reforms or fairer policies. Not only that, but movement leaders also engaged in international lobbying, seeking support from other nations or international forums. Examples include the diplomacy conducted by Mohammad Hatta at the League of Nations or the efforts of movement figures to gain sympathy from other anti-colonial nations. This strategy was vital to the struggle. As a point of reference, in the context of the labor movement which was also relevant to the resistance against the colonial system “the Indonesian Trade Union Confederation employed a strategy of Concept, Lobbying, Action, and Politics as movement activities to influence the government’s decision-making.” (Setyawan & Affandi, 2015). This combination of strategies which includes grassroots mobilization, internal pressure, and external support demonstrates the maturity and complexity of the Indonesian nation’s political struggle. These strategies are further supported by the organization’s internal strength. National movement organizations, in their quest for independence, systematically built communication networks and consolidated support at the grassroots level, ensuring that every political strategy had solid mass support. (Putra, 2020).

The Role of Politics in Organizing Resistance

The consolidation of social forces is the process of integrating various elements of society into a unified political or social movement to oppose oppression, injustice, or the domination of power, whether by colonial forces or authoritarian regimes. Political and social organizations were formed as tools for collective struggle to unify voices and coordinate resistance strategies. For example, Budi Utomo, founded in 1908, was the first modern organization focused on Javanese education and culture. Sarekat Islam, which emerged in 1912, was initially an economic organization but later evolved into a major political movement that united merchants and Muslims in rejecting foreign economic domination. In addition, labor unions during the New Order era and the post-Reform era also played a crucial role in advocating for workers’ rights and democratization.

Through these organizations, the people were mobilized to carry out collective actions such as demonstrations, strikes, or boycotts. Effective mobilization typically arises from shared circumstances and suffering for example, farmers who have lost their land or workers

subjected to unfair treatment. A shared identity whether ethnic, religious, or nationalistic also serves as a driving factor. A concrete example can be seen in the massive demonstrations leading up to the 1998 Reformasi in Indonesia, which involved students, NGOs, and the general public. Consolidation also fosters communication networks among groups such as cross-sectoral alliances encompassing students, workers, environmental activists, and religious groups and enables the exchange of information and strategies that facilitate the coordination of actions across various regions, much like the activist networks during the Reformasi era.

The Influence of Modern Political Structures and Strategies on Resistance

Resistance today is not merely spontaneous or localized; it has undergone modernization through well-organized structures and sophisticated strategies. Mass media and social media play a key role in disseminating information, raising collective awareness, and shaping public opinion. Social media platforms such as Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram have become primary tools for rapid mobilization, as seen in the #ReformasiDikorupsi Movement in Indonesia in 2019. Alternative and independent media also often play a crucial role in amplifying issues that are not covered by mainstream media.

Nonviolent strategies, inspired by figures such as Gandhi and Martin Luther King Jr., include peaceful actions such as nonviolent marches and demonstrations, boycotts of products or institutions, and public awareness campaigns using posters, art, and internet memes. Examples of the application of these strategies can be seen in the Jasmine Revolution in Tunisia (2011) and the peaceful student protests in Hong Kong. Furthermore, community-based organizing emphasizes decentralization, where decisions are made from the bottom up. Local communities actively shape the agenda of the struggle and determine methods of struggle appropriate to the local context, as seen in residents' forums or village meetings to formulate strategies against eviction.

Shift in Objectives: From Religious to Nationalist-Political

Resistance has evolved alongside shifts in public consciousness and the global context. Initially, much of the resistance was religious in nature. For example, the Diponegoro War

(1825–1830) was led by Prince Diponegoro, who viewed the Dutch as a threat to Islamic values and Javanese culture. The Padri War (1803–1837) was also driven by the desire of Minangkabau ulama to uphold Islamic values against customs they considered deviant, leading them to confront the Dutch. However, in the 20th century, an awareness of national identity began to emerge, demanding independence from colonialism. National figures such as Soekarno, Hatta, and Tan Malaka directed the struggle toward the ideals of secular nationalism and politics. This struggle was not only to defend religious values but also to establish an independent, sovereign, and just nation. The nationalist movement succeeded in uniting various ethnic, religious, and social groups, as well as breaking down barriers of exclusivity. The Youth Pledge, proclaimed in 1928, became a significant milestone for inclusivity, affirming the motto “one land, one nation, one language.”

