

Preliminary View on Journalistic and Intellectual Life of Mohammad Said (MS): A Discourse on Anti-Colonial Struggle

Mehmet Özay* & Budi Agustono**

Abstract

This work probes the life history and journalistic career of Mohammad Said (1905-1995) in a condensed manner, with much consideration on intensive insight into his personality and writings. In this regard, this study can be classified as an example of microsociology because it departs from the general approach of conventional historiography by absorbing facts concerning grand political events and episodes. He was a self-made intellectual who explored in his writings formidable historical events concerning the migrant workers (*koeli kontrak*) in North Sumatra, and the Dutch War in Aceh. In addition, it was also pertinent to construct a framework to explain his ideas on the development of nationalism, and the factors that led to independence in the following decades. During the early 20th century, nationalism, identity, and nation-state were a patchwork, and had cleavages in many people's minds in the Archipelago. Nevertheless, new discourses were developed to gain political consciousness and power through the writings of young journalists and intellectuals like Mohammad Said (MS). The thoughts and actions of MS should be considered as representing the values of his time. In this regard, one can assert that—in a Hegelian way—his self-consciousness helped the readers to comprehend the 'spirit of the time.' This study carried some glimpses of the era of tense discussions of independence, and anti-colonial struggles through MS's intellectual discourse. This approach, namely viewing past political developments through the prism of a social agent, is essential.

Keywords: Mohammad Said, *Waspada*, North Sumatra, nationalism, Indonesia

Introduction

Mohammad Said (MS) is considered to be one of the pioneering and most versatile journalists (*tokoh pers*) and media investors that has contributed to intellectualism and nationalism, or nation-state building, in the Archipelago during the early part of the 20th century. This work probes MS's life story, journalistic career, and intellectual stance on patriotism, and is a preliminary work to his intellectual life, principally through visiting his writings. It can be regarded as a form of microsociology because it departs from the general approach of conventional historiography, which absorbs facts concerning grand political events and episodes. This work revisits the pre-independence years, considered a part of 'revolutionary history' by Audrey, through new interpretative lenses and sources that are assumed to allow us to understand the scope of an intellectual figure such as MS.¹ He is undoubtedly remembered as among those who contributed to the development of journalism, intellectual discourse against colonial conditions, and Indonesian independence movements through his engagement in print media.² MS developed a sense of belonging to the Archipelago, and to the larger community through his *Semangat Rakyat*, which became a widespread concept attracting youth from diverse social backgrounds. This work -beyond the personal history and intellectual life of MS -aims to contribute to the debate on the nation-state establishment.

At this stage, it is right to pose a fundamental question: "Who is MS?" And it should be considered in line with others, such as "Where was he raised?," "How did he acquire education and build himself?" and more specifically, "What did he propose for the purpose of nation-building?" In this regard, this study aims to contextualise the thoughts and worldview of MS by analysing and interpreting his writings. In other words, this is an attempt to restructure his intellectual biography and reconstruct the

* Mehmet Özay (corresponding author) (PhD) Associate Professor, Institute of Islamic Thought and Civilization, International Islamic University Malaysia (ISTAC-IIUM), Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. Email: mehmetozay@iiu.edu.my. Orcid: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-2719-1543>.

** Budi Agustono (PhD), Professor, Department of History, Faculty of Cultural Sciences, University of Sumatera Utara, Medan, Indonesia. Email: budi.agustono@usu.ac.id.

¹ Audrey R. Kahin (1985), "Preface," in Audrey R. Kahin (ed.), *Regional Dynamics of the Indonesian Revolution: Unity from Diversity*, Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, p. ix.

² Zulfikri Habib Nasution (2012), H. Mohammad Said dan Karya Sejarahnya, *Skripsi*, Profram Studi S1 Jurusan Pendidikan Sejarah, Fakultas Ilmu Sosial Universitas Negeri Medan, n.p.

nationalist development to which his thoughts contributed somewhat significantly by revisiting primary documents. Beyond this, all his works are a combination of thoughts that can be structured as decolonial discourse, examples of which are, undoubtedly, his continuous engagement with sociopolitical affairs, and his retrospective writings after independence. It is fair to say that, although the decolonisation process was not completed in one instance as argued by Bastin and Benda,³ the intellectual writings of MS -like the others- served to disseminate political consciousness, and became successful at decolonising people's minds to a considerable extent.

Although he did not gain much of a formal education, MS was able to enhance his knowledge, and contribute to society at large. In this regard, the life stories, and thoughts of MS are interesting for the social sciences, such as social anthropology, journalism, history, and politics.⁴ We prefer a linguistic and philosophical shift in describing him by utilising the German concept of *Bildung* rather than the English word 'autodidact', which has been mainly used to describe him since MS was believed to have been self-learner throughout his life.⁵ This is what made him unique among individuals during the same colonialism era.

As Budi Agustono argues, MS was an "organic intellectual,"⁶ which is quite an assertive statement. The concept of 'organic' may be interpreted as referring to originality (*asli*) in the broader sense while also accentuating his naiveness, which was not a result of any established school environment since he could only attend primary school (*sekolah rendah/sekolah normal*),⁷ or any intellectual interventions and impositions by outsiders such as native Westernizers schooled in colonial institutions, or colonial circles during his early youth which his own family and neighbourhood had structured. In addition, one may assert that his God-given skill and thinking process, because of his extraordinary success, led him to be unique in terms of comprehending the social affairs happening around him, including his anti-colonial stance, emphasised in his discourse and activities with strong nationalistic perspectives.⁸

It is observed that, the features of the period in which MS lived determined his journalistic activities. This means that the 'colonial condition' had various impacts and influences on the eco-political structure, such as the economy, education, and social life in the whole region, and thus, his journalistic stance, and intellectuality. We believe that the colonial condition impelled him to reflect on how to disseminate truth, and to challenge colonialism with it. His writings testify that he was a political journalist. Besides that, we assert that MS was not a member of any collective movements in a strict sense. Instead, he was a saviour for his understanding, and for disseminating his knowledge and experiences to a larger audience as catalogued in his publications. MS portrayed the social settings, work environments, labour class, and capitalist owners of plantations with their values without intercepting or obscuring the actual conditions. His primary target was to unveil the natural face of colonial rule, and its collaborators, proving how the government was decadent in its ethical values, public policies, and work life.

This work directly results from multiple methods applied by the present writer, such as textual analysis, discourse analysis, interpretation, and comparative understanding based on valid and existing data, and interviews with specific individuals. We would say that the literature scope is wide enough, including historiography, newspapers, biographies, diaries, town descriptions, political essays, colonial reports, or their published formats in theses, etc. This study allows us to engage in a more extensive scope of the political history of North Sumatra, and the Archipelago in general through the prism of MS's thought and intellectual stance.

³ John Bastin and Harry J. Benda (1968), *A History of Modern Southeast Asia: Colonialism, Nationalism and Decolonization*, Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall Inc. p. vii.

⁴ Budi Agustono (n.d.), "H. Mohamad Said," Opini, *Waspada*.

⁵ Mohd. Said (n.d.), *Otobiografi: H. Mohammad Said: dengan Modal otodidak, Mengemban Masyarakat*. (Unpublished Memoir), p. 3. The idea of his being a self-taught individual was emphasized significantly. The root of this concept is related to his early ages when he could not continue schooling owing to the poverty of his family. But this material reality did not create for him to continue his learning process and initiated through his own efforts to overcome the obstacle ("Mohd. Said," *Tokoh Indonesia*).

⁶ Budi Agustono (n.d.), "H. Mohamad Said," Opini, *Waspada*.

⁷ Mohd. Said (n.d.), *Otobiografi*, p. 2.

⁸ Mohd. Said (n.d.), *Otobiografi*, p. 5. It is right to consider MS among the ones who were regarded as "... the nationally oriented urban intelligentsia." Anthony Reid (1971), "The Birth of the Republic in Sumatra," *Indonesia*, Vol. 12, p. 26. And It is also argued that MS asserted that "... saya dukung kemerdekaan Indonesia." (Interview with Tribuana Said, August, 14 2023).

