Oetoesan Hindia and the Making of Regional Political Solidarities in Java and the Ottoman World 1914–1920

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Abstract

Between 1914 and 1920, the Surabaya newspaper *Oetoesan Hindia* brought local grievances in colonial Java into conversation with developments in the Ottoman world. This article examines that relationship as a problem in regional history, asking how a newspaper associated with Sarekat Islam connected unequal experiences of colonial rule with wider projects of Muslim solidarity. Using the historical method of heuristics, source criticism, interpretation, and historiography, it analyses newspaper reports on agrarian expansion, police violence, legal inequality, food shortages, labour organization, Islamic education, and Ottoman affairs. The evidence reveals overlapping rather than successive political geographies. Surabaya provided the institutional centre of publication; reports from other Jnese localities made injustice a shared political concern; and Ottoman sovereignty supplied a language of collective dignity extending beyond colonial boundaries. World War I intensified these connections without creating them. By 1920, calls for local organizational initiative under central leadership coexisted with labour negotiation and public defence of the caliphate. The newspaper helped articulate national consciousness through regional connections and religious affiliation. Its rhetoric nevertheless cannot establish uniform reader responses, completed fundraising, or the factual accuracy of every reported allegation. The contribution is an account of how colonial Java became politically legible through connections among local experience, interurban organization, and a wider Muslim world.

Keywords: *regional history; colonial Java; Surabaya; Oetoesan Hindia; Sarekat Islam; Ottoman world*

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Introduction

In April 1914, readers of *Oetoesan Hindia* encountered criticism of plantation expansion and its consequences for ordinary people. In May, the same newspaper urged Muslims to assist the Ottoman state. These concerns occupied different geographical settings, yet they belonged to a common political conversation. Land, water, employment, religion, and sovereignty were presented as questions about who could claim protection and whose welfare mattered. A newspaper published in Surabaya offered a means of relating these questions across distances that neither village life nor the territorial boundaries of the Dutch East Indies could adequately contain.[1]

The relationship deserves attention as regional history. Java was a principal arena of Sarekat Islam's expanding organizational networks, but it was not a self-contained setting for political change. Its towns, commercial communities, agricultural districts, and administrative institutions were connected through the movement of money, information, and people. Muslim affiliations also directed attention beyond the colony, especially towards the Ottoman state and the caliphate. Regional history here concerns the historical production of connections among places: how a political public could understand an incident in Bangil, a shortage in Bodjonegoro, a congress in Bandung, and a threat to Ottoman sovereignty as matters of related concern. The relevant region was neither identical with the later Indonesian nation nor exhausted by the geography of the umma.

Oetoesan Hindia emerged from the urban and commercial environment of Surabaya. Muslim Arab and indigenous merchants supported the publishing company Setija Oesaha, while H.O.S. Tjokroaminoto's editorial leadership tied the newspaper closely to Sarekat Islam. Its development exemplified the interdependence of the vernacular press and modern political organization. Organizational activity supplied reports and arguments; publication carried them beyond individual meetings and made them available for further discussion. Advertising and subscriptions also sustained a commercial enterprise whose political functions depended on material resources. The paper's history therefore belongs simultaneously to urban history, the history of commerce, and the history of anticolonial association.[2]

The broader setting was an unequal colonial order undergoing institutional and social change. The expansion of education and employment helped create new indigenous readers and writers, while Malay offered a medium for addressing audiences across local linguistic boundaries. Existing histories of the press emphasize its contribution to political awareness and national organization. That contribution was

[1] "Pro en Contra: Berdjenis-djenis pemandangan di doenia orang ketjil dengan kemakmoerannja," *Oetoesan Hindia*, April 29, 1914, no. 82, 1. National Library of Indonesia, Khastara digital collection; "Seroean bagi Kaum Muslimin," *Oetoesan Hindia*, May 20, 1914, 1. National Library of Indonesia, Khastara digital collection.

[2] Takashi Shiraishi, *An Age in Motion: Popular Radicalism in Java, 1912–1926* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1990), 71–74; Zuhrotul Latifah, *Sarekat Islam pelopor gerakan kebangsaan*, ed. Muhammad Wildan (Yogyakarta: Adab Press, 2020), 20–21.

substantial, but it must be reconstructed through the particular settings in which newspapers operated. The category bumiputera identified indigenous inhabitants within a colonial hierarchy; it did not erase differences of occupation, location, education, or political outlook. Similarly, newspapers serving European or Chinese communities were participants in a differentiated publishing environment, rather than mere background to an already unified national press.[3]

World War I made these relations more urgent. Dutch neutrality did not insulate the East Indies from disruptions to shipping, trade, supplies, or political information. The Ottoman state's involvement in the conflict gave the war a particular significance for Muslim readers, who could interpret its fortunes through ideas of religious brotherhood and collective dignity. The years after the war brought continued economic difficulty and disputes over the direction of political organization. The period 1914–1920 thus permits an examination of connections already visible before wartime Ottoman participation, their intensification during the conflict, and their reformulation in postwar Java.[4]

The historiography provides several starting points. Ahmat Adam places the vernacular press within the emergence of Indonesian political consciousness, while Takashi Shiraishi reconstructs the interaction of newspapers, meetings, organizations, and popular radicalism in Java. Kees van Dijk demonstrates the colony's entanglement in World War I. Together, these approaches make it possible to treat political communication as part of historical social relations, rather than as a detached succession of editorial opinions. They also suggest that national mobilization cannot be understood solely through elite programmes or the eventual achievement of independence.[5]

Studies specifically concerned with *Oetoesan Hindia* have emphasized its association with Sarekat Islam, resistance to colonialism, and expressions of Islamic solidarity. Rama Narendra examines moral and material support for the Ottoman state during 1914–1918. Nasya Nafisa addresses the newspaper's role in anticolonial opposition during 1914–1919. Research on Islamic press language by Makyun Subuki and colleagues identifies education, organization, welfare, and literacy as dimensions of modernity across a different newspaper corpus. These studies establish that Islamic affiliation and political change were closely connected, while leaving scope for a more

[3] Ahmat Adam, *Sejarah awal pers dan kebangkitan kesadaran keindonesiaan* (Jakarta: Hasta Mitra, 2003), 20, 36; Danil Mahmud Chaniago and Umi Rusmiani Umairah, "Sejarah pers kolonial di Indonesia," *Khazanah: Jurnal Sejarah dan Kebudayaan Islam* (2018), https://doi.org/10.15548/khazanah.v0i0.72; Retno Widianto, Djono, and Suryo Ediyono, "The Role of the Bumiputera Press in the Indonesian National Movement in the Early 20th Century," *HISTORIA: Jurnal Program Studi Pendidikan Sejarah* 13, no. 2 (2025), 649, 651.

