

SECURING THE STATE, DEFENDING THE RELIGION An Analysis of *Boelan Sabit* Newspaper Publications (December 1945-January 1946)

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Abstract: This article discusses how the narration of Islamic-ness and Indonesian-ness in the midst of the war of independence was represented in an Islamic newspaper called *Boelan Sabit*. The period under study is a month (December 15, 1945-January 14, 1946). Using the historical method, the research findings revealed that *Boelan Sabit* newspaper incessantly called for Indonesian Muslims to defend Indonesian independence from Dutch colonialism and British occupation based on both Islam and nationalism. The newspaper ensured its Muslim readers that the period of independence was a time to strengthen the two identities inherent in them, namely a son of Indonesia and a Muslim. In this regard, this newspaper took the legitimacy and inspiration in maintaining Indonesian independence from the Quran and other resources of Islamic teachings. In addition, *Boelan Sabit* newspaper encouraged Muslim readers to have broad knowledge concerning on affairs of state through publishing articles about modern state-related concepts, including deliberation, sovereignty, democracy, and dominion status. Further, this newspaper had a role in helping Indonesian Muslims to understand and accept their new identity after the second world war as a patriotic Indonesian citizen as well as a pious Muslim.

Keywords: Islam, nationalism, Indonesian war of independence, Islamic press.

Introduction

Until the arrival of Japanese troops in Indonesia in 1942, the majority of Indonesian Muslims were almost politically inactive and socio-economically weak. Most of them lived in rural areas, were

illiterate, and apolitical. However, in the last months of 1945, the Indonesian Muslims changed dramatically. Indonesian Muslim leaders worked together with their nationalist compatriots to proclaim Indonesian independence and managed this newborn country. Muslim youth joined both the national army and paramilitary organizations to fight the Dutch, who wished to resume their colonialism in Indonesia, and the British, who claimed to come to Indonesia to disarm Japanese troops. They were even willing to sacrifice themselves by fighting against more trained British and Dutch forces. How can Indonesian Muslims become one of the strongest backbones in the struggle of the Republic of Indonesia against the Dutch and the British?

Newspapers play an important role in times of conflict. Newspapers are one of the mass communication media used by belligerents to influence the public, seek support, increase morale, and weaken the enemy. These aims are possible to reach through newspapers given newspapers' wide reach, moving rhetoric written by experienced journalists or writers, and touching photographs. In newspapers war is imagined, represented and disseminated. Newspapers help shaping public attitude towards war, either supporting or rejecting it. In other words, as stated by Glenn R. Wilkinson, public attitudes made war possible.¹ Therefore, in order to study the public attitude towards war, a study of how war is represented in public space is needed, including in the print media. Roy Morris Jr., in his introduction to a book about print media and Civil War in America, underlined that newspapers and magazines have played a role in bringing conflict and war into the living rooms and parlors of (American) public, which in turn means that the power of the press is increasingly solidified and expanded.² This holds true in Indonesian case during the war of independence, which lasted from 1945-1949. Through the print media the war reached the hands of ordinary Indonesians. Therefore, understanding the struggle for Indonesian independence will not complete without comprehending how Muslims thought and voiced their support for the Republic

¹ Glenn R. Wilkinson, *Depictions and images of war in Edwardian newspapers, 1899-1914* (Hampshire and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), p. 1.

² Roy Morris, Jr., "Introduction," David B. Sachsman, S. Kittrell Rushing, and Roy Morris Jr. (eds), *Words at war: The Civil War and American Journalism* (Indiana: Purdue University Press, 2008), p. 9.

through various kinds of media, with one of the most important being newspapers.

The literature on the role of nationalist newspapers in Indonesia during the Dutch-Indonesian conflict (1945-1949) has been written quite a lot.³ However, Islamic journalism in this time of conflict received very little attention from historians. This paper is the first study that systematically examines the workings of Islamic press, especially *Boelan Sabit*, during the war of independence in Indonesia. This study provides a perspective on how an Islamic newspaper played a role in the midst of one of the bloodiest conflicts after the Second World War. *Boelan Sabit* openly supported the Republic of Indonesia and rejected the presence of the Dutch and the British. Given that its readers were educated Indonesian Muslims, this newspaper justified its pro-Republic stance both by patriotic and Islamic arguments. This newspaper helped shaping the public perception among Indonesian Muslims, that at that time Indonesian Muslims had to adopt a new position: devout Muslims as well as patriotic sons of Indonesia, who had to defend their independence from foreign invasion, if necessary with their lives.

This paper examines how the narration of Islamic-ness and Indonesian-ness in the midst of the conflict was represented in an Islamic newspaper. The newspaper examined in this study was *Boelan Sabit* (literally means ‘crescent’, often associated as the symbol of Islam), which was published by the Indonesian Islamic Youth Movement (Gerakan Pemoeda Islam Indonesia, GPII), a youth wing of an Islamic party that was founded in 7 November 1945, Masyumi⁴.

³ For example, see Andi Suwirta’s study on Jakarta-based newspaper, *Merdeka*, and Yogyakarta-based newspaper, *Kedaulatan Rakjat*, during the Dutch-Indonesian conflict, *Suara dari Dua Kota: Revolusi Indonesia dalam Pandangan Surat Kabar “Merdeka” (Jakarta) dan “Kedaulatan Rakjat” (Yogyakarta) 1945-1947* (Jakarta: Balai Pustaka, 2000). See also J.R. Chaniago, et. al., *Ditugaskan Sejarah: Perjuangan Merdeka, 1945-1985* (Jakarta: Pustaka Merdeka, 1987); David T. Hill, *Journalism and Politics in Indonesia: A Critical Biography of Mochtar Lubis (1922-2004) as Editor and Author* (Oxon & New York: Routledge, 2010) especially Part II Chapter 3, “The “press of political struggle”: the first *Indonesia Raya*”, and Muhammad Yuanda Zara, ““Trust Me, This News is Indeed True”: Representations of Violence in Indonesian Newspapers during the Indonesian Revolution, 1945-1948,” Bart Luttikhuis & A. Dirk Moses (eds), *Colonial Counterinsurgency and Mass Violence: The Dutch Empire in Indonesia* (Oxon & New York: Routledge, 2014).