His Concise Biography: Developing Years

Mohammad Said was born on August 17, 1905, in Labuhan Bilik, Kabupaten Labuhan Batu.⁹ It is a small town near Sungai Panai on the coast of North Sumatra facing the Straits of Malacca, with a port called by the same name, which was a functional and critical transport hub both for human mobilisation, and trade products from North and West Sumatra. Some decades later, it became an administrative body (*onderafdeeling*) under the Dutch re-organisation.¹⁰ His father's name was Mohammad Hasan, whom people called Haji Hasan. He was the fourth among seven siblings in his family. When he was six years old, he commenced his fundamental education, with primary education in a religious school, or Qur'an school¹¹, and a public school (*sekolah desa/kampungscholen*), which must have been a Dutch school (*Volkschool*). Another reference tells us that MS had education until junior high school (*sekolah rendah*) and *sekolah normal*, after which, he could not continue his education because of his family's poverty.¹² However, he completed a five-year education in seven years; he repeated the first class twice because he was adapting to the school.¹³ When he completed the initial stage of his schooling in 1918, he sat for *Kwakeling*, which was an exam to continue further education in Medan. Although he could not pass it, he sat for another exam, the *Normaalschool*, and gained access to education in *Jongens Normaalschool* in Pematang Siantar. However, after three years of education, he had to leave the school for economic reasons.¹⁴

Although MS acquired limited formal education, through his efforts, after about 5 or 7 years, he became a self-taught though reserved intellectual. This is a well-known characteristic of his, earning him the description of autodidact. However, we prefer to describe him as *Bildung*, a German concept. Since he was born during the colonial era at the beginning of the 20th century, he developed an anti-colonial consciousness due to his close circle's socioeconomic and sociopolitical situation which was present in a significant segment of North Sumatran society. He began working in the media during his time in Medan where he became acquainted with a few senior journalists, such as Djamaloeddin Adi Negoro, and Yahya Yacoeb.¹⁵

During MS's childhood years into young adulthood, he witnessed specific social changes, giving rise to new political thoughts. Social movements emerged and gradually expanded among society, particularly the educated classes. Literature was also a salient factor in disseminating the new ideological stance towards the spirit of independence. In this regard, in 1920s and 1930s, solid literary ideas were disseminated through poems and novels in journals and publishing houses such as Balai Pustaka.¹⁶

After his schooling, he acquired a job in Labuhan Batu as an intern (*magang-melamar kerja magang di kantor pemerintahan Belanda*) because of his linguistic capability. His position was described as an assistant writer (*leerlingschrijver*), in which he worked for almost three years.¹⁷ This is what Anderson argues about the schooling of the native children in Dutch schools: "...the young, educated individuals learned Dutch and knew more about the Netherlands through schooling in institutions operated by the colonial governments."¹⁸ One can argue that this working experience might have changed the direction of his life. During this period, in dealing with the office works, he not only gained work experience with the Dutch people, but also improved his linguistic capability. As such, during these three years, he was given different positions in the office. First, as an assistant (*schrijver*) in correspondence (*surat menyurat dan personalia*); second, as an assistant of an office attorney (*Jaksa*), and third, as the private assistant of district officer (*kontrolir*). During this short period, he witnessed the correspondences with the Dutch office of district officer (*kontrolir*), the ruler on behalf of the Dutch colonial regime in the

⁹ Tribuana Said (n.d.), *Mohammad Said: Wartawan Yang Juga Sejarawan*, Unpublished notes, p. 1.

¹⁰ Mohd. Said (n.d.), *Otobiografi*, p. 1, 6; Royandi Hutasoit (2013), *Biografi Mohammad Said (1902-1995)*, *Skripsi Sarjana*, Departemen Sejarah, Fakultas Ilmu Budaya, Universitas Sumatera Utara, p. 24.

¹¹ As mentioned by Dr. Rayati Sadi, his daughter, MS's father a religious person and wished his son to get education in a religious school. Interviewee 1.

¹² Mohd. Said (n.d.), *Otobiografi*, p. 2.

¹³ Royandi Hutasoit (2013), *Biografi Mohammad Said (1902-1995)*, p. 25.

¹⁴ Royandi Hutasoit (2013), *Biografi Mohammad Said (1902-1995)*, pp. 26-27.

¹⁵ Royandi Hutasoit (2013), *Biografi Mohammad Said (1902-1995)*, pp. 31-32; Kristanto Hartadi (2023), "Sambutan: Merawat Sejarah Adinegoro," in Lestantya R. Baskoro (ed.), *Melawat Ke Talawi: Tapak Langkah Wartawan Adinegoro*, Jakarta: Lembaga Pers Dr. Soetomo, p. vii.

¹⁶ Nj. Nursinah Supardo (1964), *Kesusasteraan Indonesia*, Tjetakan Kedua, Djakarta: Penerbit Tunas Memar Murni, p. 100.

¹⁷ Mohd. Said (n.d.), *Otobiografi*, p. 5; Royandi Hutasoit (2013), *Biografi Mohammad Said (1902-1995)*, p. 28.

¹⁸ Benedict Anderson (2002), *The Spectre of Comparisons: Nationalism, Southeast Asia, and the World*, Reprinted, London: Verso, p. 5.

region, and was implicitly involved in collecting taxes, and other issues with the mentioned regional polities.¹⁹

This work experience made him aware and conscious of the slave workers' cases (*kuli kuli kontrak*). At the time, these workers tended to run away from their plantation dorms or were forced into criminality owing to the mismanagement. These imported labour forces were taken to court for their actions and were treated unjustly under the *Poenale Sanctie*.²⁰ Furthermore, this ordinance caused a constant 'koeli unrest'. MS, as a private assistant of the *kontrolir* in the mentioned office, often encountered and witnessed these court cases,²¹ with the actions of the contract coolies often becoming news in the Dutch and vernacular press in the region. His close observations and witness of the injustices occurring under the policies of the Dutch colonial rule, and their collaborators, namely the native rulers, caused a definite distance between him and these circles. After a while, due to his political stance and activities, he was terminated from the Dutch office when he was 23 years old in 1927. This was a pertinent turning point in his life, and he left Labuhan Batu to settle in Medan.²²

We argue that the concept of *rantau/merantau* helped MS enhance his knowledge and experience. Through this process, he found opportunities to meet and discuss social and political issues in the context of the *rakyat's* welfare, Indonesianness, and Malayness. For instance, he travelled from his hometown to Medan, and to Penang Island, even though it was only for a short period. MS uprooted his life from his rural hometown Labuhan Bilik to cosmopolitan Medan where he was introduced to the intellectual life. Referring to Mannheim's explanation,²³ we argue that MS's penetration into these unfamiliar social spheres no doubt caused his structural changes. He developed such qualities so as to be able to empathise with others, such as the exploitation of the labour class. Undoubtedly, his distinctive characteristic was intense patriotism, which was directly caused by the colonial condition he had closely witnessed in his early ages, reflected in the various activities he was involved in throughout his life.²⁴ This was a general tendency called '*semangat*' during the 1920s to 1940s, especially among the youth, who was the driving force of the independence movement in the Archipelago.

His Professional Life in Journalism

It is right to argue that MS's interest in intellectual activities, such as journalism and research, and the ethical dissemination of knowledge stemmed from his early schooling, and linguistic capability, which were gained both through his short-term study at a Dutch school, and employment in a Dutch legal institution in Panai, Sumatra.²⁵ His calibre of intellectualism was also the result of his being self-taught, and his industrious attempts to deal with the sociopolitical themes around him in society. Furthermore, it is right to argue that journalism in the Malay world at that time, -including North Sumatra-, was a novel mechanism to transmit new ideas and thoughts to more significant segments of the local society.²⁶ During these interesting times, he, and Ani Idrus (1918-1999),²⁷ who would later become his wife, engaged in vernacular media at different times, and got married when they were both journalists in *Sinar Deli*.²⁸

¹⁹ Mohd. Said (n.d.), *Otobiografi*, pp. 12 & 14; Royandi Hutasoit (2013), *Biografi Mohammad Said (1902-1995)*, p. 29.

²⁰ It is known as the Labor Law since the late decades of the 19th century. For details, see: Keizerina Devi Azwar (2004), *Poenale Sanctie: Studi Tentang Globalisasi Ekonomi Dan Perubahan Hukum di Sumatera Timur (1870-1950)*, Program Pasca Sarjana, Universitas Sumatera Utara.

²¹ Mohd. Said (n.d.), *Otobiografi*, p. 8; Royandi Hutasoit (2013), *Biografi Mohammad Said (1902-1995)*, p. 30.

²² Royandi Hutasoit (2013), *Biografi Mohammad Said (1902-1995)*, p. 31.

²³ John Heeren (1971), "Karl Mannheim and the Intellectual Elite," *The British Journal of Sociology*, Vol. 22, No. 1, p. 8.

²⁴ Because of this, MS was regarded as a significant contributor to the nationalist movement and development of the nation and awarded during National Press Day (*Hari Pers Nasional*) on Februari 9, 1985. "Penghargaan Pemerintah Untuk Mohammad Said," *Waspada*, p. 76. (This article with the date (Maret 1994) is compiled with some others and presented to me by the family of MS on July 17, 2022, in Medan Kota).

²⁵ This information tells us that MS other young nationalist leaders studied in Dutch school. But he did not continue to further education in Dutch higher education institutions neither in Batavia nor in the Netherlands like the other youth such as Muhammad Hatta who was a Padangnese and after completing his study in Dutch schools in Padang he continued further education first in Batavia and later in Rotterdam. John Ingleson (1979), *Road to Exile: The Indonesian Nationalist Movement (1927-1934)*, Kuala Lumpur: Heinemann Educational Books (Asia) Ltd., p. 3.

²⁶ Zainal-Abidin B. Ahmad (1945), "Malay Journalism in Malaya," *Journal of the Malayan Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society*, Vol. 19, No. 2, p. 245.

²⁷ Ani Idrus was born November 25, 1918 in Sawahlunto, Sumatra Barat. It is obvious that she had similar inclination to the colonial condition like MS and engaged significantly with nationalist course of actions in vernacular media. Hendrajit (2016), "Mengenang Ani Idrus, Profil Wartawan Pejuang," *aktual.com*, 31 Maret 2016, Jakarta.

²⁸ Hendrajit (2016), "Mengenang Ani Idrus, Profil Wartawan Pejuang," *aktual.com*, 31 Maret 2016, Jakarta. MS and Ani Idrus got married in September 1939 (Hutosit, 2013: 34). *Sinar Deli* was administered by Mangaradja Ihtutan and Hassan Noel Arifin and was first printed in Medan, 1929 (Said, 1988: 33; *Sinar Deli*, Arba'a 18 January 1933, No. 15, Lembar Pertama, Tahoen Ke IV).