[4] Kees van Dijk, *Hindia Belanda dan Perang Dunia I* (Jakarta: KITLV–Yayasan Obor Indonesia, 2011), 132–35; Yeti Setiawati and Samsudin, "Gerakan politik Sarekat Islam di Jawa tahun 1916–1921," *Historia Madania: Jurnal Ilmu Sejarah* 4, no. 2 (2020): 355–72, https://doi.org/10.15575/hm.v4i2.9502.

[5] Ahmat Adam, *Sejarah awal pers dan kebangkitan kesadaran keindonesiaan* (Jakarta: Hasta Mitra, 2003); Takashi Shiraishi, *An Age in Motion: Popular Radicalism in Java, 1912–1926* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1990); Kees van Dijk, *Hindia Belanda dan Perang Dunia I* (Jakarta: KITLV–Yayasan Obor Indonesia, 2011).

focused account of the geographical relationships through which those connections were expressed.[6]

The research gap is consequently relational rather than a claim that the newspaper or Islamic solidarity has been overlooked. Accounts centred on organizational development, colonial resistance, or wartime sympathy can leave local grievances and overseas affiliations in separate explanatory compartments. This article asks how *Oetoesan Hindia*'s reporting connected them, and how those connections changed between 1914 and 1920. Its objective is to reconstruct the forms of national-movement reporting and Islamic solidarity while explaining their relationship to colonial policy, wartime developments, and regional organization. The contribution is a reading of colonial Java as an interconnected political arena, with Surabaya as a publishing centre whose significance depended on relationships extending across the island and beyond it.

The argument is that the newspaper made disparate experiences legible within overlapping solidarities. Reports about agrarian exploitation, coercion, and unequal law offered a vocabulary of common injury. Appeals to Muslim brotherhood expanded the moral community within which injury could be recognized. Sarekat Islam provided an organizational means of coordinating these claims among localities. Ottoman affairs, in turn, supplied an external reference for dignity and sovereignty. These relationships supported emerging national consciousness without requiring religious solidarity to disappear or every local struggle to adopt the same political strategy. Their historical importance lies in the effort to connect scales of concern, whose practical effectiveness must still be assessed against the limits of the evidence.

Method

The study follows the historical method through heuristics, source criticism, interpretation, and historiography. Its primary evidence consists of selected *Oetoesan Hindia* issues from 1914–1920 preserved through the National Library of Indonesia's Khastara digital collection and its audiovisual newspaper service. The newspaper material includes political commentary, organizational announcements, reports of meetings, complaints about local conditions, and international news. Secondary works on the vernacular press, Sarekat Islam, colonial Islam policy, agrarian relations, and the war provide context and interpretative comparison. This is a historical reading of a

[6] Rama Narendra, "Solidaritas Islam dalam surat kabar Oetoesan Hindia pada Perang Dunia I tahun 1914–1918" (Universitas Airlangga, 2022); Nasya Nafisa, "Surat kabar Oetoesan Hindia sebagai media perlawanan terhadap kolonialisme tahun 1914–1919" (Universitas Siliwangi, 2025), https://repositori.unsil.ac.id/id/eprint/2739/; Makyun Subuki, Rosida Erowati, Neneng Nurjanah, and Syihaabul Hudaa, "Gagasan modernitas dalam pers Islam di Hindia Belanda awal abad XX (1915–1934)," *GHANCARAN: Jurnal Pendidikan Bahasa dan Sastra Indonesia* 5, no. 2 (2024): 289–308, https://doi.org/10.19105/ghancaran.v5i2.9781.

selected documentary corpus; no statistical measure of the complete newspaper run or representative survey of readership is asserted.[7]

Heuristics involved identifying material relevant to the national movement and Islamic solidarity across the period. The principal lines of enquiry were colonial inequality, social and economic conditions, organizational action, and relations with the Ottoman world. These questions guide close historical reading of the newspaper articles rather than quantitative coding. The evidence is sufficiently varied to establish recurring concerns, but its distribution is uneven. Particularly rich material from 1914, 1916, and 1918–1920 supports comparison between prewar appeals, wartime argument, and postwar organization. It does not justify assigning equal significance to every intervening year or assuming uninterrupted editorial consistency.

External criticism examines publication identity, dates, issue numbers, publisher information, and the condition of surviving copies. The archival descriptions and reproduced mastheads help distinguish documents produced at the time from later accounts. Surviving pages may be faded, torn, or incomplete. Such damage affects the recoverability of a passage and the precision of its citation even when the publication's identity is clear. Calendar dates are therefore distinguished from the dates of reported events. Issue numbers and page references are included only when supported by the available record. Where an exact publication date remains contradictory, citation is restricted to the securely identifiable year rather than resolved through conjecture.

Internal criticism asks who speaks, what genre carries the statement, and what purpose publication serves. *Oetoesan Hindia*'s association with Sarekat Islam shaped its selection of grievances and its appeals to readers. A report of police violence supplies evidence of an allegation and its political presentation, but does not independently establish every action described. An appeal for donations demonstrates an attempt at mobilization, rather than the sum collected or transferred. Reported meeting attendance is treated as a newspaper estimate. Malay quotations and paraphrases are read in their historical context, with attention to persuasive language and the distinction between an attributed speaker's position and an editorial commitment.

Interpretation combines chronological comparison with thematic analysis. It examines how grievances in different Javanese settings were related to organizational programmes and how overseas events were given local significance. Harold D. Lasswell's communication model helps distinguish speakers, messages, channels, intended audiences, and anticipated effects. His concepts of surveillance, correlation, and the transmission of social heritage are used as retrospective analytical aids. They are not attributed to the historical actors, and they do not substitute for evidence of reception.