⁴ The Masyumi party was very influential in Indonesia and had a very broad mass base. One of its founders, Mohammad Natsir, was appointed Republican Minister of

In this regard, this paper investigates news, opinions and poems related to Islam and Indonesia published by this newspaper.

The period examined in this article is between 15 December 1945 and 14 January 1946. There are several reasons for the selection of this period. First, this one month period is a crucial period for the Republic of Indonesia. About a month earlier, fighting broke out between Indonesian freedom fighters and British forces in Surabaya, the second largest city in Indonesia. This battle continued until the following months and, most importantly, sparked a strongly negative sentiment among the Indonesian people towards the British presence. In the period between December 1945 and January 1946, both the British and the Dutch were able to strengthen their foothold in Java and Sumatra. As a result, in early January 1946 the Republican government moved its capital from Jakarta (which was occupied by the Dutch and the British) to Yogyakarta in the interior of Java. The second reason is practical. The 15 December 1945 edition was the earliest edition of *Boelan Sabit* available in the National Library of the Republic of Indonesia in Jakarta. The period of one month is representative enough to understand about the aspects of Islam and Indonesia during the conflict.⁵

By using historical method, the purpose of this study is to find out how ideas about Islam and Indonesia were envisioned, expressed and disseminated by the Islamic press following the birth of the Republic of Indonesia and the coming of the British and the Dutch. How did *Boelan Sabit* view Indonesia's independence and the arrival of the British and the Dutch troops to Indonesia? How did *Boelan Sabit* perceive the position of Muslims in the newly born Republic of Indonesia? How were arguments originating from Islamic teachings used as a justification to support Indonesia as well as to fight against foreign forces?

Information as of January 3, 1946. This Party was founded on 7 November 1945, and was the only party in Indonesia that represented Islamic ideology at least until the next two years. See Rémy Madinier, *Islam and Politics in Indonesia: The Masyumi Party between Democracy and Integralism* (Singapore: NUS Press, 2015), pp. 76-77.

⁵ *Boelan Sabit* was published in Indonesian. The English translation in this paper is mine.

Spiritualizing Indonesian Independence

Boelan Sabit newspaper strongly supported Indonesian independence and was against the presence of the Dutch and the British forces. Even when it discussed Islamic teachings, it contextualized the discussion within the framework of Indonesian independence. For example, when *Boelan Sabit* in a full front page discussed about the 10 Muharram as the Ashura Day On 15 December 1945 (10 Muharram 1365 H). Although the headlines of the day discussed important days in Islamic history, the article itself was opened not only with ‘*bismillāh*’ (in the name of Allah) but also with a reminder of the new age that Indonesian Muslims were entering: “Thank to God who has helped us encountering the new age, the Age of Independence of Indonesian Land.”⁶ This statement clearly confirmed the position of *Boelan Sabit* as supporters of the Republic of Indonesia and its self-proclaimed independence.

Further, the Islamic element was clearly present in *Boelan Sabit*’s efforts to strengthen its appeal to Muslims in Central Java to support the Republic of Indonesia. *Boelan Sabit* emphasized the principles of the Masyumi Party in its effort to show its inclination both for supporting the Republic and the role of Islam in the newborn state. In the 14 January 1946 edition of *Boelan Sabit*, for example, it was confirmed by *Boelan Sabit*’s editorial that the Masyumi principle was twofold, namely “Upholding the sovereignty of the Republic of Indonesia and the Islamic Religion” and “Implementing Islamic ideals in Indonesian state affairs”.⁷

Occasionally, when calling Indonesian Muslims to defend Indonesia’s independence *Boelan Sabit* used stories of glorious Islamic past. Long time ago, wrote a journalist from *Boelan Sabit* in his article, ‘*Menoedjoe djalan kebahagiaan*’ (Towards the path of happiness), 14 January 1946, Muslims had achieved highest glory; they even became teachers for the rest of the world. However, then they became ungrateful for God’s favor and were busy pursuing worldly pleasures. As a result, internal disputes arose and led to bloodshed and schism. Muslims fell from glory to destruction. It was only in the 20th century that Muslims regained their consciousness. The same held true for Indonesia, which could be seen from various kinds of Islamic

⁶ “Sepoeloh Moeharom (‘Asjoero),” *Boelan Sabit*, 15 December 1945.

⁷ “Haloecan kita: “Kedaulatan Rakjat,” *Boelan Sabit*, 14 January 1946.

movements aimed at elevating the degree of Indonesian Muslims since the beginning of the 20th century. The peak of this effort was the independence of Indonesia and the establishment of the Republic of Indonesia since 1945.⁸

And, according to *Boelan Sabit*, Muslims were obliged to maintain such independence:

We are from the side of the Muslim Ummah: we are in full confidence with our 100 percent independence, and there is no better time for us than now, when we must attempt to maintain the perpetuity of our independence, and with the help God it must succeed. An Arabic proverb says: "If the *crescent moon* appears, it is clear for us that the full moon will come".⁹