MS is fundamentally known as a prominent journalist (*tokoh pers*) because of his primary involvement in print media in the second half of the 1920s. This strong involvement in print media started from his early ages when he submitted pieces of news to some vernacular newspapers, including one in Medan, and *Soera Indonesia*, printed in Surabaya, and Java Island, as a freelancer from late 1927 onwards. Moreover, after a discussion about the meaning of journalism with his father,²⁹ he left for Medan to realise his dream of being a journalist. In a short time, he obtained employment in various vernacular media in North Sumatra as an apprentice, or young media worker. He began working professionally in a Mandarin-Malay newspaper called *Tjin Po* in 1929 when he was 24 years old. Aside from *Tjin Po*, there were other newspapers published in Medan, such as *Pewarta Deli*,³⁰ *Oetoesan Sumatra*,³¹ and *Andalas*.³² He worked in *Tjin Po* as a redactor and field journalist, creating news by following and visiting court cases. Although it seemed that this was an incredible opportunity for him to gain experience in a newspaper having dual languages, his employment ended because, after two months, the Chinese owner decided not to work with a village boy anymore!³³

After that, starting September 1, 1928, he worked at *Oetoesan Sumatra* as redactor (1928-1929).³⁴ However, during this period, he felt that he could not continue in this newspaper owing to the owner's inclination towards leftist ideology.³⁵ This development could be interpreted as MS having a specific nationalist ideology, which was mentioned by several interviewees, including the chief editor of *Waspada*, and Dr. Rayati Said, one of his daughters (Interviewee 1). He took similar posts in the *Sinar Deli* (1937), *Penjebar* (1937), *Penjedar* (1937-1938), and *Seroean/Seruan Kita* (1938-1939), which were published in collaboration with his wife, Ani Idrus.³⁶ He initiated the republication of *Pewarta Deli*, the first pro-Republican paper, just a year after the Independence of Indonesia in Medan.³⁷ Furthermore, he opened the branch of Antara News in Medan in 1946. MS and Ani Idrus began publication of *Waspada* on January 11, 1947.³⁸

Penang Process

With his professional but short experiences in Medan newspapers, he left for Penang Island to acquire new experiences. What attracted him to Penang is not known. However, it may likely be the role of the Island as an intellectual hub for the whole region with its multi-ethnic, multi-cultural population, enriched through cultural affairs, including publication houses and printed newspapers. The exact date

²⁹ Mohd. Said (n.d.), *Otobiografi*, pp. 14-15.

³⁰ Mohammad Said (1992), "Dengan Otodidak Mengemban Tugas Rakyat," p. 77; *Pewarta Deli* was founded by Sjarikat Tapanoeli Company, which was operated by the migrants from Angkola Sipirok, Padang Lawas which were known as Mandailing region. Mohd. Said (n.d.), *Otobiografi*, p. 18; Dimulikan oleh N.V. Handel Mij. Electriche Dukkerij, Sjarikat Tapanoeli Medan, *Pewarta Deli*, 2 Januari 1940, Selasa, p. 1.

³¹ Mohammad Said (1992), "Dengan Otodidak Mengemban Tugas Rakyat," in Mokhtar Lubis (ed.), *Visi Wartawan 45*, Jakarta: Penerbit Media Sejahtera, pp. 77-78. Batak Printing Company invested first to establish a newspaper called Pantjaran Berita which was renamed as *Oetoesan Sumatra* and Dja Parlagoetan, a former principal a Malay school in Aceh, was appointed as the director (Mohd. Said (n.d.), *Otobiografi*, p. 18).

³² Mohd. Said (n.d.), *Otobiografi*, p. 15) (Note: The owner of *Tjin Po* was Tan Tek Bie from Padang. (Ibid.). He was immediately received well by Tan because a previous journalist Mohammad Iljas had just quitted his post (Mohd. Said (n.d.), *Otobiografi*, p. 16).

³³ Mohd. Said (n.d.), *Otobiografi*, p. 16.

³⁴ Mohd. Said (n.d.), *Otobiografi*, pp. 16 & 19). *Oetoesan Sumatra*, whose director was Soetan Parlindoengan, and chief redacteur was Dja Parlagoetan, was operating in Jalan Oude Markt. There was a vacancy since a journalist named Mohammad Idham, charged as the first redacteur, quitted the job in the newspaper (Ibid.).

³⁵ Tribuana Said (n.d.), *Mohammad Said: Wartawan Yang Juga Sejarawan*, Unpublished notes, pp. 2-3; Rayati Syafrin (n.d.), "Riwayat Hidup Alm. H. Mohammad Said," n.p.

³⁶ After they married in 1944, they began to print a weekly paper titled *Seroean Kita*, in 1947. During that time, although Indonesia declared independence, the Dutch Kingdom engaged militarily to regain political hegemony in the Archipelago. Furthermore, after the independence, the couple established *Waspada* Medan as a new newspaper.

³⁷ Rayati Syafrin (n.d.), "Riwayat Hidup Alm. H. Mohammad Said," n.p. The chief editor of this newspaper was Djameluddin Adi Negoro. Since the Dutch with the support of the British army invaded Medan recolonize the region, the newspaper was forced to end its activities and the office was also harmed by colonizing military forces (*Pewarta Deli*, 2 Januari 1940, Selasa, p. 1; Baskoro, Lestantya R. Baskoro (2023), *Melawat Ke Talawi: Tapak Langkah Wartawan Adinegoro*, Jakarta: Lembaga Pers Dr. Soetomo, pp. Xi & 121; Mohd. Said (n.d.), *Otobiografi*, p. 3; Sjamsudin Lubis (1981), "Tokoh Yang Berhasil Mengelola Enam Majalah Sekaligus," *Pers Indonesia*, No. 25, (Januari), Tahun VII, p. 21; Interviewee 2). Adi Negoro attended the committee which was named *Sumatera Cuo Sangi In* for the independence struggle held in Bukittinggi (Padang) in 1944 (Safwan, 1992: 112). After a while the name of Adi Negoro occurred as the announcer of the independence through the Raido Bukittinggi, some days later the proclamation of independence in Jakarta (Mardanas Safwan (1992), *Pahlawan Nasional: Teuku Nyak Arif*, Jakarta: Balai Pustaka, p. 120).

³⁸ Mohd. Said (n.d.), *Otobiografi*, p. 3; Rayati Syafrin (n.d.), "Riwayat Hidup Alm. H. Mohammad Said," n.p.; Indah Ramadhani (2021), *Praktik Kerja Jurnalis di Era Konvergensi Media Yang Terjadi Pada Institutis Berita Online Waspada.id Medan, Skripsi*, Program Studi Ilmu Komunikasi Fakultas Ilmu Sosial Dan Ilmu Politik Universitas Sumatera Utara, Medan, pp. 46-47. The paper was published at Jl. Brigjen Katamso No. 1, Medan. And it should be mentioned that Sukarno encouraged MS and Ani Idrus to print this newspaper so as to disseminate nationalistic consciousness (Indah Ramadhani. (2021). *Praktik Kerja Jurnalis di Era Konvergensi Media Yang Terjadi Pada Institutis Berita Online Waspada.id Medan, Skripsi*, pp. 46 & 47). MS did not actively engage after 1969, and focused on historical studies and *Waspada* was managed by Ani Idrus only (Rayati Syafrin (n.d.), "Riwayat Hidup Alm. H. Mohammad Said," n.d.).

for when he arrived in Penang is also not known. Nevertheless, it is highly possible that he arrived there in the 1930s. During the 1930s, there were Malay newspapers published in Penang, such as *Idaran (Edaran) Zaman* (1925-1930), *Suara Melayu* (1926-1932), *Malaya* (1926-?), *Al-Ikhwan* (1926-1931), *Saudara* (1929-1941), *Majallah Dunia Melayu* (1928-1930), *Semangat Islam* (1929-1931), *Puncha Pertikaian Ulama Islam* (1929-1930), *Dewasa* (1931),³⁹ *Bahtera* (1932-1933) (Roff, 1965: 96).⁴⁰ Based on my assumption, MS must have worked quite briefly in one of the following newspapers, such as *Pemimpin Melayu* (1933-34), *Bumiputera* (1934), *Persahabatan* (1936-37), *Majallah Cherita* (1938-39), and *Saudara* (1929-1941).⁴¹

Furthermore, he obtained employment in a *jawi* newspaper printed by Muhammad Yunus, a journalist from North Sumatra. Since he could not leave the diaspora, he returned to Medan, looking for opportunities to write news without a salary. He became acquainted with journalism as an ideal profession and decided to be a lifelong journalist.⁴² MS also became an administrator in *Pandji Islam*, a weekly paper (*minggoean wetenschap Islam popoeler*) published in Medan.⁴³

One may assert that all these experiences before his initiation of *Waspada* made him gain insight into journalism at the regional and national levels.⁴⁴ This newspaper has been regarded as a national asset in press history since it is the second oldest newspaper, and is currently still being published.⁴⁵ Nevertheless, during the second invasion from 1947 to 1949, although *Waspada* had had its maiden initiation, after a while, the Dutch military authorities banned around 20 newspapers, mostly those printed in English and Chinese. However, *Waspada* was not banned in Medan.⁴⁶ The *Waspada* publication was accessible at that time in both Medan and Jakarta. Nevertheless, after a few years, MS left the Jakarta branch, and continued publishing *Waspada* in only Medan.⁴⁷

MS describes the role of journalism and intellectual activities in the development of nationalism as follows: "It can be noted that since the beginning of political activity against colonialism in North Sumatra, especially Medan, the Indonesian nation generally consisted of political figures who were also journalists' authors or vice versa... Many of the leaders of the periodicals listed above are not as well-known as those who sit on the People's Council, both high-ranking and low-ranking people, such as Mangaradja Soangkoepon, Todoeng gentler Soetan Goenoeng media, etc."⁴⁸

As argued by Anderson,⁴⁹ the beginning of the 20th century witnessed a new type of journalism in line with the development of nationalism, and the relevance of this process in the context of the Archipelago under the hands of mostly native or self-educated individuals such as MS. Furthermore, they mainly

³⁹ Mohd. Yunus Abdul Hamid was also the editor of the monthly magazine *Dewasa*. He also got the same post at *Persahatan*. He left for Medan in 1939 to take part in the 28th Muhammadiyah Congress as the representative of Persatuan Indonesia Penang which was held there then continued to reside until Indonesia achieved his independence he was appointed as a wedana in Labuan Bilik until together (Abdullah Hussain (1984), *Sebuah Perjalanan*, Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, p. 206).