[7] Sulasman, *Metodologi penelitian sejarah* (Bandung: Pustaka Setia, 2014), 93; Helius Sjamsuddin, *Metodologi sejarah* (Yogyakarta: Ombak, 2007), 86–88; Kuntowijoyo, *Metodologi sejarah*, 2nd ed. (Yogyakarta: Tiara Wacana, 2003), 84–85; Louis Gottschalk, *Mengerti sejarah: Pengantar metode sejarah* (Jakarta: Yayasan Penerbit Universitas Indonesia, 1975), 118–20. Primary collection: *Oetoesan Hindia*, selected issues, 1914–1920, National Library of Indonesia, Khastara digital collection and audiovisual service, eighth floor.

Historiography then arranges the findings into an account of continuity and change grounded in particular documents and places.[8]

Results

Surabaya and the infrastructure of interurban politics

The establishment of *Oetoesan Hindia* was connected to commercial antagonisms in Surabaya in 1912. Disputes involving Chinese merchants and Muslim Arab and indigenous traders extended into advertising and publication. The withdrawal of advertising from Chinese-owned newspapers helped create an incentive for an alternative publishing enterprise. Hasan Ali Soerati and associated merchants established Setija Oesaha, which began publishing *Oetoesan Hindia* in December 1912. The reported capital of 50,000 guilders drew on merchants in Surabaya, Semarang, Pekalongan, Batavia, and Bandung. Its commercial foundations were therefore interurban from the beginning, even though the newspaper's editorial centre was Surabaya.[9]

This origin matters because political communication depended on relationships that predated a fully articulated national programme. A publishing company could consolidate economic interests, provide an alternative forum for public argument, and sustain an organizational press. The alignment with Sarekat Islam was strengthened by the participation of its members and leaders in the enterprise. Tjokroaminoto's editorial role further linked publication to organizational authority. The newspaper did not emerge simply because nationalist ideas required a vehicle; commercial conflict, associational activity, and editorial leadership together created an institution capable of circulating them.

By 1914, the paper was identified with Tjokroaminoto's direction and with editorial personnel including Tirtodanoedjo and Sosrobroto. Published five times weekly, it combined opinion, local news, overseas information, and advertisements. Malay connected its political vocabulary to readers beyond Surabaya, while Sarekat Islam and merchant networks facilitated distribution. Its pages included sections concerning conditions in the Indies and telegraphic international news. This arrangement placed organizational reports alongside information about trade, daily life, and the wider world. Political education occurred within a newspaper that readers could approach for several purposes, rather than within a purely doctrinal publication.[10]

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[8] Harold D. Lasswell, "The Structure and Function of Communication in Society," *İletişim Kuram ve Araştırma Dergisi*, no. 24 (2007): 215–28. The 2007 publication reproduces the essay originally published in 1948; page references here refer to the reproduced version.

[9] Abdurrachman Surjomihardjo, *Beberapa segi perkembangan sejarah pers di Indonesia* (Jakarta: Buku Kompas, 2002), 53; Taufik Rahzen, *Seabad pers kebangsaan: 1907–2007* (Yogyakarta: Boeker, 2007), 83–84; Takashi Shiraishi, *An Age in Motion: Popular Radicalism in Java, 1912–1926* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1990), 71–74.

[10] Taufik Rahzen, *Seabad pers kebangsaan: 1907–2007* (Yogyakarta: Boeker, 2007), 84–85; "Kabar Turky," *Oetoesan Hindia*, June 18, 1914, no. 115, 5. National Library of Indonesia, Khastara digital collection.

The interurban press environment also permitted arguments to circulate between differently positioned newspapers. On 11 October 1919, *De Locomotief* reported a denial carried by *Oetoesan Hindia* concerning a proposed Sarekat Hindia associated with reports from Solo. It observed that Sarekat Islam had more urgent matters to address. This is evidence that the movement press was read and represented within the Dutch-language press as well. The circulation of a denial does not establish agreement between the papers, but it shows that public argument crossed institutional and linguistic boundaries. Surabaya's political voice entered a wider field in which other editors selected, interpreted, and contested it.[11]

Agrarian welfare and Muslim affiliation before wartime escalation

The article "Pro en Contra," published on 29 April 1914, challenged the benefits claimed for plantation development under long-term lease arrangements. It disputed the proposition that erfpacht industry was a blessing for ordinary people and argued that little of its profit reached them. The article also associated plantation expansion with the cutting of trees in upland areas and the diminution of water sources used by agricultural communities. These were claims about distribution and livelihood, not simply objections to foreign ownership in the abstract. Land was presented as the basis of subsistence and social security, as well as an asset within an export economy.[12]

The regional implications of this argument lay in its relation of city-based publication to rural experience. A Surabaya newspaper made plantation expansion a public concern that could be understood beyond any single estate or village. Its invocation of orang ketjil, ordinary or "small" people, established a social category through which unequal benefits could be discussed. The reported connection among tree clearance, water, and farming also broadened the meaning of economic injury. It directed attention to changes in the conditions of rural life. The evidence supports an analysis of the newspaper's critique; it does not provide independent measurements of deforestation, lost land, or declining water supply.

Ottoman affairs were already present in the paper's political geography before the later wartime crisis. A report of 19 February 1914 concerning the strengthening of the Ottoman state described railway travel towards Medina as easing the hardships of pilgrimage. Ottoman infrastructure was thus represented through a practice with direct religious significance for Muslim readers. The report's importance is not that it proves new transport construction in that month, but that it made an overseas state's capacity to

[11] "De S.I. en de Islam," *De Locomotief*, October 11, 1919. The report cites a denial published in *Oetoesan Hindia*; the article title is retained as recorded in the surviving citation.