Boelan Sabit supported the Republican government's position that Indonesia was already independent and that the Republic of Indonesia was a legitimate government. This newspaper rejected the views of the Dutch and the British that the Republic of Indonesia had no legitimacy to act as a state. War was the last resort if Indonesia's aspirations for independence were hindered. In the last week of December 1945, news were circulated in Indonesia that the Dutch and the British would hold a conference in London, where they would discuss the matter concerning the returning of Dutch rule in Indonesia. Masyumi, through his Head Office (*Pengurus Besar*), represented by Abi Koesno Tjokrosoejoso, criticized the plan for this meeting. His criticism, which was published in *Boelan Sabit* on 26 December 1945, emphasized the fact that Indonesia was not invited to the conference, which indicated that Indonesia was not considered as an independent country. In other words, Indonesia had not been recognized internationally. Meanwhile, in Indonesia the Dutch and British troops continued to commit acts of violence which provoked strong resistance from Indonesian Muslims. If this continued, Masyumi Head Office instructed Muslims to prepare for a holy war against the Dutch and the British. "Wait for the call for Sabil war [*perang Sabil*]", Masyumi Head Office commanded the party's followers.¹⁰

By using the term 'perang Sabil', which can be translated as 'to fight for the cause of God', Masyumi and *Boelan Sabit* were actually

⁸ "Menoedjoe djalan kebahagiaan," *Boelan Sabit*, 14 January 1946.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ "Moe'tamar GPII di kota Bengawan," *Boelan Sabit*, 26 December 1945.

campaigning that the reasons to resist the Dutch and the British were not solely nationalism and anti-colonialism. There was a higher, if not the highest, reason for Muslims, which was related to human-divine connections: fighting the enemy because of following God's orders.

Further, it is interesting to note that the efforts to reject the presence of the Dutch and the British, *Boelan Sabit* took Islam as the legitimacy to support the Republic of Indonesia. The source of their legitimacy came from the main and highest source of Islamic teachings: the Quran. In 15 December 1945 edition, the journalist of *Boelan Sabit*, in the "*Roengan Tafsir*" (Interpretation of Quran) column, interpreted the 85th surah in the Quran, Surah Al Buruj ("The Big Stars"). This surah talks about the Islamic faith, the power of Allah over the earth and the sky, and the sacrifice of those who believe in Allah and about those who reject Allah's commands, for what they will be punished by Allah. In other words, in this last part, Allah divides people into two groups. First, believers, or those who follow Allah's commands, and those who disobey, those who reject Allah's commands. It was implied from *Boelan Sabit* interpretation that the British and Dutch colonizers were classified as those who were against Allah's command:

The godless people boast and puff up their chest against the truth and justice that God loves. The Indonesian people will continue to fight every colonial tyranny. Even though the British and the Dutch had made a decision (at the Singapore conference), they will commit acts of violence against Indonesia, [but] they will be stabbed by their own weapons, and they will accept God's torment inside the extremity hot hell.¹¹

Journalist of *Boelan Sabit* also ensured its readers that the colonizers would be chased by "defenders of truth and justice". The journalist claimed a few examples from abroad where the native people were fighting against the domination of the foreign invaders, such as in Annam (Vietnam), India and Africa.¹²

Boelan Sabit advocated the amalgamation between nationalism and religion within an Indonesian. One of its reports in 15 December 1945 read as follows:

From the conscious sons and daughters of Nusantara, born a spirit of life, a national spirit which is usually inherited by the

¹¹ "Sepoeleoh Mocharom ('Asjoero)," *Boelan Sabit*, 15 December 1945.

¹² Ibid.

nations of the world. From their mouths came the recognition of “TRIOLOGY”. One nation: Indonesia. One Indonesian country. One Indonesian language. Apart from that, for those who are aware, with true Religion the world community will be safe in its broadest meaning of the word. So, we have also yelled [that we are the adherents of the] “RELIGION OF ISLAM”.¹³

In addition, the editor of *Boelan Sabit* interpreted the 84th surah in Al-Qur'an, Al-Insyiqaq (“To Split Asunder”) in the context of the struggle for maintaining Indonesian independence. This surah tells about the fate of humans on the Day of Judgment. Some get happiness and return to their Lord in a happy state. But some return in a sad state. Who gets happiness? They, according to the journalist of *Boelan Sabit*, were those who understood that life was not only in this world but also in the hereafter. This awareness, the journalist continued, led them “to be wise to use their lives for things that are more beneficial for the nation, homeland and religion.”¹⁴ These people were “those who are named believers and those who are willing to sacrifice”.

Islam was described as the source of inspiration for resistance against the foreign invaders. An article by the journalist of *Boelan Sabit* (name unknown), entitled “*Revolusi dan Islam*” (Revolution and Islam), was published in the newspaper in 26 December 1945. In the beginning, the author questioned, what was the source of strength that “was capable of throwing enemies into the sea”? The answer, said the author, was “the basis of Islam”. This was the basis that must be used in the revolutionary struggle of the homeland. He continued that the enemy had brought difficulties to the Indonesian people intending to weaken the enthusiasm of the people. Based on Islam, the writer continued, Muslims will realize that this troubled world was not the end, but only an arena where a Muslim was tested and must pass an examination. Therefore, “however severe suffering is, it will only be lightly felt in the hearts of every Muslim”.¹⁵

He continued:

So, “with Islam”, the people will be big-spirited. And, with Islam the revolution can continue. For Muslims, the spirit of “sabilillah” [in the way of Allah] is the realization of a great soul. Then, all

¹³ “Menebalkan semangat tjinta bangsa,” *Boelan Sabit*, 15 December 1945.

¹⁴ “Soerat Insjiqoq,” *Boelan Sabit*, 26 December 1945.

¹⁵ “Revolusi dan Islam,” *Boelan Sabit*, 26 December 1945.