⁴⁰ Penang Island since its geo-strategic position in the seaways had acquired importance for the whole nationalities in the region including the intellectuals and educationists invested significantly in the Island. In addition, Penang was well connected to Singapore which was later established and developed well in terms of transregional trade. Pertaining to vernacular press these islands took the pioneership. With this regard, among others Malay newspapers such as *Jawi Peranakan* was commenced to be printed since 1876 di Singapura, and *Bintang Timor*, *Al-Imam*, *Neraca*, *Al-Ikhwan*, *Saudara* and *Utusan Melayu* were the ones known to be published in Pinang (Kassim Ahmad (2011), "Katakanlah Yang Benar: Peranan dan Tanggunjawab Akhbar," in Abdul Rahman Haji Ismail and Mahani Musa (eds.), *Akhbar dan Tokoh Persuratkhabaran Malasia Kurun ke-20*, Pulau Pinang: Penerbit Universiti Sains Malaysia, pp. 270-288). *Bintang Timor* is known the earliest Malay vernacular newspaper published in Romanized in Singapore in 1894. The main purpose of this newspaper was to disseminate information in Romanized Malay language to all individuals including Malay Muslims, Baba Nyonya (Chinese) and the British (European). Bahasa Malayu utilized in this newspaper seems to have played a bridging social distance among distinct nationalities who were assumed to have accessed Romanized Malay language because of different reasons. And as it is understood that this piece of writing this newspaper was founded by Peranakan in Singapore (O., M. S., (1894), "Inche Inche dan Tuan Tuan," *Bintang Timor* (Surat Khabar Sahari Hari Dalam Bahasa Malayu, Vol. I, Singapura, Hari Dua (Slasa), 10 Hari Bulan July, 1894, No. 8, p. 3; Murad (1894); (n.w.). (1894). "Bintang Timor," *Bintang Timor* (Surat Khabar Sahari Hari Dalam Bahasa Malayu), Vol. I, Singapura, Hari Satu (Isnin) 24 Hari Bulan September 1894, No. 72, p. 3.

⁴¹ Ahmad Adam states that he must have worked at *Saudara* (Interviewee 3).

⁴² Mohd. Said (n.d.), Otobiografi, p. 13. (Note: Based on his own explanation he acknowledged about *jawi* script (Ibid.).

⁴³ *Pandji Islam*, No. 11, 18 Maart 1940. The manager of the paper was Z. A. Ahmad.

⁴⁴ This newspaper was printed in both Medan and Jakarta. But Mohd. Said left the Jakarta branch and continued the publication of *Waspada* only in Medan after few years (Tribuana Said. (n.d.). *Mohammad Said: Wartawan Yang Juga Sejarawan*, Unpublished notes, p. 3; Rosihan Anwar (1984), "Menjadi Juruwarta Waspada Di Jakarta Di Zaman Revolusi," p. 65).

⁴⁵ Interview with family members and chief editor of *Waspada*, July 15, 2022, Waspada Office, Medan Kota.

⁴⁶ "Dutch Ban Singapore Papers," *The Singapore Free Press*, 27 October 1948, p. 5.

⁴⁷ Mohd. Said (n.d.), Otobiografi, p. 3; Rosihan Anwar (1984), "Menjadi Juruwarta Waspada Di Jakarta Di Zaman Revolusi," *Waspada*, 11 Januari, p. 65; Interviewee 2.

⁴⁸ Mohd. Said (n.d.), Otobiografi, p. 24.

⁴⁹ Benedict R. O'Gorman Anderson (2001), "Nationalism," in Joel Krieger (ed.), *The Oxford Companion to Politics of The World*, Second Edition, Oxford: Oxford University Press, p. 576.

emphasised the vulnerable conditions of the grassroots people living in the growing cities, and their littorals rather than the welfare of the ruling class and employers. These groups of people, the new social and political elite, replaced the religiously educated groups that functioned well in the colonial wars from West Java to Aceh during the whole 19th century, as argued by Bastin and Benda.⁵⁰

A Brief Noti about *Waspada*

MS's merits as a journalist-intellectual took a significant departure with the initiation of *Waspada* as a founding father in 1947. However, his early journalistic experiences, and engagement with North Sumatra's sociopolitical developments contributed much to his accumulated wisdom and knowledge. *Waspada* was undoubtedly a creditable venture by MS and Ani Idrus in the history of journalism in Indonesia.⁵¹ However, coincidentally, when the publication of *Waspada* was initiated in 1947, the Dutch second invasion was started by the Allied Forces, namely the British and the United States, in some regions, including the capital city of North Sumatra, Medan, eventually forcing it to cease activities for a short time.⁵²

His intellectual horizon was to avoid open conflict with the colonial powers. Indeed, having a conflict with the latter was not a task for journalists. That is the reason, or at least one of the reasons his concept of *Waspada* (Cautious!) was always present in his writings. Since he had a fertile mind and, as it is understood, a constant reader of various sources, he disseminated his ideas via newspaper articles which mostly appeared as a column on page two.⁵³ As had been observed since its initial years, the editors of *Waspada* paid crucial attention to regional and global affairs. The newspaper itself tells us something about its content and format. For instance, since its early printing, *Waspada* informed about local and regional developments, and disseminated information from Europe, the US, India, Pakistan, and the Middle East. All foreign news emerged with illustrations on pages 1, 2, 4, and 6. Generally, the contents of the news from around the globe were neutral. Nevertheless, the news about the Middle East and India had a tone of empathy in the course of independence, the struggle against Western colonialism, and the religious, political, and intellectual figures' perception and support of the independence movement in the Archipelago. In the regional context, providing the multi-cultural reality of North Sumatra, there was some news about Indian migrants (Singh, 1948: 4), and news of Muslims in Siam, and their relations with Siamese governments.⁵⁴ Even though the physical revolution continued, there were discussions about a regional union, such as the Southeast Asian League.⁵⁵

In 1949, *Waspada*'s motto, to be the "voice of independence," was mentioned at the top of the page. Furthermore, there was also an emphasis on it being a daily newspaper for the Indonesian Nation (*Bangsa Indonesia*).⁵⁶ All this, no doubt, contributed to him becoming a nationalist his entire life, which was reflected in his writings in various newspapers, and his publication of *Waspada*, which was considered "*koran kiblik*," which means "the voice of the Republican movement" by the Dutch colonial authorities.⁵⁷

Intellectual Activities

What makes MS unique among other colleagues is his dedication, and his mission to disseminate truth, which he sustained throughout his life in his profession. In this sense, it is right to assert that his

⁵⁰ Bastin and Benda (1968), *A History of Modern Southeast Asia*, p. 95.

⁵¹ This newspaper was printed in both Medan and Jakarta during the early years of the independence after 1949. But MS left the Jakarta branch and continued the publication of *Waspada* only in Medan after few years

Mohd. Said (n.d.), Otobiografi, p. 3; Rosihan Anwar (1984), "Menjadi Juruwarta *Waspada* Di Jakarta Di Zaman Revolusi," *Waspada*, 11 Januari, p. 65.

⁵² T. Sjahril (1971), *Garis Besar Perkembangan Pers Indonesia*, Serikat Penerbit Surat kabar (SPS), Djakarta: Pertjetakan Negara, p. 18; Interview 2.

⁵³ MS was a regular columnist in *Waspada* in the early stage, namely, the years between 1947-1950 of the history of this newspaper. But it is observed some intervals in his writing process as a columnist. For instance, during the days after 15th March 1947 till 14th April 1947 there are not any writings are encountered. His writings continued till 1980s. When one analytically approaches his writings can be assessed simply in two distinct periods: the first is during the physical revolution (1945-1950); the second one is after this period till his aged time. But we may assume that his writings reflected the voices of unseen masses.

⁵⁴ "Hubungan Melaju Muslim dgn Pemerintah Siam Sudah Mulai Baik," *Waspada*, No. 579, Djum'at, 18 Februari, 1949, Tahun Ke III, p. 4.

⁵⁵ Lembaga Asia Tenggara," *Waspada*, Djum'at 6 Pebruari, 1948, No. 304, Tahun Ke-II, p. 1.

⁵⁶ *Waspada*, 1949: 1.