[12] "Pro en Contra: Berdjenis-djenis pemandangan di doenia orang ketjil dengan kemakmoerannja," *Oetoesan Hindia*, April 29, 1914, no. 82, 1. National Library of Indonesia, Khastara digital collection; Masyrulhushomad and Sudrajat, "Penerapan Agrarische Wet (Undang-Undang Agraria) 1870: Periode awal," *HISTORIA: Jurnal Program Studi Pendidikan Sejarah* 7, no. 2 (2019): 159–74, 162–64, 168; Muhammad Tauchid, *Masalah agraria sebagai masalah penghidupan dan kemakmuran rakyat Indonesia* (Yogyakarta: STPN Press, 2009), 24–26.

facilitate pilgrimage relevant to public discussion in the Indies. An earlier report on Aya Sofia and subsequent items under "Kabar Turkij" likewise placed Ottoman institutions within the newspaper's field of attention.[13]

On 20 May 1914, "Seroean bagi Kaum Muslimin" extended an appeal for support for the Ottoman navy to Muslims beyond the Ottoman population. It explicitly requested voluntary financial contributions. The appeal translated a state's military needs into a shared religious obligation and addressed readers in the Indies as members of the wider community being summoned. "Kabar Turky" on 18 June carried further information about Ottoman political and military affairs. Taken together, these items show that the war intensified an existing concern. They also distinguish the expression of transregional affiliation from its measurable material results: the appeal provides no verified total of donations received.[14]

War news and the political language of shared vulnerability

After Ottoman participation in the war, the newspaper's arguments became more insistent about the relationship between Ottoman survival and Muslim dignity. "Saja Poenja Fikiran Redactur?" of 5 November 1914 presented Ottoman sovereignty as a remaining sign of Islam's independence. This was a political interpretation framed through religious identification. Readers were asked to regard the state's continued sovereignty as more than a matter of European diplomacy. The contrast between a colonized population in the Indies and a Muslim state still exercising independent power gave Ottoman affairs a significance that ordinary foreign news could not convey.[15]

The two instalments of "Fikiran dan Seroeannja Seorang Islam," published on 16 and 17 November, made that relationship personal and ethical. The writer described Muslims as brothers in this world and the hereafter, expressed concern about wartime suffering, and questioned the reliability of European telegrams seen as hostile to Turkey and Germany. The second instalment encouraged aid through Al Hilal Alachmar, the Red Crescent, in a manner consistent with Dutch neutrality. Solidarity here combined a critique of information with humanitarian action. It did not necessarily require readers to abandon the colony's formally neutral position or endorse every military objective of the Central Powers.[16]

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[13] "Tegoeh Keradjaan Turkije," *Oetoesan Hindia*, February 19, 1914. National Library of Indonesia, Khastara digital collection; "Mesdjid Besar Aja-Sofia," *Oetoesan Hindia*, January 26, 1914. National Library of Indonesia, Khastara digital collection. The railway item is treated as a contemporary representation of pilgrimage infrastructure, not a verified construction chronology.

[14] "Seroean bagi Kaum Muslimin," *Oetoesan Hindia*, May 20, 1914, 1. National Library of Indonesia, Khastara digital collection; "Kabar Turky," *Oetoesan Hindia*, June 18, 1914, no. 115, 5. National Library of Indonesia, Khastara digital collection.

[15] "Saja Poenja Fikiran Redactur?," *Oetoesan Hindia*, November 5, 1914. National Library of Indonesia, Khastara digital collection.

[16] "Fikiran dan Seroeannja Seorang Islam," *Oetoesan Hindia*, November 16, 1914, no. 221, 1. National Library of Indonesia, Khastara digital collection; "Fikiran dan Seroeannja Seorang Islam," *Oetoesan Hindia*, November 17, 1914, no. 222. National Library of Indonesia, Khastara digital collection.

This distinction is crucial to the chronology and character of mobilization. The May appeal concerned Ottoman naval support before the later escalation described in the November items. The November appeal addressed suffering and relief within the language of neutrality. Both called for material assistance, but they did so in different circumstances and for differently described purposes. Grouping all contributions as a single wartime campaign would obscure these distinctions. The evidence instead demonstrates several ways in which the newspaper sought to turn distant events into obligations for readers in the Indies.

"Hindia dengan Peperangan," published on 19 November 1914, expressed anxiety that Ottoman defeat would place the Muslim world in danger. Its argument made the fortunes of Britain, France, and Russia relevant to the perceived security of Muslims far from the battlefields. The same day's "Perserikatan Balkan Baroe" evaluated international alignments through their possible consequences for Ottoman power and the caliphate. These items demonstrate a moral and political geography in which distance did not determine relevance. A conflict thousands of kilometres away could be interpreted as affecting the standing of a community living under a different imperial authority.[17]

Such reporting also reveals the newspaper's agency in selecting geopolitical meanings. It did not merely relay all available international information with equal emphasis. Ottoman institutions, anticipated dangers, and claims of Muslim unity offered a framework for interpreting the conflict. Expressions of sympathy for Turkey and Germany should consequently be read as historically situated choices. The newspaper's suspicion of Allied information remains evidence of partisan judgement, not proof that every report it challenged was false. In April 1915, coverage of the attack on the Dardanelles continued the attention to Ottoman wartime vulnerability, linking military developments to the established language of solidarity.[18]

Coercion and the extension of local grievances

Local encounters with authority provided another basis for common political concern. "Dimana Keadilan?" reported the case of H. Moekti in Surabaya in 1915. According to the account, a police official struck him while seeking information about Moksin, and Moekti remained ill for two weeks. The narrative made physical vulnerability and the difficulty of obtaining redress part of an argument about justice. The significance of the report lies partly in the question posed by its title: whether the legal order could protect an indigenous person dealing with officials. It offered readers a particular experience through which unequal authority could be considered.[19]

[17] "Hindia dengan Peperangan," *Oetoesan Hindia*, November 19, 1914, no. 224, 5. National Library of Indonesia, Khastara digital collection; "Perserikatan Balkan Baroe," *Oetoesan Hindia*, November 19, 1914, 1. National Library of Indonesia, Khastara digital collection.

[18] "Penjerangan Dardanellen," *Oetoesan Hindia*, April 28, 1915. National Library of Indonesia, Khastara digital collection.