Indonesian people must have it to continue their revolution. To find out the greatness of the soul of Islam, we only need to present half of the teachings of Islam which comprises the spirit of revolution: Who dies but has never fought, and in his heart there is no willingness to fight, he dies as a hypocrite.¹⁶

In a conference on 26-27 December 1945 in the Habiprojo Building in Surakarta, the GPII praised two paramilitary groups affiliated to Masyumi, Sabilillah and Hizboelloh, in their efforts to fight the foreign invaders. *Boelan Sabit* made the news of this conference the main news in the 29 December 1945 edition. By quoting the results of the meeting, the *Boelan Sabit* journalist wrote that Sabilillah and Hizboelloh were “atomic [bombs] that destroyed enemies and spies”.¹⁷ The term “Atomic [bombs]” (“*Atoom*” in original text) here clearly brought readers to recall the enormity of the power of the atomic bombs dropped by the United States on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, Japan, less than six months earlier. The atomic bombs destroyed two cities in Japan, and made Japan, which for the previous several years was very powerful, surrendered to the United States and finally ended the Second World War. Comparing American atomic bombs with Sabilillah and Hizboelloh as atomic bombs which destroyed the enemy was clearly an effort to strengthen enthusiasm to the members of these two groups and to show how dangerous they were in front of the enemy.

Besides, “*Atoom*” in this article also had other meaning. The chairman of the meeting, Harjono, interpreted this term differently. For him, “*Atoom*” stood for “*Alloh Tolong Orang-orang Moeslimin*” (Allah helps Muslims).¹⁸

Interestingly, GPII, and *Boelan Sabit* as its spokesperson believed that the struggle should not only be carried out by male youth. Although women were not expected to take up arms, they also had an equally important role. Regarding the role of Muslim women at war, in the late December 1945 meeting, as reported by *Boelan Sabit*, a female envoy from the GPII women’s section, Hidanah, stressed that Muslim women in times of turbulence had three types of obligations, namely obligations to themselves, obligations to household and obligations to

¹⁶ “Revolusi dan Islam”.

¹⁷ “Rapat oemoem moe’tamar GPII,” *Boelan Sabit*, 29 December 1945.

¹⁸ Ibid.

community.¹⁹ To themselves, they were obliged to educate themselves, while for households, they were obliged to manage the household well. As for the community, they were obliged to realize the noble ideals of mothers. Equally important, Hidanah underlined that without mothers there would be no men and youth fighters. In the meeting, Hidanah asked rhetorically: “Who gave birth to the Prophet Muhammad? Who gave birth to Prince Diponegoro? Who gave birth to the heroes who are now marching to the front line? Women, right? Then, pay respect to women!”²⁰

In addition to publishing views that motivate its readers to fight the Dutch and the British, *Boelan Sabit* also released news about the Indonesian people’s resistance against the foreign invaders in a very pro-Indonesia tone. *Boelan Sabit* had confirmed its pro-Republican attitude since the beginning, thus it is understandable when its reports clearly supported Indonesian independence and anti-colonialism attitude.

Educating Muslims about Politics

Boelan Sabit did not only report violence and fighting involving Muslim youth. For this newspaper, fighting was an important way to defend the sovereignty of the Republic from the Dutch and British hindrance. However, there was another important task to do, namely to expand the knowledge and understanding of the readers, most of whom were educated Muslims, regarding basic concepts of statehood. The aim was to ensure that Muslims were not just preoccupied with fighting the enemy in the battlefield, but also to increase knowledge and skills in managing the newly born country. Muslims were the biggest part of Indonesian society, so they were expected to participate in running the state.

The GPII itself, as the mother organization of *Boelan Sabit*, in its Articles of Association (Anggaran Dasar), especially in Article 6 (Efforts), did not only emphasize how they seek to deepen Islamic knowledge (point A) and the application of these teachings among its members (point B), but also had an effort to “Enhance intelligence and skill of Islamic youth in state matters” (point C).²¹

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ “Anggaran Dasar Gerakan Pemoeda Islam Indonesia,” *Boelan Sabit*, 29 December 1945.

A method to do this was by providing various columns that contained knowledge about democracy, sovereignty of the people, and state administration. *Boelan Sabit* introduced concepts relating to modern state. These concepts were discussed in the Roengan Pengetahoean Politik (Political Knowledge) column, which was presented serially. One of them was the definition and explanation of the principle of “*musyawarah*” (deliberation) which was the main notion of the fourth principle in the Pancasila (Indonesian state principle of five pillars). Deliberation, according to the author who discussed it in *Boelan Sabit*, was a method to make decisions. However, the majority did not necessarily the one who held the truth. Therefore, two steps were necessary; first, adopting deliberation as a method to make a decision, and second, educating the people to be more intelligent, which in turn would make them increasingly responsible for managing common issues.²²

Another issue discussed by *Boelan Sabit* was on the form of government in postwar Indonesia. The discussion was sourced from government and Islamic leaders, or was taken from other media outlets that specialized in state matters. One example can be seen in Knowledge and Politics column in the 2 January 1946 edition of *Boelan Sabit*. An article was published, entitled “‘*Dominion Status*’ *Arti dan Isinja*” (‘Dominion Status’: Its Meaning and Contents). This was taken from the *Pantja Raja* magazine.²³

Interestingly, there was no other reason to publish this article than to reject the contents. At the beginning of this article, the editorial staff of *Boelan Sabit* wrote: “In order to broaden the knowledge concerning politics, here we publish ‘Dominion Status’, and we hope it is not to be swallowed up! We only want independence 100 pCt.”²⁴

The dominion status discussed here was linked to the history of two nations that have long fought for independence, namely India and Indonesia. In the beginning, more space was given to the discussion of the presence of dominion status as one of the demands of the Indian nationalists to the British rule. The All India Congress since 1885 requested self-government for India. The request changed into a Home Rule, and finally, since 1916, a dominion status. This demand

²² “Demokrasi,” *Boelan Sabit*, 15 December 1945.

²³ “Roengan Pengetahoean dan Politik: ‘Dominion Status’, *Arti dan Isinja*,” *Boelan Sabit*, 2 January 1946.