⁵⁷ Rosihan Anwar (1984), "Menjadi Juruwarta *Waspada* Di Jakarta Di Zaman Revolusi," *Waspada*, 11 Januari, 1984, pp. 65 & 66; Syafik Umar (2017), "Lahirnya Koran Kaum-Kiblik," *Pikiran Rakyat*, 8 Juni, (Kamis), p. 26. MS states that he was himself among the Republican journalists (Mohd. S. 1947: 2).

journalism in various newspapers, and intellectual works were based on an idealist perspective where enlightening the public through transmitting accurate news was vibrant.⁵⁸ He was a “political activist,” as mentioned in the unpublished paper of his eldest son.⁵⁹ Furthermore, his success story was based on the philosophy mentioned above, which reflected sustainable continuity in his stance and fight against injustices in journalism-oriented activism.⁶⁰ He was firmly bound to journalism and played a role in contributing to the public through his writings. In this regard, one may guess that his intellectual orientation was to reach the public with *just* journalism—which seemed to be a norm for him—by highlighting historical affairs and figures.⁶¹

MS utilised journalism as a vehicle for his pro-*rakyat* policy to highlight justice through attempts to critically ascertain the policies of the colonial regime before the independence years.⁶² Moreover, his close attention to the injustices of the working strata at the plantations in that period was reflected in his early newspaper articles, and later, one of his books, *Koeli Kontrak*, published in 1977. As observed, he did not prioritise physical struggle, but mostly preferred the expression and practice of patriotism through his journalistic engagements during the 1930s and 40s. On the other hand, he also became a creative and innovative intellectual, writing various books, such as *Deli Dahulu dan Sekarang*, *Perubahan Pemerintahan (Bestuurshervorming)*, *Aceh Sepanjang Abad* (two volumes), which could be considered as reinventions of the lost past.

There are two aspects to MS’s inclination to disseminate truth. The first was the colonial condition that determined all the realities through various mechanisms, including print media. The second was the illiteracy among the native masses. The illiterate masses strongly felt his struggle to overcome the inertia. Hence, his venture into media was to enlighten them via rational logic and truth based on historical and contemporary issues and developments.

One can assert that he should be named a public advocate because of his statement that his purpose in journalistic activities was to disseminate truth to the public. Moreover, when one revisits his writings, his concept of truth is directly related to justice. In this regard, his journalistic writing could be described as instructive. His advocacy for the vulnerable groups in the labour class provided enough insight to show that he cared much about the public, and the social reality of certain groups, particularly the labourers,⁶³ one that, in the 1930s and 1940s, was designed by colonial rule. On the other hand, it is challenging to call MS an “organisational activity.”⁶⁴

The dissemination of national awareness and historical consciousness was no doubt enhanced by the vernacular press. However, limiting the nationalist movements only to the initiation of print media does not reflect the whole reality. Before the expansion of the vernacular press, public talks (*ceramah*), the traditional propaganda mechanism, was actively utilised by local and regional leaders.⁶⁵ For instance, Mohammad Samin (Thayeb) was an influential orator in his public talks, as witnessed by MS. Pertaining to the creation of historical consciousness, MS highlighted various subjects about the history of the region in *Waspada*. For instance, he wrote one of the longest serial articles which seems total 63 pieces during the early months of 1960. The title of this serial articles is “Ungkapan Sedjarah: “Sumatera Utara Diabad ke-XIX,” and it is about the 19th century history of North Sumatra.⁶⁶

⁵⁸ Sofian Harahap emphasized MS’s being idealist by arguing that in general “journalist should be idealist” (Online Webinar, May 15, 2023).

⁵⁹ Tribuana Said (n.d.), *Mohammad Said: Wartawan Yang Juga Sejarawan*, Unpublished notes, p. 1; Mohd. Said. (n.d.). *Otobiografi*, p. 41.

⁶⁰ Tribuana Said (n.d.), *Mohammad Said: Wartawan Yang Juga Sejarawan*, Unpublished notes, p. 4.

⁶¹ Tribuana Said (n.d.), *Mohammad Said: Wartawan Yang Juga Sejarawan*, Unpublished notes, p. 1.

⁶² Based on the available data, it is understood that he wrote a total 16 articles about the labour issue (*Koeli Kontrak*). The first and the last issues are as follow: H. Mohd. Said (1976), “Koeli-Kontrak ‘Tempo Doeloe’ Dengan Derita dan Kemarahannya” (1), *Waspada*, Djumat, 30 Januari 1976, No. 7988, Tahun ke xxx, p. 3; H. Mohd. Said (1976), “Koeli-Kontrak ‘Tempo Doeloe’ Dengan Derita dan Kemarahannya” (16), *Waspada*, Selasa 17 Februari 1976, No. 8006, Tahun Ke-xxx, p. 3.

⁶³ His initiation of writings about *Koeli Kontrak* during the early phase of *Waspada* as follow: M. S. (1947), “Kembali Kekebon” (2), *Waspada*, Sabtu 19 April 1947, No. 83, Th. 1, p. 2; M. S. (1947), “Perkeboenan di Soematera Timoer,” *Waspada*, Senin 29 September 1947, No. 194, Th. 1, p. 2; M. S. (1948), “Kuli dan Perkebunan” *Waspada*, Djoem’at 29 Oktober, 1948, No. 491, Tahun Ke-II, p. 2; M. S. (1949), “Nasib Buruh di Deli,” *Waspada*, Chamis 1 December 1949, No. 793 Tahun Ke-III, p. 1; M. Said (1951), “Modal di Perkebunan,” *Waspada*, 18 June 1951, (Senin), No. 1222, Tahun ke-V; M. S. (1948), “Kuli dan Perkebunan” *Waspada*, Djoem’at 29 Oktober, 1948, No. 491, Tahun Ke-II, p. 2.

⁶⁴ This concept is borrowed from the work of Cheah Boon Kheng about A. Samad Ismail (Kheng, 1987: xvi).

⁶⁵ One of the earliest examples is observed to have been in Medan where Mohammad Samin gave a talk on February 17, 1918 as the commissioner of *Sarekat Islam* in North Sumatra (Said, 1977: 120).

⁶⁶ For the first paper of this serial see: Mohd. Said (1969), Ungkapan Sedjarah: “Sumatera Utara Diabad ke-XIX (1),” *Waspada*, 30 December 1969, Selasa. Dari Bijbelgenootschap (Bible Society) Sampai Politik Tembaku (digodog dari Data data dan Beberapa Fragmen Kesan Autentik Tokohisarjana Asing).

Labour Issue

The ordinary people, particularly those forced to work in plantations under the colonial administration's policies, had his close attention. In this regard, there is no doubt that the vulnerability of the large number of the working class employed in plantations easily induced a nationalistic point of view, as observed in the political stance of MS.⁶⁷ Moreover, after quitting *Oetoesan Sumatra* in 1929, he established a volunteer advocacy group (*pokrol*) to seek justice for the exploitation of workers by the capitalists running the plantations. Like his being a non-academic historian, here it is observed that MS acted on his intellectual capacity without any formal/higher education.⁶⁸ His *rakyat*-mindedness mirrors the name of *Waspada*, the newspaper he initiated in Medan and Jakarta. *Waspada* means 'caution!' (*hati hati!*) against mangling, or as most suggested, the divide and rule of the Dutch colonial regime.⁶⁹ MS did not invite the labour class for a class revolution. He prioritised a peaceful climate in his struggle against colonial rule, which was also symbolically observed in the title of his newspaper, *Waspada*. In addition, as a literate person, he might have acknowledged that class consciousness was irrelevant to plantation workers. Instead, discussing justness was, I suppose, attractive to both the working class as well as diverse sections of the public, including the Muslim and non-Muslim communities, and those communities divided by certain political ideologies.

Rakyat-Mindedness⁷⁰

MS's active political life was relatively short. He was a member of the North Sumatra Parliament (*Kongres Rakyat se-Sumatera Timur*), founded after independence (27 April to 1 May 1950) in Medan, whose aim was to separate Sumatra Island from the newly established Federal States of Indonesia, which was regarded as a political design by the former Dutch colonial government.⁷¹ After this process, MS became a member of the cadre of the Indonesian Nationalist Party (*Partai Nasional Indonesia*, or PNI), and was elected as the first head of the 'North Sumatra and Aceh' branch from 1950 to 1956. In this regard, as stated by his family members, he was the first PNI supporter in Medan.⁷² He was invited to the peace talks in den Haag (*Konferensi Meja Putar*) to represent Indonesian media in 1949.⁷³ His role in this political aspect continued until the Suharto era, and he was elected as a member of the Provisional People's Consultative Assembly (*Majelis Permusyawaratan Rakyat Sementara*, or MPRS) in 1967.⁷⁴

It should be remembered that Indonesian nationalism as an ideology should be contextualised to the sociopolitical situation in the Archipelago. Nationalism, in a sense, is related to secularism. Individuals who were considered nationalists, and participated in nationalist movements, also had a specific vital concern about religion, say, Islam, in the region. In this context, MS, as mentioned in some places in the article, was a nationalist, and was close to the nationalist leaders during the independence years, and later. Nevertheless, one example from his early life provides us with his religious thought. When he decided on being a journalist as a lifelong profession, the fundamental reason was to disseminate accurate information. The word 'true', also related to 'justice,' and the affairs of the Prophet (pbuh) were equalised in his understanding.⁷⁵ Justice as a concept also implicitly emerged in his writings. For instance, when he discussed why he chose journalism with his father, he developed a rational approach, whereby people needed to get real news "for a peaceful community life."⁷⁶

⁶⁷ Labor and enhancing nationalism in was an issue discussed among the colonial power circles during the 1920s both in Java and Sumatra and is argued that "... growing coolie unrest as a backdrop of the rising tide of nationalism" (Jan Breman (2002), "New Thoughts on Colonial Labour in Indonesia," *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*, Vol. 33, No. 2., p. 336). No doubt that gradually nationalist and religious organizations advocated the labor issue for the objective of political consciousness and course of independence.