[19] "Dimana Keadilan?," *Oetoesan Hindia*, 1915, 1. National Library of Indonesia, audiovisual newspaper service, eighth floor. The exact publication date is unresolved: the dated references give

The report "Peraniaja'an Keras dari Pehak Politie," dated 26 April 1916, carried allegations by Pa' Poeah from Kedoengbanteng, Bangil, concerning interrogation in an animal-theft case. He described being beaten, chained, and pressured to confess. The newspaper challenged whether government adequately safeguarded justice. This report brought a locality outside Surabaya into the paper's public arena and gave an alleged victim a position within political argument. The analysis does not presume his innocence or establish an adjudicated account of the interrogation. It identifies the newspaper's challenge to coercive procedure and its presentation of an indigenous person's claim to protection.[20]

These accounts linked personal treatment to a structure of unequal power without making every official action interchangeable. Moekti's case concerned questioning by a police official; Pa' Poeah's allegation involved an assistent-wedono and pressure to confess. Their publication placed distinct experiences alongside wider criticism of colonial law. A 1915 article criticizing a Dutch newspaper similarly defended indigenous workers and Sarekat Islam members against degrading treatment. In this public language, dignity became something that could be claimed collectively even when the reported injury was individual. The movement press's political intervention consisted in selecting such incidents and refusing to leave them as isolated private misfortunes.[21]

Organization and the social meaning of Islamic unity in 1916

During 1916, the paper developed arguments connecting brotherhood to practical social organization. "Persatoean Muslimin," published on 15 April, described Muslims as inhabitants of a wide world extending from east to west. It also diagnosed a failure of emotional and practical connection among dispersed believers. Its appeal urged readers to give the word "brother" active meaning through mutual assistance and protection against humiliation or injury. The document is therefore evidence of an effort to create solidarity, rather than confirmation that such solidarity already operated uniformly. Its insistence on unity also exposes the divisions it hoped to overcome.[22]

"Kemadjoean dan Agama Islam," published in 1916, challenged the claim that Islam obstructed progress. It located backwardness in failures of understanding and practice, and urged assistance in good rather than wrongdoing. Its discussion of mutual help extended to humanity more broadly. This argument made Islamic identification compatible with education, cooperation, and social improvement. It also complicates a reading of the paper's religious politics solely through antagonism to other communities.

November 1 and an incompatible July date. The year and article identification are retained without assigning a conjectural day.

[20] "Peraniaja'an Keras dari Pehak Politie," *Oetoesan Hindia*, April 26, 1916, 1. National Library of Indonesia, audiovisual newspaper service, eighth floor.

[21] "Soerat Kabar Belanda jang Habis Akalnja," *Oetoesan Hindia*, December 1, 1915, no. 229. National Library of Indonesia, Khastara digital collection.

[22] "Persatoean Muslimin," *Oetoesan Hindia*, April 15, 1916, 5. National Library of Indonesia, audiovisual newspaper service, eighth floor.

A language capable of defending Muslim collective dignity could also affirm wider human obligations, even though particular reports retained exclusionary or communal judgements.[23]

The report "Nationaal Congres Sarekat Islam di Bandoeng" of 23 June 1916 translated unity into an educational programme. It highlighted a proposed school for prospective Islamic teachers and called on readers to contribute resources. Concern about Christian missionary educational and social institutions supplied part of the immediate setting. The reported response was institution-building: Muslim communities were urged to acquire the personnel and resources required to sustain their own educational work. Brotherhood acquired an organizational horizon extending beyond sympathy or the duration of a meeting. The article demonstrates an initiative and an appeal, without by itself proving that the proposed school was subsequently established.[24]

The geographical significance of the Bandung report is the circulation of an organizational project through a newspaper in Surabaya. A congress could address concerns extending across local branches; publication could make those concerns accessible elsewhere and solicit participation. The word "national" in the congress title articulated an ambition to broaden political association within the Indies. That ambition did not replace Islamic identification, which supplied both the educational purpose and the language of contribution. Regional connections, religious solidarity, and emerging national consciousness were being worked out together, through projects whose realization depended on local resources.

Economic questions also entered cooperation across organizational lines. "Openbare Vergadering S.I. dan I.S.D.V." reported a 1916 meeting concerned with private estates, taxation, and the burdens borne by ordinary people. The report placed Sarekat Islam and the Indische Sociaal-Democratische Vereeniging within a shared forum for grievances. Private estates, or tanah partikelir, must be distinguished from the long-term leases criticized in the 1914 plantation article. Both could become political questions about land and obligation, but they represented different arrangements. Their juxtaposition in the newspaper widened the range of social experiences addressed by the movement without proving permanent agreement among the participating organizations.[25]

[23] "Kemadjoean dan Agama Islam," *Oetoesan Hindia*, 1916, 1. National Library of Indonesia, audiovisual newspaper service, eighth floor. Conflicting references give July 6 and July 16; the exact day is not established.

[24] "Nationaal Congres Sarekat Islam di Bandoeng," *Oetoesan Hindia*, June 23, 1916, 1. National Library of Indonesia, audiovisual newspaper service, eighth floor; Zuhrotul Latifah, *Sarekat Islam pelopor gerakan kebangsaan*, ed. Muhammad Wildan (Yogyakarta: Adab Press, 2020), 50.

[25] "Openbare Vergadering S.I. dan I.S.D.V.," *Oetoesan Hindia*, 1916, 1. National Library of Indonesia, audiovisual newspaper service, eighth floor.

Representation and inequality in 1918

The establishment of the Volksraad in 1918 supplied a further forum whose debates could be relayed to newspaper readers. Reporting on "Hokoem dan Justitie" on 20 July criticized differences in the legal treatment of Europeans and indigenous inhabitants. The paper argued that justice could not be achieved while those differences remained. This shifted public attention from an official's conduct to the categories through which colonial law governed populations. The claim demanded equality as a principle of government, even while its articulation took place through an institution with limited authority.[26]

The distinction between institutional speech and political achievement is essential. Public criticism inside the Volksraad could give grievances visibility, but visibility did not confer control over executive decisions. The newspaper's presentation of legal inequality shows how representative discussion could become part of an anticolonial political education. It also demonstrates that participation and scepticism were compatible. A forum created within the colonial order could be used to expose that order's limitations. The evidence does not warrant depicting the Volksraad as an effective sovereign legislature or assuming that the reported criticism produced an immediate legal reform.