The Role of Political Elites and Religious Leaders in the Colonial Political Arena

Political elites and religious leaders played a crucial role in the struggle against colonialism, serving as driving forces and symbols of resistance. They possessed strong moral and social legitimacy, which enabled them to mobilize the masses and spread the ideology of the struggle. For example, KH Ahmad Dahlan and KH Hasyim Asy'ari were widely recognized as influential figures in fostering national consciousness. Their presence provided a sense of security and confidence to the people, and when they called for resistance, many were inspired to follow.

Mass mobilization became one of the key capabilities of the political elite and religious leaders, who leveraged existing networks such as Islamic boarding schools (pesantren) and mosques to rally support. A concrete example can be seen in the Jihad Resolution issued by NU in 1945, which called on Muslims to defend Indonesia's independence. Through sermons and religious study sessions, they inspired thousands of people to participate in resistance actions, establishing themselves not only as spiritual leaders but also as social leaders who provided direction for the movement. Furthermore, political elites and religious figures were also active in spreading the ideology of resistance, using various communication channels to explain that the struggle against colonialism was part of the values of the path of resistance. By teaching that resistance was rooted in Islamic doctrine, they made the message of the

struggle more readily accepted by the public. Interaction with other movements and adaptation to social change became crucial strategies for maintaining their relevance and influence in the struggle for independence.

Long-Term Impact and Political Legacy: A Political Theory Perspective

The sociopolitical transformations resulting from the consolidation of social forces and resistance movements cannot be separated from a political theory framework that highlights the dynamics of power, resistance, and state formation. In this section, we will discuss three main aspects of the long-term impact and political legacy of the struggle, linking them to key theories in political science.

The Formation of a National Political Identity

The concept of national identity as the result of a shared struggle can be understood through the theoretical framework of political constructivism, particularly Benedict Anderson's theory of "*imagined communities*." Anderson argues that a nation is an imagined community because its members, even though they do not know one another personally, share a collective mental image of togetherness. In the Indonesian context, the resistance movement against colonialism served as the defining moment for the formation of this collective identity.

The construction of national identity also aligns with the views of Ernest Gellner, who noted that nationalism emerged as a necessity for modern industrial societies that required cultural homogeneity for administrative and economic efficiency. Through the mass media, national education, and symbols of the struggle, the resistance against colonialism shaped national consciousness as a modern political entity.

The Birth of the Modern Political System in Indonesia

The birth of the modern political system can be examined through the lens of institutionalism, particularly historical institutionalism. This theory emphasizes that political institutions are formed as the result of a long historical process, including social struggles and consolidation. The emergence of political parties, labor unions, and youth organizations is part of "path dependency," where historical trajectories shape the direction of future

political development. Furthermore, theories of democratization, such as those put forward by Samuel P. Huntington in **The Third Wave: Democratization in the Late Twentieth Century**, suggest that the transition to democracy is often driven by bottom-up pressure, including pressure from social movements and popular resistance. In the Indonesian context, the anti-colonial movement laid the foundation for the formation of a more inclusive system of political representation and public participation.

The Relevance of Political Struggles in Confronting the Hegemony of Power

In confronting modern forms of power hegemony such as corporatism, authoritarian populism, and global inequality the political struggles of the past remain relevant. This can be explained through Gramscian hegemony theory. According to Antonio Gramsci, power is exercised not only coercively but also through ideological domination that creates consensus within society. Within this framework, contemporary social movements can be seen as efforts to create *a counter-hegemony* against oppressive dominant values. Furthermore, the “new social movement theory” approach, as developed by thinkers such as Alain Touraine and Jürgen Habermas, emphasizes the importance of communication, identity, and symbolic values in these struggles. Social media, class consciousness, and civil society networks have become modern manifestations of strategies once employed in colonial resistance.

CONCLUSION

The development of resistance against colonialism in Indonesia demonstrates a significant transformation from movements rooted in moral and spiritual values toward more structured and organized political strategies. Religious figures, who had previously served as symbols of ethical resistance, subsequently adopted a political approach as a more effective means of championing the people’s aspirations. Politics became a crucial instrument in the process of mass mobilization, the articulation of social demands, and the attainment of national independence. This transformation reflects the religious movement’s keen ability to adapt to socio-political changes and has opened up broader avenues for participation in the national political arena.

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