⁶⁸ Mohd. Said (n.d.), *Otobiografi*, pp. 3, 5; Rayati Syafrin (n.d.), "Riwayat Hidup Alm. H. Mohammad Said".

⁶⁹ Interviewee 1; Indah Ramadhani (2021), *Praktik Kerja Jurnalis di Era Konvergensi Media Yang Terjadi Pada Instituti Berita Online Waspada.id* Medan, p. 46.

⁷⁰ His reference to Rakyat to public, ordinary people is observed in his all writings. Since his prime objective of journalism was to disseminate truth to the public. And there are some journal articles which includes the word Rakyat in the title as well: M. S. (1947), "Rakjat Bitjara," *Waspada*, Chamis 22 Mei 1947, No. 110, Th. 1, p. 2.

⁷¹ Mohd. Said (n.d.), *Otobiografi*, p. 3; Rayati Syafrin (n.d.), "Riwayat Hidup Alm. H. Mohammad Said".

⁷² Mohd. Said (n.d.), *Otobiografi*, pp. 3 & 5; Rayati Syafrin (n.d.), "Riwayat Hidup Alm. H. Mohammad Said"; Interview with family members and chief editor of Waspada, July 15, 2022, Waspada Office, Medan Kota.

⁷³ Interview with family members and chief editor of Waspada, July 15 2022, Waspada Office, Medan Kota. MS wrote about this process in his column in Waspada See: M. S., 1949: 2.

⁷⁴ Mohd. Said (n.d.), *Otobiografi*, p. 3; Rayati Syafrin (n.d.), "Riwayat Hidup Alm. H. Mohammad Said".

⁷⁵ Mohd. Said (n.d.), *Otobiografi*, p. 14.

⁷⁶ Mohd. Said (n.d.), *Otobiografi*, p. 15.

One can argue that the whole writing process of MS resulted from a “colonial predicament,” as argued by Ann Kumar, who asserted that this phenomenon was instrumental to the development of history writing in Indonesia.⁷⁷ In this context, as Kumar argued,⁷⁸ historians were recessive and “hardly analytical” in writing the exact phenomena that occurred during the late colonial era, and even after independence. On the other hand, MS wrote down the social and economic problems created by the colonial administration’s policies.

MS portrayed the working class as victims of the collaborative efforts of the Dutch colonials and the native feudal elites, who firmly controlled and administered the newly emerging export economy, or capitalism through massive investment in agricultural plantation areas from the 1920s onwards. This stance reminds the readers of the role and function of Max Havelaar, who was also representatively against the hegemonic ecopolitical structure of “the Javanese aristocracy colliding with the Dutch to oppress the peasantry.”⁷⁹

Some individuals played significant roles in the emergence of a nation, which was also relevant in the Indonesian context. Various forms of independence movements (*pergerakan*) occurred in the direct and indirect struggles against colonialism, as observed in the form of wars in Java and Sumatra throughout the 19th century. Although these wars are observed to have happened in a not entirely holistic way, they were limited to specific geographies; these were undoubtedly the sources of inspiration for the struggles and movements for independence in the early part of the 20th century. During the early stage of these struggles, the roles of religious leaders had a suitable place; in the later stage, some novel actors emerged, and took the lead. Social and political changes, triggered by internal and external factors, caused this diversion of leadership. However, it is undeniable that religion had a specific role in the later stage as well. On the other hand, new ideologies, such as socialism and nationalism, with their various branches—and Islam, though a religion, was transformed into a political ideology—were introduced into the new educated classes, with new media of information, such as newspapers, and journals, and new social institutions, such as clubs, higher education institutions, and political parties.⁸⁰ All these diverse ideologies by certain leaders in society converged on the path of independence.

Revisiting the History of the Region

Taking into consideration general perceptions, in Indonesia, MS is recognised in three categories at the national level as a journalist, non-academic or amateur historian, and politician to some extent.⁸¹ This is because he contained these crucial elements in his intellectual capacity and performed accordingly as an activist and ‘intellectual entrepreneur’ during the colonial and post-colonial periods. To define his philosophy, gaining a clear conception, that is assumed to have vital relevance with his intellectuality, is paramount. In this regard, it is right to track his philosophy in line with idealism. In another sense, his idealism is not theoretical, but quite relevant to his daily professional activities as viewed in his political stance, journalistic writings, and constant search for historical facts and figures.

MS was known not only as a journalist, but also as an amateur or public historian. This is not surprising if one considers the importance of the Archipelago’s long and salient history. Probably, another reason why MS was prone to developing an interest in history was because of his nationalistic stance. This was developed based on a political reality, such as the ‘colonial condition’ he witnessed and experienced in his early life. In a Weberian sense, I argue that nationalism should be considered a *typology*. Because it was a contra-ideology to the Western colonial rule, it almost became a religious or secular norm. This means that MS appeared to have comprehended the contribution of history in building a strong nation-state through independence movements even since his early years. As remarked by Mohd. Ali, “History is interpreted as the struggle for the attainment of certain humanitarian ideals, ideals which spring from our hopes of the future and are based on the past....”⁸² It is observed that, after 1969, MS shifted his

⁷⁷ Ann Kumar (2011), “Indonesian Historical Writing after Independence,” in Axel Schneider and Daniel Woolf (eds.), *The Oxford History of Historical Writing*, Volume 5: Historical Writing Since 1945, Oxford: Oxford University Press, p. 576.

⁷⁸ Ann Kumar (2011), “Indonesian Historical Writing after Independence,” p. 584.

⁷⁹ Ann Kumar (2011), “Indonesian Historical Writing after Independence,” p. 585.

⁸⁰ Bastin and Benda (1968), *A History of Modern Southeast Asia*, pp. 99-100.

⁸¹ Benedict Anderson describes Mohd. Said “as a historian” in his translation of one of the former’s articles. See: Said (1973): 145 (f.n.1); Mohd. Said (n.d.), *Otobiografi*, p. 3.

⁸² R. Mohd. Ali (1965), “Indonesia’s National Archives,” in K. G. Tregonning (ed.), *Malaysian Historical Sources*, Second Printing, Singapore: Malaysia Publications Ltd., p. 117.

orientation to history, and focused on more research and publications commencing from the issue of the Islamisation of Sumatra and Nusantara, and, in particular, Aceh history.

Moreover, he participated in various academic workshops and seminars to present his writings; some were converted into book publications. Among his historical writings was also the Malayan context while he was dealing with the grave of Syekh Ahmad in Negeri Sembilan.⁸³ This, and similar writings, provided insight into his intellectual curiosity and inquiry-mindedness.

Besides that, MS developed a solid interest in history, and the historical stages of North Sumatra.⁸⁴ In this sense, he especially had a broad inclination to study and disseminate information about the history of Aceh, and North Sumatra, the Islamisation of the region, and Singamangaradja. Although he did not obtain any higher education in history or the social sciences, and was not professionally academic, he conducted crucial field works and library searches to access archival documents written in different languages, such as English, Dutch, and Malay.

Among his works are, in order: a) The book titled *Koeli Kontrak* seems to be based on his witness and engagement with the plantation workers in various places, in particular, Deli; and b) *Aceh Sepanjang Abad*, a book with the most detailed work on Aceh, containing almost the whole historical period.⁸⁵ In addition, as mentioned by Ali Hasjmy, MS highlighted the Aceh issue in *Seruan Kita* as well.⁸⁶ This shows that he gradually developed his understanding of the historical developments of Aceh, and seemed to have conducted crucial research to re-construct them through his articles disseminated to the public, first in *Waspada*, which were then converted into a significant book.

One of his publications was an academic article about the social revolution that happened in the Pacific War in North Sumatra between the Republicans and the traditional powerhouses, and this work was translated by Benedict Anderson.⁸⁷ His journal articles included subjects related to sociopolitical changes, such as the Social Revolution in North Sumatra, published in *Harian Merdeka*, in Jakarta. These articles were later translated into English by Benedict Anderson and Toenggag Siagian, and published as a monograph titled “What Was the Social Revolution of 1946 in East Sumatra?” in the context of the ‘Cornell Modern Indonesia Project’ in 1973.⁸⁸

Some of his other works are as follows: *Deli Dahulu dan Sekarang, Perubahan Pemerintahan (Bestuurshervorming)*, *Bushido, 14 Bulan Pendudukan Inggris di Indonesia*, and *Sejarah Pers di Sumatera Utara*. As some family members and researchers had mentioned, he could not find time to

⁸³ H. Mohd. Said (1985), “Soal Makam Syekh Ahmad di Negeri Sembilan Malaysia,” *Waspada*, Rabu 13 Maret 1985, Halaman IV.

⁸⁴ MS developed his interest to history after his “transferring *Waspada* to his more business-minded wife Ani Idris in 1969. So, he could spend even more time on history” as argued by Reid (Personal communication with A. Reid, so that he could spend even more time on history).