"Igama Islam dalam Volksraad" reported Dr. Schmutzer's argument that Islam contained resources for social progress and did not inherently threaten public order. The article also criticized an economic orientation towards taking wealth from the Indies rather than improving the lives of its inhabitants. Its significance lies in the publication of a defence of Islam within representative debate, alongside a critique of colonial extraction. The newspaper made a statement from that institutional setting relevant to a readership whose religious identity was frequently implicated in questions of governance and security.[27]

Colonial policy towards Islam provides context for this intervention. Husnul Aqib Suminto and Jajat Burhanudin describe the importance of distinctions between religious observance, social life, and political mobilization within colonial approaches associated with Snouck Hurgronje. Those distinctions help explain why Islam could be tolerated as worship while its associational and political expressions attracted suspicion. The newspaper challenged the separation by portraying Muslim identity as a resource for public welfare and organized action. Its argument did not merely request freedom of

[26] "Hokoem dan Justitie," *Oetoesan Hindia*, July 20, 1918, no. 136, 1. National Library of Indonesia, audiovisual newspaper service, eighth floor.

[27] "Igama Islam dalam Volksraad," *Oetoesan Hindia*, July 14, 1918, 1. National Library of Indonesia, audiovisual newspaper service, eighth floor.

private belief; it defended Islam's legitimacy within the colony's social and political future.[28]

Administrative reform and subsistence after the war

On 15 October 1919, "Perobahan Pemerintahan!" questioned whether proposed administrative changes would give inhabitants greater power or tighten their subordination. The reported proposals involved enlarged powers for local officials. The article's concern was consequently about the direction of authority: whether reform transferred capacity towards governed populations or strengthened officials acting over them. Its criticism of officials who forgot their duties and behaved as masters made that distinction concrete. Administrative rearrangement could be presented as progress while preserving unequal relationships at the local level.[29]

The article also connects regional history to governance. Local administration was where broad claims of reform met everyday relations of dependence and command. The newspaper made proposed changes at that level intelligible as a question of political participation. It did not reject all institutional change; it tested change against the position of inhabitants. This is a different emphasis from reporting an assault, although the two concerns shared a suspicion of unchecked official power. Across these genres, the newspaper's critique moved between immediate injury and the institutional arrangements that made redress uncertain.

Food shortages brought another kind of vulnerability into view. "Ra'jat Bodjonegoro Bertereak!!!," published on 10 December 1919, described people seeking rice with empty baskets after government stocks were exhausted and new supplies had not arrived. The report's language conveyed hunger and frustration rather than treating scarcity as an impersonal fluctuation in trade. Its account associated access to food with the government's responsibility to secure subsistence. The effects of wartime and postwar disruption entered regional politics through a named locality and a staple whose absence directly threatened daily life.[30]

The report also contrasted indigenous hardship with the apparent availability of rice among Chinese traders. That contrast must be retained as the writer's claim and examined critically. It documents perceptions of unequal distribution and the communal framing of scarcity, but does not establish comparative inventories, deliberate withholding, or collective culpability. The distinction matters particularly because the newspaper's commercial origins already involved tension among trading communities. Its defence of vulnerable inhabitants could expose colonial inequality while also

[28] Husnul Aqib Suminto, *Politik Islam Hindia Belanda* (Jakarta: LP3ES, 1985), 30, 64–65; Jajat Burhanudin, "The Dutch Colonial Policy on Islam: Reading the Intellectual Journey of Snouck Hurgronje," *Al-Jami'ah* 52, no. 1 (2014): 25–58.

[29] "Perobahan Pemerintahan!," *Oetoesan Hindia*, October 15, 1919, no. 195, 1. National Library of Indonesia, Khastara digital collection.

[30] "Ra'jat Bodjonegoro Bertereak!!!," *Oetoesan Hindia*, December 10, 1919, no. 235, 2. National Library of Indonesia, Khastara digital collection.

reproducing socially divisive judgements. Such tensions are part of its history, rather than exceptions to be removed from an account of solidarity.

Bodjonegoro's reported shortage can be situated within the wider crisis of rice supply in Java during 1918–1921, but a regional context is not a substitute for local evidence. War-related disruption, rising prices, and the relationship between export production and food requirements explain why subsistence became an urgent political issue. They do not prove a single cause for every shortage. *Oetoesan Hindia*'s report demonstrates how the problem was narrated and made available for collective concern. Read alongside earlier arguments about land and ordinary people's welfare, it shows continuity in the political importance attached to the material conditions of life.[31]

Labour negotiation and coordinated solidarity in 1920

The issue of 8 March 1920 carried "Kebon dan Kaoem Boeroeh," including Ottolander's discussion of a workers' organization described as Persatoean Kaoem Boeroeh or Vereeniging der Arbeiders-Beweging. The improvement of workers' conditions supplied its stated purpose. References to Sarekat Islam figures and Semaoen placed labour association within the broader movement environment. The article therefore connected plantation labour to organized political life rather than presenting employment solely as a private contract between individual workers and employers.[32]

Its treatment of conflict was nevertheless qualified. Ottolander opposed the oppression of workers by capital and the reverse oppression of capital by workers, favouring negotiated cooperation. The publication of this argument exposes the range of political positions carried within the movement press. Concern for labour did not invariably entail revolutionary class struggle. Nor should one speaker's reported position be treated as a complete editorial programme for the newspaper. The evidence supports a more precise conclusion: *Oetoesan Hindia* furnished space for organized labour's claims and for debate about the means of securing improvement.

"Ma'loemat kepada Sekalian Kaoem S.I. di Hindia," issued on 4 June 1920, gave a more explicitly systemic account of colonial problems. It located defects in regulations and law rather than only in officials. It also described local Sarekat Islam branches as units expected to develop their own judgement while observing rules and central leadership. This formulation combined initiative with coordination. Local conditions required practical decisions, while organizational unity supplied a means of connecting those decisions to wider aims. The announcement articulated a political geography of

[31] Ahmad Ibrahim Zuhad, "Kebijakan pemerintah Hindia Belanda terhadap krisis beras di Pulau Jawa tahun 1918–1921" (UIN Syarif Hidayatullah Jakarta, 2024), 20–21; Kees van Dijk, *Hindia Belanda dan Perang Dunia I* (Jakarta: KITLV–Yayasan Obor Indonesia, 2011), 135.