²⁴ *Ibid.*

failed because of British refusal to fulfill it. As for Indonesia, according to this article, dominion status for Indonesia had been echoed by Indonesian nationalists since 1936 when Soetardjo, an Indonesian member of Dutch-created representative body, petitioned about dominion status at the Dutch East Indies People's Council. Four years later, another Indonesian nationalist, Wiwoho, also recommended dominion status before the People's Council session. Some other nationalists put forward the same demand in 1940 to the Visman Commission, a commission established by the colonial government to investigate aspirations of the native.²⁵

Furthermore, the author of the article asserted that dominion status was the Dutch proposal as a solution to the post-Second World War political problems in Indonesia. The Dutch gave the Indonesian people authority to regulate their country, but they were still under the Kingdom of the Netherlands. This status referred to the example used by the British Empire, namely its dominion areas outside the United Kingdom which were controlled by British and other Westerners, encompassing Canada, New Foundland, South Africa, Australia, New Zealand and Ireland.²⁶ An example like this was what Indonesian people imagined would be applied by the Dutch in Indonesia. Although Indonesian nationalists had proposed a dominion status for about a decade before, but it was clear that *Boelan Sabit* rejected this option. Its demands were full independence and sovereignty, and without the need to be under the Kingdom of the Netherlands.

For *Boelan Sabit*, the one and only authority in Indonesia was the Republic of Indonesia, led by President Soekarno and Vice President Mohammad Hatta. Their orders must be carried out, and not orders from the Dutch or the British. *Boelan Sabit* passed on to his readers various instructions from President Soekarno. It thus acted as government spokesman. Two important things emphasized by Soekarno in the era of maintaining independence were the so-called coordination and consolidation. *Boelan Sabit* even made this theme the main news on 7 January 1946 under the heading "*Haloean Kita: Koordinasi-Konsolidasi*" (Our Direction: Coordination-Consolidation). The meaning of coordination, according to the author, was the close relationship between various struggle bodies and ideological schools,

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ "Rocangan Pengetahoean dan Politik: 'Dominion Status', Arti dan Isinja," article 2, *Boelan Sabit*, 7 January 1946.

while consolidation referred to efforts to harmonize the movements between various struggle organizations.²⁷

The *Boelan Sabit* editorial elaborated on what Indonesian people and especially Muslims must do in the war situation. First, it ensured that the source of the struggle for Muslims was Islam, from which came the noble attitudes such as honesty, sincerity, purity, discipline, and obedience and fear of God. These virtues would create a close unity which cannot be divided. Besides being guided by President Soekarno's advice on coordination and consolidation, there were two other efforts that must be performed especially by Indonesian Muslims, namely:

- (1) defending our independence from the invaders, by fighting through the way of the army, (2) upholding and regulating order in our country, implementing the arrangement of the government, by giving efforts in state administration.²⁸

In addition, the editorial staff of *Boelan Sabit* emphasized several directions that Indonesian Muslims must understand. First, both diplomacy and military were equally important, and both must be carried out together. Secondly, the struggle body and political parties should be rooted in the will of the people. Third, the government had established a centralized military effort under the command of the TKR (People's Security Army) while the political body and ideologies centered on the Komite Nasional Indonesia (KNI, Indonesian National Committee). Finally, the group selfishness must be diminished given that selfishness may spark hazardous competition for power, jealousy, and mutual defamation that may make "our enemies laugh, because we are easily weakened".²⁹

On 6 and 7 January 1946, Masyumi held a '*koersoes kilat*' (quick-brief course). In this course, rather than military tactics and weapons, the Masyumi members and sympathizers for two days were taught about political and social sciences, both from the perspective of Western science and from the perspective of Islamic theology. Some of the subjects taught were the issue of foreign policy, economic upheaval, the struggle of the workers, the structure of the state

²⁷ "Haloean kita: 'koordinasi dan konsolidasi."

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Ibid.

according to Islam, and the procedures for the struggle of *the Sabil* army (the army of the holy war).³⁰

Becoming Muslims and Patriots

The GPII's Articles of Association and By-Laws (*Anggaran Rumah Tangga*) showed a combination of Islam and nationalism. As published by *Boelan Sabit*, in the Article 4 of GPII's Articles of Association, it was mentioned that the aim of the GPII was twofold, namely: "Upholding Islam" and "Defending and perfecting the State of the Republic of Indonesia based on the Belief in One God". This was clearly GPII acceptance of Pancasila instead of the Jakarta Charter, the early version of the Pancasila text which was in one of its articles emphasized the application of Islamic law to Indonesian Muslims. The requirement to become GPII member was provided in the first article of its By-laws: "Islamic youth, citizens of the Republic of Indonesia", aged between 15-35 years.³¹

The bond between Islam and nationalism was manifested in a symbolic form. The GPII meeting on 26-27 December 1945 gave an idea on how to become Muslim as well as a patriot of Indonesia in the time of war. At this meeting the audience stood up to sing Indonesian national anthem, 'Indonesia Raya', led by Abd. Madjid Harsoloemakso. The meeting itself was closed by shouting *Allahu akbar* (Allah is great) three times and *merdeka* (independence) once.³²

However, this emphasis on the combination of Islam and Indonesian patriotism was not only represented in the conceptual and symbolic form. For *Boelan Sabit*, a pious Muslim at the same time could also be a patriot. *Boelan Sabit* often published the true story of Muslim youth who were willing to sacrifice their lives to defend Indonesia's independence. One rather long story that represented a great sacrificial narrative by Muslim youth for an independent Indonesian state could be seen in the story of a member of the GPII Surakarta and Hizboelloh (Masyumi's armed youth organization) named Banani. The story of the struggle of Banani took almost half a page in the newspaper, showing its major value and importance. In the midst of the many news about political developments at the national level, this

³⁰ "Boeah koersoes kilat," *Boelan Sabit*, 10 January 1946.