⁸⁵ *Aceh Sepanjang Abad*, which is regarded as his prime work was based on his early articles published on 3 July 1959 till 9 December 1959, in *Waspada* (Mohd. Said (n.d.), Otobiografi, p. 4; Rayati Syafrin (n.d.), “Riwayat Hidup Alm. H. Mohammad Said”.

⁸⁶ The impact of these writings of Aceh caused consciousness of Acehnese pioneer struggle in the whole Indonesian society. As argued by some other writers Aceh has been considered as a ‘modal’ for the rest of Indonesia (Mohd. Said (n.d.), Otobiografi, pp. 4, 5.)

⁸⁷ Budi Agustono (n.d.), “H. Mohamad Said,” Opini, *Waspada*, n.p. MS was awarded by ‘*Sarakata Pancacita*’ and ‘*Medali Pancacita*’ by Aceh Governance which was called in 1970s as Governance of Special Province of Aceh (Pemerintah Daerah Istimewa Aceh), in 1978. This award was presented by Ali Hasjmy, then the Governor of Aceh. Aligned with it, he was also honoured by the title of ‘the Hero of Aceh Land (*Kepahlawanan Tanah Aceh*)’, and the Defender of Aceh Rights (*Pembela Hak-Hak Asasi Rakyat Aceh*) (Hasjmy, 1994: 28; Said, n.d.: 5; Syafrin, n.d.). Ali Hasjmy had a close relationship like other Acehnese political elites such as Daud Beureuh and social elites (*tokoh tokoh adat*) with MS and visited the latter in his home in Medan (Interview with the family members and Sofian Harahap, the chief editor of *Waspada*, on July 15, 2022, Medan Kota). In addition, MS was awarded by other institutions owing to his contribution in various fields. For instance, “*Sarakata Ulama*” and “*Medali Ulama*” were presented to him during the seminar titled ‘Masuk dan Berkembangnya Islam di Nusantara’ (10-16 Juli 1978); “*Satya Penegak Pers Pancasila*” (1991) which was presented by H. Harmoko, Minister of Information. 10 distinguished individuals including Mohd. Said were made an award because of their political activities against Gerakan 30 September/Partai Komunis Indonesia (Syafrin, n.d.: G30S/PKI) (n.w.). (n.d.). “Penghargaan Pemerintah Untuk Mohammad Said,” *Waspada*, p. 76. (This article with the date (Maret 1994) is compiled with some others and presented to me by the family of Mohd. Said on July 17, 2022, in Medan Kota). But *Waspada* publication must be different date.) He was honoured by “*Peniti Emas*” by the governor of North Sumatra in 1991 (from Ketua Serikat Penerbit Surat Kabar (SPS) Pusat) because of his support to the establishment of SPS in Solo in 1946 and funded the branch of it in Medan in 1991 (“Mohd. Said,” *Tokoh Indonesia*); (Rayati Syafrin, (n.d.). “Riwayat Hidup Alm. H. Mohammad Said”). There is also one award which proves that MS was also internationally recognized. During his Haj travel, Mohd. Said who was accompanied by Sukarno, was given a special award in July 1955 in Cairo by Gamal Abdel Nasser, Prime Minister of Egypt (Anwar, 1984: 67).

⁸⁸ Rayati Syafrin (n.d.), “Riwayat Hidup Alm. H. Mohammad Said”.

publish some others,⁸⁹ for example, “*Sejarah Harian Waspada dan 50 Tahun Peristiwa Halaman Satu.*”⁹⁰

Conclusion

As preliminary remarks, this paper presents an analytical reconstruction of the life story, intellectual stance, and contributions of the late MS from Medan, North Sumatra. We should acknowledge that this article has pinpointed some of the crucial parts of his biography, and intellectual life. His engagement in various subjects throughout his lifetime was based on his experiences in different periods, such as the colonial era, the independence movement, and the post-independence or nation-state building process.⁹¹ As argued by Bastin and Benda, historians -and we could say social scientists, generally- "choose to emphasise (and delete) certain events based on what they feel to be significant. Hence, we adopted this same approach in briefly studying MS in this article.

This work is a venture to preliminarily understand MS's sociopolitical environment through his experiences. It is also fair to state that interpreting all the relevant data about him and his works is subjective to a certain extent. Thus, to avoid being “trapped” by this subjectivity in understanding, we also applied various methods, such as the comparative method, to find a balance in the narration throughout the work. The political insight of MS was driven by his observations about what had been happening in the plantation sector where the capitalists, including colonial administration agencies, private capitalists, or the native ruling families, had hired labour power. Since then, he implicitly and explicitly tried to be on the right side of the *justice pendulum*. With his writings about various subjects, he sensitised the public to such issues that were relevant to their daily lives.

MS was not an ideological fighter for the rights of the labour class. Instead, he developed an inclusive understanding of these rights under colonial rule. However, it is also true that the material sources and experiences made MS take a position of reproach in colonial discourse where the labour class, and their conditions were primarily prioritised in the public arena. The labour class became a source of public discussion because of the independent treatment of the employers, who were primarily Dutch citizens acting as investors in North Sumatra, and the specific reactions from various circles, including members of the Dutch socialist circles in the Netherlands, and the local/regional journalists and intellectuals, such as MS.

Looking closely at his life experiences, three major professional engagements appear in journalism, politics, and history. One may develop an assumption that, over time, his professional engagement in journalism contributed to his inquiry-mindedness, which led him to focus more on historical works rather than journalism in his later years. On the other hand, it can be argued that these three primary intellectual interests of his had a certain common point, viz. colonialism. In this regard, colonialism, or the colonial condition was a significant factor for shaping his intellectual discourse to overcome it through various tangible and intangible vehicles throughout his life. He developed an analytical and interpretative perspective about deep-seated historical and contemporary issues, such as labour, colonial wars, and Islamisation. The labour issue was a salient theme that drew attention globally in the 1930s and 1940s. He tried establishing a novel frame of reference to create a collective consciousness. To realise his objective, his journalistic ventures became a vehicle through which he implicitly created a public force of change. In this regard, with his theoretical and mostly practical engagements in this

⁸⁹ Interview with the family members and Sofian Harahap, the chief editor of *Waspada*, on July 15, 2022, Medan Kota); Nuncintama Purba (2018), *Tinjauan Kritis Terhadap Buku Aceh Sepanjang Abad Jilid I dan II Karya H. Mohammad Said*, Undergraduate Thesis, Jurusan Pendidikan Sejarah Fakultas Ilmu Sosial Universitas Negeri Medan, Medan, UNIMED, p. 64.

⁹⁰ Indah Ramadhani (2021), *Praktik Kerja Jurnalis di Era Konvergensi Media Yang Terjadi Pada Institusi Berita Online Waspada.id* Medan, p. 46. Some of MS's works are as follow: *Zelfbesturende Landschappen Buitengewesten. Keradjaan Keradjaan Boemipoetara Jang Berhak Memerintah Sendiri*, Medan: Sinar Deli, 1937.

-Seminar Masuknya Islam ke Indonesia, Medan: Waspada, 1964.

-Deli Dahoeloe dan Sekarang, Medan: Sinar Deli 1937.

-14 Bulan Pendudukan Inggris di Indonesia, Medan: Antara, 1946.

-“Mentyari Kepastian Tentang Daerah, Mula dan Tyara Masuknya Agama Islam ke Indonesia,” *Sejarah Masuknya Islam ke Indonesia*, Medan: PSSMIKI, 1963.

-*Sejarah Pers di Sumatera Utara, Dengan Masyarakat Yang Dicerminkannya, 1885-1942*, Medan: Waspada (1976).

-Koeli Kontrak Tempo Doeloe, Medan: Waspada, 1977.

-*Aceh Sepanjang Abad, Jilid I*, Medan: Waspada, 1961; *Aceh Sepanjang Abad, Jilid II*, Medan: Waspada (1985) -“Dengan Otodidak Mengembang Tugas Rakyat,” *Visi Wartawan 45*, Jakarta: Yayasan Media Sejahtera.

⁹¹ Budi Agustono (n.d.), “H. Mohamad Said,” *Opini, Waspada*, n.p.

vocation, he was certainly a moderniser of journalism, or at the very least, one of the pioneers in this field.

Acknowledgement

The authors would like to thank Insitute of Islamic Thought and Civilization (ISTAC) and Research Management Center (RMC) of International Islamic University Malaysia (IIUM) for funding this research activity and allowing us to conduct field works in Malaysia and Indonesia for the purpose of collecting data in July and August, 2023.

References

Books and Journals

Ahmad, Kassim (2011), "Katakanlah Yang Benar: Peranan dan Tanggungjawab Akhbar," in Abdul Rahman Haji Ismail and Mahani Musa (eds.), *Akhbar dan Tokoh Persuratkhabaran Malasia Kurun ke-20*, Pulau Pinang: Penerbit Universiti Sains Malaysia.

Anderson, Benedict(2002). *The Spectre of Comparisons: Nationalism, Southeast Asia, and the World*, Reprinted, London: Verson.

Anderson, Benedict R. O’Gorman (2001), "Nationalism," in Joel Krieger (ed.), *The Oxford Companion to Politics of The World*, Second Edition, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Azwar, T. Keizerina Devi (2004), *Poenale Sanctie: Studi Tentang Globalisasi Ekonomi Dan Perubahan Hukum di Sumatera Timur (1870-1950)*, Medan: Universitas Sumatera Utara.

B. Ahmad, Zainal-Abidin (1945), "Malay Journalism in Malaya," *Journal of the Malayan Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society*, Vol. 19, No. 2, 244-250.