[32] "Kebon dan Kaoem Boeroeh," *Oetoesan Hindia*, March 8, 1920, no. 47, 1. National Library of Indonesia, Khastara digital collection. The date and number are also visible in the reproduced masthead.

branches rather than a demand that every locality merely reproduce commands from the centre.[33]

Postwar concern for the Ottoman caliphate coexisted with this consolidation. "Protest dari Pihak Kaoem Islam," published in 1920, reported a large Sukabumi meeting organized through Central Sarekat Islam and the local branch, with Tjokroaminoto and Abdoel Moeis present. Attendance was reported at approximately 9,000. The caliphate was represented as a surviving sign of Muslim unity, and humiliation of the Muslim world was connected to the dignity of the population in the Indies. This was a defence of an institution perceived as threatened after the war; it must not be confused with the later abolition of the caliphate.[34]

The Sukabumi account brings together the article's central regional relationships. A local gathering was linked to central leadership, an overseas institution, and a newspaper published in another Javanese city. Here solidarity had a reported organizational and public form, in addition to the appeals and opinions visible earlier. The attendance figure remains a newspaper estimate and cannot establish the composition or motives of every participant. Even with that qualification, the account shows how a transregional issue could be enacted through a particular local assembly. Ottoman affairs were not simply imported into Java; they were interpreted through concerns about unity, honour, and collective standing within colonial society.

Discussion

Regional connections and the formation of political community

The results show that the newspaper's contribution to national consciousness operated through relationships among places. Surabaya supplied a publishing institution and leadership associated with Sarekat Islam. Reports from Bangil and Bodjonegoro brought other local experiences into its arena; Bandung and Sukabumi appeared as sites of projects and assemblies whose claims could circulate more widely. The political meaning of these connections was not predetermined by Java's territorial outline. It was produced through the identification of shared grievances, the circulation of appeals, and efforts to coordinate organizational action. Regional history makes these intermediate relationships visible between an individual's experience and an eventual national narrative.

This reading complements Shiraishi's emphasis on a movement constituted through newspapers, meetings, and organizations. It also preserves the significance of national awakening established in histories of the vernacular press. The distinction

[33] "Ma'loemat kepada Sekalian Kaoem S.I. di Hindia," *Oetoesan Hindia*, June 4, 1920, no. Extra, 1. National Library of Indonesia, Khastara digital collection.

[34] "Protest dari Pihak Kaoem Islam," *Oetoesan Hindia*, 1920, 1. National Library of Indonesia, Khastara digital collection. Conflicting dated references give June 16 and July 16; the exact publication day and month remain unresolved. The reported attendance is an estimate, and the report concerns a postwar threat to the caliphate rather than its later abolition.

concerns explanatory direction. Rather than beginning with a complete national subject whose views a newspaper expressed, the evidence shows writers seeking to establish common interests among differently situated people. Muslim brotherhood, indigenous dignity, workers' welfare, and the position of ordinary people offered partly overlapping grounds of identification. None guarantees that every addressee belonged to the same political community in the same way.[35]

Surabaya's importance consequently rests on its connections as well as its prominence. Interurban commercial support helped sustain publication; distribution and organizational relations enabled appeals to move beyond the city. A report could connect an administrative decision to its implications for inhabitants elsewhere, or give a named locality's suffering wider visibility. This process did not erase differences between towns and countryside. It made those differences available for political interpretation. The newspaper's regional role was to assemble a field of concern within which dispersed experiences might be related, disputed, and translated into organizational purposes.

An exclusive opposition between a national and an international outlook would miss this process. Ottoman sovereignty mattered partly because readers lived within a colonial polity whose own inhabitants lacked comparable control. Religious affiliation made a distant state's security morally proximate, while local experiences gave that affiliation political urgency. The relationship ran in both directions at the level of interpretation: the Ottoman world offered a reference for dignity, and the position of Muslims in the Indies shaped the meanings assigned to Ottoman events. The evidence demonstrates these connected interpretations, without establishing direct Ottoman direction of Sarekat Islam's activities.

Continuity and change in the uses of solidarity

Chronology qualifies any claim that World War I created Islamic solidarity in Java. The railway report and the May naval appeal show attention and obligations before the later wartime crisis. November 1914 intensified concern through the language of danger, survival, and relief. The 1916 articles then made brotherhood a principle of mutual protection and educational organization. By 1920, branch coordination and a reported public protest over the caliphate gave solidarity a more explicitly organized form. This sequence identifies changing applications of a continuing concern rather than a simple progression from religion to politics.

The same caution applies to anticolonial criticism. The 1914 plantation argument already addressed unequal economic relations. Reports of coercion in 1915–1916 and legal debate in 1918 developed related questions through different genres and

[35] Takashi Shiraishi, *An Age in Motion: Popular Radicalism in Java, 1912–1926* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1990), 57–74; Ahmat Adam, *Sejarah awal pers dan kebangkitan kesadaran keindonesiaan* (Jakarta: Hasta Mitra, 2003); Yeti Setiawati and Samsudin, "Gerakan politik Sarekat Islam di Jawa tahun 1916–1921," *Historia Madania: Jurnal Ilmu Sejarah* 4, no. 2 (2020): 355–72, https://doi.org/10.15575/hm.v4i2.9502.

institutions. The 1919 administrative article asked whether reform altered the distribution of power, while the June 1920 announcement explicitly identified defective rules as a problem. There was a movement towards systemic articulation, but earlier criticism was not wholly confined to bad officials. Continuity in the concern for welfare and justice coexisted with changes in the vocabulary and organizational form of opposition.

Sarekat Islam's role was to give practical expression to some of these concerns through meetings, congresses, branches, and appeals for resources. That relationship explains the paper's capacity to link religious identification to social programmes. It also prevents an account of solidarity from remaining solely at the level of emotion. At the same time, projects and appeals must be distinguished from fulfilled outcomes. The proposed teacher-training school, requested donations, and instructions for branches show the kinds of participation being sought. The Sukabumi report supplies evidence of an assembly, but even there the newspaper cannot establish long-term effects on participants or subsequent institutional change.