³¹ "Anggaran Dasar Gerakan Pemoeda.

³² "Rapat oemoem moe'tamar GPII.

personal story showed that a touching story about a young man's sacrifice was extremely noteworthy. The title of the news is '*Kenang-kenangan bagi: Pahlawan A. BANANI-SIRADJ Hizboelloh*' (A Piece of Memory for a hero named A. BANANI-SIRADJ *Hizboelloh*).³³

The article narrated the last eight days in Banani's life. On the morning of Tuesday, 18 December 1945, Barisan Hizboelloh Surakarta was holding a rally to prepare troops for battle. Banani was present. This group was visited by President Soekarno, his family, and his ministers. In his remarks, Soekarno emphasized the importance of Hizboelloh in sustaining an independent Indonesian state from enemy interference as well as in helping this new country to prosper in the future.³⁴

Sukarno's advice described by *Boelan Sabit* "strengthening his [Banani] soul and determination, that Hizboelloh was willing to sacrifice for the state, for the sake of prosperous Indonesia".³⁵ In the afternoon, the Hizboelloh troops moved to the battlefield. They, wrote *Boelan Sabit* journalist, "had reinforced their minds that they would not return, intending to water the earth of the Indonesian motherland with their blood".³⁶

On 24 December 1945, Hizboelloh troops were ordered to retreat after carrying out an attack (not specified where and how the raid went). But Banani (and his two friends) refused to withdraw, and asked to be sent back to the front line. Banani was ordered to take a rest by his commander, but for him, there was no such thing as taking rest for Muslim youth, because the real rest, he said, was "later if we have arrived at the God's protection". Banani also bathed many times in order to remain pure from *hadath* (ritual impurity). He incessantly voiced his desire to meet God. He read Quran after the battle. He told his friends that he missed martyrdom. He recounted his dream, where he received purely white and fragrant flowers from heaven. He also saw a golden gate with a beautiful guard. He tried to approach the gate, but he could not reach it because his dream suddenly stopped. When

³³ "Kenang-kenangan bagi: Pahlawan A. BANANI-SIRADJ Hizboelloh," *Boelan Sabit*, 21 December 1945.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Ibid.

he woke up, his hands smelled good. His friends admitted that Banani's hands smelled like musk.³⁷

Shortly thereafter, came the order from their commanders to get ready to fight. Two days later, on December 26, they met NICA (Netherlands Indies Civil Administration) and Gurkha forces in Ungaran, northern Central Java. As they crawled near the enemy, they were bombarded with bullets and mortars. Hizboelloh troops pushed forward while shouting *Allāhu akbar* and *Lā ilāha illallāh* (There is no god but Allah). There were a few casualties on the Hizboelloh side. One of them was Banani. His body was taken to Surakarta Hospital, and then brought to a Republic office in Surakarta. In this last place Banani's body was given an "Islamic army" honor. *Boelan Sabit* reported that the office space was crowded by the military and GPII members, as well as Muslims of the city in general. The officials read aloud the biography of Banani and messages for those who were still alive. After that, military honors were given by firing rifles three times. Banani's body was then buried in the Astana Bahagia cemetery. The journey of Banani's body to the tomb, *Boelan Sabit* wrote, was escorted by "tens of thousands of people".³⁸

The death of Banani (and one other friend) on the Ungaran front was depicted by *Boelan Sabit* as the death of martyrs. The death was portrayed giving an extra enthusiasm to other Hizboelloh fighters to control the Ungaran region. It was reported that in the end Hizboelloh troops succeeded in repelling NICA and Gurkha forces. A number of NICA and Gurkha soldiers were killed, while their weapons were confiscated by Hizboelloh troops. Dozens of enemy spies were also arrested. In short, Hizboelloh, *Boelan Sabit* journalist wrote, acted as "*banteng ketaton*" (wounded bull who raged till dead) to resist the attacks of NICA and Gurkha, which ended in victory on the part of Hizboelloh, marked by the takeover of Djatingaleh Fortress in Semarang by Hizboelloh troops.³⁹

The similar stories as above appeared many times in *Boelan Sabit*, with this Banani story as one of the most elaborated ones.⁴⁰ The core

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Another example is the story of Moch. Solihan, a Hizboelloh member who was killed by enemy attacks. See 'Kenang-kenangan bagi: Pahlawan Moch. Solihan Hizboelloh', *Boelan Sabit*, 2 January 1946.

theme of these stories was similar, namely about the sacrifice of a pious Muslim youth who at the same time really patriotic in defending Indonesia from the Dutch and the British. During their lives, they were devout adherents of Islam and did many good deeds to others. They were not only pious personally, but also dared to defend their religion and country. In the end, they died on the battlefield and were described as martyrs for both their religion and country.

In turn, this kind of story did not only stop in the narrative, but was expected to be an inspiration and a mental reinforcement for other Muslim youths going into the battle. For *Boelan Sabit*, they were portrayed as patriotic martyrs, who later died on the battlefield as Indonesian independence heroes. The burial of their dead bodies was arranged militarily as well as according to Islamic rituals. All GPII members and local Muslims were depicted in mourning for their death and were ready to continue their aspirations for an independent Indonesia.

In addition to the biography of the martyrs, *Boelan Sabit* praised the deceased Indonesian Muslim fighters through poetry. One of them was entitled “*Kenang2an kepada Pahlawan jg telah sjahid*” (Remembrance to a hero who died as martyr) written by a poet named Bima Sutji, published in *Boelan Sabit* on 2 January 1946. The poem read as follows:

Mr. X is lying on bed,
finely wrapped in shroud,
fully decorated,
to be taken to the tomb,

He... is Dead. People say.