Baskoro, Lestantya R. (2023), *Melawat Ke Talawi: Tapak Langkah Wartawan Adinegoro*, Jakarta: Lembaga Pers Dr. Soetomo.

Bastin, John and Benda, Harry J. (1968), *A History of Modern Southeast Asia: Colonialism, Nationalism and Decolonization*, Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall, Inc.

Breman, Jan (2002). "New Thoughts on Colonial Labour in Indonesia," *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*, Vol. 33, No. 2, 333-339.

Hartadi, Kristanto (2023), "Sambutan: Merawat Sejarah Adinegoro," in Lestantya R. Baskoro (ed.), *Melawat Ke Talawi: Tapak Langkah Wartawan Adinegoro*, Jakarta: Lembaga Pers Dr. Soetomo.

Hendrajit (2016), "Mengenang Ani Idrus, Profil Wartawan Pejuang," *aktual.com*, 31 Maret 2016, Jakarta.

Heeren, John (1971), "Karl Mannheim and the Intellectual Elite," *The British Journal of Sociology*, Vol. 22, No. 1, 1-15.

Hussain, Abdullah (1984), *Sebuah Perjalanan*, Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka.

Hutasoit, Royandi (2013), Biografi Mohammad Said (1902-1995), *Skripsi Sarjana*, Departemen Sejarah, Fakultas Ilmu Budaya, Universitas Sumatera Utara.

Ingleson, John (1979), *Road to Exile: The Indonesian Nationalist Movement (1927-1934)*, Kuala Lumpur: Heinemann Educational Books (Asia) Ltd.

Kahin, Audrey R. (1985) "Preface," in Audrey R. Kahin (ed.), *Regional Dynamics of the Indonesian Revolution: Unity from Diversity*, Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press.

Kheng, Cheah Boon (1987), "Introduction," in *A. Samad Ismail: Journalism and Politics*, Singamal Publishing Bureua (M) Sdn. Bhd.

Kumar, Ann (2011), "Indonesian Historical Writing after Independence," in Axel Schneider and Daniel Woolf (eds.), *The Oxford History of Historical Writing*, Volume 5: Historical Writing Since 1945, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Lubis, Sjamsudin (1981), "Tokoh Yang Berhasil Mengelola Enam Majalah Sekaligus," *Pers Indonesia*, No. 25, (Januari), Vol. VII.

Mohd. Ali, R. (1965), "Indonesia's National Archives," in K. G. Tregonning (ed.), *Malaysian Historical Sources*, Second Printing, Singapore: Malaysia Publications Ltd.

Nasution, Zulfikri Habib (2012), H. Mohammad Said dan Karya Sejarahnya, *Skripsi*, Profram Studi s1 Jurusan Pendidikan Sejarah, Fakultas Ilmu Sosial Universitas Negeri Medan.

Purba, Nuncintama (2018), Tinjauan Kritis Terhadap Buku Aceh Sepanjang Abad Jilid I dan II Karya H. Mohammad Said," Undergraduate Thesis, Jurusan Pendidikan Sejarah Fakultas Ilmu Sosial Universitas Negeri Medan, Medan, UNIMED.

Ramadhani, Indah (2021), Praktik Kerja Jurnalis di Era Konvergensi Media Yang Terjadi Pada Institutis Berita Online *Waspada.id* Medan, *Skripsi*, Program Studi Ilmu Komunikasi Fakultas Ilmu Sosial Dan Ilmu Politik Universitas Sumatera Utara, Medan.

Reid, Anthony (1971), "The Birth of the Republic in Sumatra," *Indonesia*, Vol. 12, 21-46.

Safwan, Mardanas (1992), *Pahlawan Nasional: Teuku Nyak Arif*, Jakarta: Balai Pustaka.

Said, Mohammad (1992), "Dengan Otodidak Mengemban Tugas Rakyat," *Visi Wartawan 45*, (ed.), Mokhtar Lubis, Jakarta: Penerbit Media Sejahtera.

Said, Mohd. (1973), "What was the 'Social Revolution of 1946' in East Sumatra?," (Tr.: Benedict Anderson; Toenggoel Siagian), *Indonesia*, No. 15, (April).

Said, H. Mohammad, (1977), *Koeli Kontrak: Suatu Zaman Gelap Di Deli (Tempo Doelo Dengan Derita dan Kemarahannya)*, Medan: Percetakan Waspada.

Said, Tribuana (1988), *Sejarah Pers Nasional dan Bembangunan Pers Pancasila*, Jakarta: CV Haji Masagung.

Sjahril, T. (1971), *Garis Besar Perkembangan Pers Indonesia*, Serikat Penerbit Surat kabar (SPS), Djakarta: Pertjetakan Negara.

Supardo, Nj. Nursinah (1964), *Kesusasteraan Indonesia*, Tjetakan Kedua, Djakarta: Penerbit Tunas Memar Murni.

Newspapers

Agustono, Budi (n.d.), "H. Mohamad Said," Opini, *Waspada*.

Anwar, Rosihan (1984), "Menjadi Juruwarta Waspada Di Jakarta Di Zaman Revolusi," *Waspada*, 11 Januari, 1984.

"Dutch Ban Singapore Papers," *The Singapore Free Press*, 27 October 1948.

G30S/PKI. (n.w.) (n.d.), "Penghargaan Pemerintah Untuk Mohammad Said," *Waspada*, p. 76

Hari Pers Nasional, Februari 9, 1985. "Penghargaan Pemerintah Untuk Mohammad Said," *Waspada*.

"Hubungan Melaju Muslim dgn Pemerintah Siam Sudah Mulai Baik," *Waspada*, No. 579, Djum'at, 18 Februari, 1949, Tahun Ke III.

"Lembaga Asia Tenggara," *Waspada*, Djum'at 6 Pebruari, 1948, No. 304, Tahun Ke-II.

"Mohd. Said," *Tokoh Indonesia*, 3.12.2002. <https://tokoh.id/biografi/1-ensiklopedi/wartawan-dan-sejarawan-otodidak/>

Murad. (1894); (n.w.). (1894), "Bintang Timor," *Bintang Timor* (Surat Khabar Sahari Hari Dalam Bahasa Malayu), Vol. I, Singapura, Hari Satu (Isnin) 24 Hari Bulan September 1894, No. 72.

O., M. S., (1894), "Inche Inche dan Tuan Tuan," *Bintang Timor* (Surat Khabar Sahari Hari Dalam Bahasa Malayu, Vol. I, Singapura, Hari Dua (Slasa), 10 Hari Bulan July, 1894, No. 8.

Pandji Islam, No. 11, 18 Maart 1940.

S., M. (1949), "Djandiji Untuk Konperensi Medja Bundar" *Waspada*, Djoem'at 24 Djuni 1949, No. 663, Tahun Ke-III.

S., M. (1947), "Rakjat Bitjara"¹, *Waspada*, Chamis 22 Mei 1947, No. 110, Th. 1.

S., M. (1947), "Wedjangan dari Makassar," *Waspada*, Chamis, 24 Aperil 1947, No. 87, Th. 1.

Said, H. Mohd. (1985), "Soal Makam Syeikh Ahmad di Negeri Sembilan Malaysia," *Waspada*, Rabu 13 Maret 1985, Halaman IV.

Sinar Deli, Arba'a 18 January 1933, No. 15, Lembar Pertama, Tahun Ke IV.

Singh, Boet (1948), "Bangsa India di Sumatera," *Waspada*, Saobtoe, 11 Djanoeari 1948, No. 282, Tahun Ke-II.

Umar, Syafik (2017), "Lahirnya Koran Kaum-Kiblik," *Pikiran Rakyat*, 8 Juni, (Kamis). *Waspada*, No. 587, Senen, 28 Februari 1949.

Interviews and Unpublished Documents

Said, Mohd. (n.d.), Otobiografi: H. Mohammad Said: dengan Modal otodidak, Mengemban Masyarakat. (Unpublished Memoir).

Said, Tribuana (n.d.), *Mohammad Said: Wartawan Yang Juga Sejarawan*, Unpublished notes.

Harahap, Sofian (2023), *Virtual Seminar on the Commemoration of the 28th Year of the Demise of Haji Mohd. Said*, May 15, 2023, Department of History, Master Program in History Faculty of Cultural Sciences University of Sumatera Utara; ICAIOS (International Centre of Aceh and Indian Ocean Studies), ISTAC-IIUM, 15 May 2023.

Interviewee 1: Family members of MS, including Dr. Rayati Said and chief editor of *Waspada*, July 15, 2022, *Waspada* Office, Medan Kota.

Interviewee 2: Tribuana Said, July 27, 2023, Jakarta.

Interviewee 3: Ahmad Adam, September 10, 2023, Kajang, Selangor.

Personal communication via e-mail with Anthony Reid on Monday, November 7, 2022.

Said, Tribuana (2023), His speech during *Focus Grup Discussion* (FGD) “Mohammad Said,” August 14, 2023, Ruang DI Panjaitan, LePolonia Hotel & Convention Medan. Organized by Program Studi Strata Satu (Prodi S1) Ilmu Sejarah, Fakultas Ilmu Budaya Universitas Sumatera Utara (FIB USU) & International Institute of Islamic Thought and Civilisation (ISTAC-IIUM).

Syafrin, Rayati (n.d.), “*Riwayat Hidup Alm. H. Mohammad Said*,” n.p.