Comparative scholarship on Islamic press modernity is useful at this point. Subuki and colleagues identify education, welfare, organization, and literacy as recurring concerns in their corpus. *Oetoesan Hindia*'s reports connect these themes to particular settings and actors during an earlier, bounded period. The value of the comparison lies in recognizing a broader repertoire while preserving specificity. A proposed Islamic teacher-training school in Bandung, for example, cannot be reduced to an abstract endorsement of modernity; it addressed the practical problem of sustaining Muslim education within a competitive colonial environment.[36]

Agency and the limits of a solidaristic public

The newspaper's intervention was selective and argumentative. It chose to publicize complaints, make official reform answerable to inhabitants' interests, and represent overseas danger as locally relevant. These are identifiable forms of agency exercised by editors, contributors, and attributed speakers. Yet the documents also reveal unresolved tensions. Merchant-backed publication could criticize plantation capital while carrying arguments for labour negotiation. Muslim unity could support humanitarian obligations extending beyond believers while some reports framed commercial or subsistence conflict communally. National consciousness was emerging within these tensions, not outside them.

The Bodjonegoro report is especially revealing. Its account of hunger gave distress a public voice, but its comparison with Chinese traders could channel criticism towards a communal category without adequate evidence of collective responsibility. Source criticism must therefore operate inside, rather than against, the interpretation of the newspaper's contribution. A solidaristic appeal can illuminate genuine insecurity and

[36] Makyun Subuki, Rosida Erowati, Neneng Nurjanah, and Syihaabul Hudaa, "Gagasan modernitas dalam pers Islam di Hindia Belanda awal abad XX (1915–1934)," *GHANCARAN: Jurnal Pendidikan Bahasa dan Sastra Indonesia* 5, no. 2 (2024): 289–308, https://doi.org/10.19105/ghancaran.v5i2.9781.

reproduce a partial account of its causes. Preserving that ambiguity respects the experiences of vulnerable inhabitants without converting a partisan explanation into an independently established economic finding.

The workers' article exposes another limit of unity. Ottolander's defence of cooperation recognized inequality while rejecting reciprocal oppression. The newspaper's publication of the speech cannot be made to stand for all labour politics or all of Sarekat Islam. It shows that reformist negotiation was one available response within an increasingly complex associational field. The history of solidarity must allow for disagreements over strategy, resources, and the proper relationship between workers and capital. Otherwise, differences that shaped political action disappear into an undifferentiated story of national resistance.

Lasswell's model helps clarify this evidentiary boundary. Reports supplied information about the political environment; commentaries correlated events with readers' interests; arguments about brotherhood transmitted values and identities. These functions describe how communication was organized, but effects remain a separate historical question. Repeated appeals may indicate sustained editorial effort, not sustained agreement among readers. Similarly, the use of Malay made communication across localities possible without proving universal literacy, access, or comprehension. The history of regional political communication concerns both the connections attempted and the unequal conditions under which they could operate.[37]

The paper's relationship with a socially differentiated public also invites comparison with urban history. Hoogervorst and Schulte Nordholt show that language and visual culture help recover the ambitions of colonial Java's middle classes beyond established colonial categories and retrospective nationalist narratives. Their findings warn against treating the imagined audience of a newspaper as a transparent reflection of society. *Oetoesan Hindia* addressed merchants, organization members, workers, and broader Muslim publics through different kinds of material. Its political voice could connect their concerns, but the available evidence cannot establish an identical social position or political response among them.[38]

The novelty of the regional interpretation is therefore precise. It identifies the newspaper as a site where local injury, interurban coordination, colonial institutional debate, and Ottoman affiliation were brought into relation. The conclusion is not that these connections were unprecedented or that the paper alone created a national movement. Rather, their combination explains how Islamic solidarity and anticolonial argument reinforced one another within the political geography of Java. This approach

[37] Harold D. Lasswell, "The Structure and Function of Communication in Society," *İletişim Kuram ve Araştırma Dergisi*, no. 24 (2007): 215–28.

[38] Tom Hoogervorst and Henk Schulte Nordholt, "Urban Middle Classes in Colonial Java (1900–1942): Images and Language," *Bijdragen tot de Taal-, Land- en Volkenkunde* 173, no. 4 (2017): 442–74, https://doi.org/10.1163/22134379-17304002.

retains the contribution of the press to collective identity while grounding it in documents whose genres, dates, speakers, and limits remain visible.

Conclusion

Between 1914 and 1920, *Oetoesan Hindia* connected national-movement reporting and Islamic solidarity through an overlapping geography of political concern. Its Surabaya publishing base depended on commercial and associational relationships extending across Javanese cities. Reports of agrarian hardship, coercive interrogation, unequal law, administrative reform, hunger, and labour organization gave particular experiences a wider political meaning. Ottoman affairs supplied an additional language of shared vulnerability and dignity. Sarekat Islam's projects and branch networks provided organizational means through which those meanings could be addressed collectively.

The newspaper's responses to colonial policy and World War I consequently formed related parts of its political activity. Criticism of colonial inequality and support for Muslim unity both questioned whose welfare and standing deserved protection. The war intensified pre-existing Ottoman affiliations, while postwar reports joined organizational coordination to concerns about labour, subsistence, and the caliphate. This pattern did not constitute a uniform change from religious loyalty to national identity. Religious, regional, and national claims continued to intersect within arguments about political agency and social improvement.

The contribution to regional history is to explain how those intersections were made through connections among places, institutions, and documentary forms. Surabaya, Bangil, Bodjonegoro, Bandung, and Sukabumi belonged to a political arena linked through publication and organization, while the Ottoman world became meaningful within that arena through Muslim affiliation. *Oetoesan Hindia* helped articulate collective identity and national consciousness by bringing local grievances into this wider field. Its historical significance remains compatible with the limits of its evidence: appeals do not prove completed mobilization, partisan reports require criticism, and readers' responses cannot be presumed. Recognizing those limits strengthens the account of how political solidarity was sought and organized in colonial Java.

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