And you...
o hero, a leading warrior,
your body rolled on the ground.
your body was covered by blood.

You died,
people say.

Mr. X is DEAD, and you too, DEAD,
in the end there is no difference,
because all is the will of ALLAH.

The only difference is that you are DEAD because of your devotion, defending the Homeland and Religion, You are DEAD in the path of Allah.⁴¹

Another poem, “*Djika*” (If), in *Boelan Sabit*, 7 January 1946, written by Alimoeddin, read as follows:

Hero...

If.

Black smoke is steaming,
The sound of weapons disrupts nature
The loud sound seemed to split the earth

Inside the jungle, city and village,
On steep hills and cliffs,
Or perhaps in a deep valley...
Around the water, the fire to... the edge of the death:

Strengthen your heart, calming down your soul,
Being sincere
Release your feelings in memories,
You died as a hero,
Upholding Religion, defending the Land.

Let the body be covered in blood,
Shouting out before life [text unclear]

Allah is Great, Allah is Great, Allh is Great,
Independent, always Independent. No God but Allah...⁴²

The tone of the poems above seemed dark because they contained the terms such as blood, shroud, dead and tomb. However, optimism was present. Death was God’s will and none could escape death. Yet, the death of freedom fighters was of higher value, because they died while defending their religion and homeland. In the view of *Boelan Sabit*, this was the most ideal type of hero in a time of conflict between Indonesia and the foreign enemies. The poets, as well as the *Boelan Sabit* which published it, praised the sacrifices of these martyrs and positioned them as role models for other Muslim youth.

⁴¹ “Kenang2an kepada Pahlawan jg telah sjahid,” *Boelan Sabit*, 2 January 1946.

⁴² “Djika,” *Boelan Sabit*, 7 January 1946.

Besides the call for Indonesian Muslims to contribute with their lives, they were also requested to provide financial assistance to support the independence struggle, especially in the form of money. Masyumi Party formed the so-called Fonds Sabilillah as an effort to attract financial support from Muslims. The campaigns to request financial aid from Muslims were carried out, one of which was through advertisement in *Boelan Sabit*. Masyumi Party in its advert in *Boelan Sabit*, 10 January 1946, hoped for “maximum assistance” from Muslims throughout Indonesia especially to strengthen Sabilillah and Hizboelloh. The money was expected to be delivered to the Masyumi head office in Setjodiningratan 1, Yogyakarta.⁴³

‘Ulamā’ and the Independence for Struggle

In the pre-war era, ‘*ulamā*’ (Muslim scholars) were identical with religious teachers who taught their students with religious education in centers of religious education such as *surau* (small mosque) or *pesantren* (Islamic boarding school). They almost entirely focused on educating people to understand religious teachings. Only a few of them were involved in political affairs. Dutch policies limited the movement of religious teachers, including via 1905 and 1925 Teacher Ordinance, Hajj passport policy, and screening of returning pilgrims from Mecca. These had narrowed the space for religious teachers to be involved in matters beyond their mosques.

However, the arrival of the Japanese enabled Muslim scholars to take part in managing the community, even though in the context of supporting Japan’s war effort in the Pacific. This can be seen, among other things, in the involvement of Indonesian scholars in Japan-established organizations. After the Japanese defeat and the proclamation of Indonesian independence, the influential scholars’ society repositioned themselves, this time as supporters of the independent Indonesian state.

Boelan Sabit proposed the need to unite two important elements in Indonesian society, namely Muslim scholars and Western-educated intellectuals. A writer named Matapatjar wrote in *Boelan Sabit* that every group in Indonesian society must contribute to the Republic of Indonesia in accordance with their respective backgrounds. The writers, he explained, contributed by writing in newspapers and

⁴³ “Fonds Sabilillah,” *Boelan Sabit*, 10 January 1946.

magazines, while the agitators contributed with their voices to make people aware. The organizers, he continued, struggled to arrange the steps of struggle, whereas the wealthy people struggled by donating their wealth and the knights struggled with their blood and soul. The other two important parties were Muslim scholars and intellectuals. The ‘*ulama*’ had the role of “being the leader” while the intellectuals “became promoters, holding the steering wheel responsible for the nation and their homeland”. These two groups, said Matapatjar, must unite “to organize the people’s energy in facing this fierce struggle”.⁴⁴

He continued:

With the unity between ‘*Ulama*’ and intellectuals, one can guarantee the firm unity of the people. Therefore, intellectuals, who are full of modern knowledge, and ‘*Ulama*’, who are always learning the contents of the Quran that are full of knowledge and sciences, such as natural sciences, medical science, astronomy, social sciences, political science, social sciences, etc. must unite to bring and guide the people to a direction of progress and to uphold the eternal the State of the Republic of Indonesia. ⁴⁵

In the GPII conference in late December 1945, Chairperson of the Yogyakarta Regional KNIP, Moh. Saleh, also gave a speech, which was then published in *Boelan Sabit*. He said that after observing various battlefronts he found that the role of the *kyai* (traditional Muslim clerics) at the time of independence, differed from their role in the past. Previously, he said, the clerics’ major task was to memorize the so-called “*fa ‘ala jaf’oeloe*” (Arabic verbs). However, now in the age of independence the situation had changed. The clerics left their *surau* and *pesantren* to be involved in handling socio-political matters. He believed that the clerics had at least two important contributions. ⁴⁶ First, they were deemed skillful at managing the newly born state in their capacity as residents and regents. Second, they became “heroes who cleanse rioters and enemies”. For Moh. Saleh, the *kyai* and *santri* (Muslim students) were nothing but “flowers on the battlefield today”. The *kyai*

⁴⁴ “Oelama dan intelek bersatoelah oentock menegakkan negara Repoeblik Indonesia,”, *Boelan Sabit*, 26 December 1945.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ ‘Rapat oemoem moe’tamar GPII.

in the independence war, Moh. Saleh added, had dual functions, namely “war heroes” and “excellent state experts”.⁴⁷

The *kyai* themselves did not only play a role in calling for resistance against the British and the Dutch. Even though they were already old in term of age, they were still willing to join training for preparation to enter the battlefield. One of such training was held by *Sabilillah* on 1 January 1946 at his headquarters. A report in *Boelan Sabit* mentioned that at that time there were at least 300 *kyai* who were trained in weapons handling and military tactics. They were mostly old people, which was marked by their beards (they were then dubbed “*Barisan Djenggot*” [The Beards Front]).⁴⁸

Why did these old people join the training for battle? One of the *kyai* asserted that he joined the training in order to “understand how to beat Gurkha and NICA”. After this training, he intended going to Semarang to hamper NICA and Gurkha movement. He was ready to live and to die; he said, if he died he would be a martyr, and if he was still alive then he would live in freedom. He had prepared his own weapon to face the NICA and Gurkha troops: sharpened bamboo spears.⁴⁹

Since January 1946, *Sabilillah* Surakarta had even organized special military training for elders, dubbed as “*peradjoerit barisan oeban*” (gray warrior soldiers). They were generally aged 50 years and above. In his report entitled “*Barisan Sabilillah*” (*Sabilillah* Front), *Boelan Sabit* reported that they were trained by a Republican military major who understood military science. In the afternoon they were trained to use hand grenades, incendiary device, and spears and how to carry out attacks on the enemy. They were portrayed as elders who had young spirit because they wanted to practice their military drill which required strong body like that of young people. In addition, *Boelan Sabit* illustrated them as devout elders, because at night after military training they “face God with prayer and reflection”.⁵⁰

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ “Latihan Barisan Sabilillah,” *Boelan Sabit*, 2 January 1946.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ “Barisan Sabilillah,” *Boelan Sabit*, 10 January 1946.

Conclusion

After researching the *Boelan Sabit* newspaper's various articles for a month (from 15 December 1945 to 14 January 1946), it was found that this newspaper incessantly called for Indonesian Muslims to defend Indonesian independence from Dutch colonialism and British occupation. This call, according to the newspaper, was based on both Islam and nationalism. *Boelan Sabit* ensured its Muslim readers that the period of independence was a time to strengthen the two identities inherent in them, namely a son of Indonesia and a Muslim. This newspaper, by taking the legitimacy and inspiration to maintain Indonesian independence from the Quran and other Islamic teachings, constantly voiced that Indonesian Muslims upheld the Republic of Indonesia whose existence was challenged by the Dutch and the British. Besides, it believed that adhering Islam correctly would be an important thing to do to bring the postwar world to peace and progress.

To support Indonesian independence from foreign attackers, some methods used by *Bulan Sabit* to express this standpoint were, first, it linked various stories taken from Islamic traditions to the struggle of Indonesian Muslims to maintain their country's independence. For example, on 15 December 1945, when Muslims all over the world commemorated 10th Muharram (Ashura Day). For *Boelan Sabit*, Indonesian Muslims who at that time were struggling to maintain their independence must learn from the messages brought by the commemoration of Ashura Day, including by studying the great sacrifices of the prophets to reach happiness. Second, it emphasized that the Indonesian people were not alone in their fighting to defend their independence. They had many fellows throughout Asia and Africa. Third, it criticized the failure of the Western countries to fulfil their pre-war promises, which stressed that colonized nations were allowed to determine their future.

As a media for public literacy, this newspaper not only voiced the views of its mother organization (Masyumi), but also sought to educate its Muslim readers, especially concerning on matters of state. There were not many Indonesians could read and write Latin letters, and even fewer were politically literate. Thus, GPII, as the publisher of *Boelan Sabit*, made this magazine a medium for sharing information about the modern political concepts and information about political developments within and outside the country.

Judging from its reports and views, *Boelan Sabit* continuously campaigned that a pious Muslim can at the same time be a patriotic Indonesian son. In its Article of Association, the GPII clearly stated that they aimed both to uphold Islam and to defend the Republic of Indonesia. They accepted Pancasila and believed in a representative democracy. And, to prove that the combination of pious Muslims and patriotic sons of Indonesia was real, *Boelan Sabit* repeatedly reported on the sacrifices of Islamic youth in the fight against the Dutch and the British troops. Reports of Indonesian nationalist newspapers on the events of the death of Indonesian fighters generally focused on the sacrifice of the young men in the context of the defence of the motherland. However, *Boelan Sabit* combined the defense of the motherland with the sacrifice of a martyr to defend his religion. Therefore, for Masyumi and *Boelan Sabit*, an ideal type of Muslim at that time was a man devout to his religion, being kind to others, loving the country and willing to sacrifice his life for his religion and nation.

In addition to the youth, *Boelan Sabit* believed that the presence and contribution of ‘*ulama*’ (Muslim scholars) were indispensable in the struggle for maintaining Indonesian independence. In the past the scholars may only concentrated on religious matters, but now they had taken part in social and political matters as well. They were reported joining in military drill and weapons handling. More importantly, given their educational background, they were illustrated to have sufficient knowledge and skills not only about the management of the people but especially the management of the state. ‘*Ulamā*’, thus, were redefined by *Boelan Sabit*, by equating them with intellectuals and administrators.

This research shows that Indonesian nationalism in its formative years must be understood in the context of its relation to Islamic ideas. This is evident in Islamic oriented print media such as *Boelan Sabit*. Reading *Boelan Sabit* enable us to comprehend how the idea of nationalism was combined with the idea of Islam in the context of the Indonesian war of independence and was then expressed in Islamic oriented newspapers. []

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