

TURKISH LAICISM IN INDONESIA'S NEWSPAPERS (1920-1940) AND ITS INFLUENCE ON INDONESIAN SECULARISTS AND MUSLIMS THOUGHTS

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Abstract: The Republic of Turkey was established in 1923 after the Treaty of Sevres and Lausanne were ratified by the Turkish nationalists led by Mustafa Kemal. This establishment has marked the beginning of a new era in the political, social, economic, and cultural lives of Turks. The main concern for Turkish statesmen was laicism. The policy has a significant effect on the global world, especially for the Dutch Indies. The purpose of this article is to provide a critical analysis of the roles of Indonesian-language newspapers in informing Dutch Indies citizens about Turkey's secularization process and how newspapers served as the primary medium for disseminating information about Turkey. Through newspapers, Muslims from Nusantara (the archipelago) expressed their views on the Turks' secularisation efforts. This study employed a historical method using contemporary Indonesian-language newspapers from the National Library of the Republic of Indonesia. The news of Turkey's secularisation had a significant impact on the thoughts of Indonesian secularists and Muslims in laying the nation's foundation in the 1940s.

Keywords: Turkey, the Dutch Indies, secularist, laicism, Muslim thought

Introduction

Indonesian language newspapers exploded in popularity at the turn of the twentieth century. The advancement of printing machines

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communication, and transportation were all factors in the emergence of these Indonesian-language newspapers. Several foreign newspapers made their way into the Dutch Indies, inspiring the indigenous people to form a variety of modern organisations. With the rise of the *Sarekat Islam*, the *Mubammadiyah* and the Indische Partij (Indies Party) political awareness and nationalist sentiments culminated with in the 1910s, acting as a vital stimulant to the new spirit.² The development of vernacular press is responsible for this. Although several organisations were credited with being the forerunners of national awakening, Sarekat Islam played a larger role. This was confirmed by Taufik Abdullah, who stated that Sarekat Islam was the pioneer of Indonesia's nationalism movement.³

Islam, without a doubt, was instrumental in promoting Indonesia's nationalism movement. A growing spirit of patriotism among Indonesians was sparked by a number of Muslim-run newspapers. The Cairo-based *Al Manar* magazine was successfully in inspiring modern Muslim activists to form *Mubammadiyah*, an Islamic organisation. Furthermore, the Singapore-based *Al Imam* newspaper inspired Indonesian activists to reflect on nationality and homeland discourses.⁴ As a result, at the turn of the twentieth century, newspaper played such a significant role.

Indonesian-language newspapers reported on international events, which benefited Indonesian activists and intellectuals by broadening their knowledge and horizon. For example, the victory of Japan over Russia in the 1905, Russo-Japanese war, inspired the indigenous people of Dutch Indies to rise up and advance. That victory had instilled them the belief that Asian nations were capable of defeating Russia due to their military prowess. Many Indonesian-language newspapers, such as *Warta Hindia*, *Oetoesan Hindia*, *Pantjaran Warta*, and *Sin Po* covered the Great War from 1914 to 1918. The news reported include the Balkan wars, North African wars, and the Ottoman State's dissolution in 1923. The Ottoman Empire was one of the Muslim

² Ahmad B. Adam, *The Vernacular Press and the Emergence of Modern Indonesian Consciousness (1855-1913)* (Ithaca, New York: Southeast Asia Program, Cornell University, 1995), p. xiii.

³ Taufik Abdullah, *Islam di Asia Tenggara: Manusia dan Kebudayaan di Asia Tenggara*, Seri Studi Wilayah No. 3 (Jakarta: Lembaga Research Kebudayaan Nasional-LLPI, 1976).

⁴ Michael Laffan, *Islamic Nationhood and Colonial Indonesia: The Umma below the winds* (London & New York: Routledge Curzon, 2003).

countries covered extensively in the Dutch Indies newspapers. Turkey's victory over Greece in the Turkish War of Independence, which forced the United Kingdom to sign a peace treaty, had already boosted the spirit of Indonesians fighting for independence. Following the establishment of the Republic of Turkey, Indonesian-language newspapers continued to report news and offer their perspectives on the country. Many prominent Turkish figures were covered extensively by Indonesian-language newspapers, including Mustafa Kemal, Halide Edip, Enver Pasha, and Ismet Inonu. These newspapers frequently reported on the 'Turks' progress at turn of the twentieth century.

The primary sources of this study were newspapers which were used to determine the perspectives of Indonesian-language newspapers in reporting on the establishment of the Republic of Turkey. Newspapers published in Indonesia from 1816 to 2014 are archived at the National Library of the Republic of Indonesia. *Bataviasche Koloniale Courant* was the oldest newspaper found in the National Library of the Republic of Indonesia was.⁵ Various Indonesian-language newspapers, such as *Kaoem Moeda*, *Oetoesan Hindia*, *Pantjaran Warta*, *Soeara Oemoem*, and *Sin Po*, were published at the turn of twentieth century. The newspapers, such as such as *Adil*, *Oetoesan Hindia*, and *Poeroendingan*, which reported on Mustafa Kemal and laicism in Turkey, provided materials for the analysis of this study. The voice of Muslim nationalists and secularists were represented in these publications. Because the current study aims to explore the insights of Indonesian-language newspapers on the establishment of Republic of Turkey in the early of the twentieth century, no Dutch-language newspapers were used in this study. The Indonesian-language newspapers were the media that represent indigenous people's thoughts and perspectives on global political dynamics. However, some other Indonesian-language newspapers attempted to harmonise with the Dutch colonial government. As a result, the newspapers used in this study were carefully chosen to represent the voices of the indigenous people of the Dutch Indies regarding the establishment of the Republic of Turkey. This article examined the ideas of laicism adopted by the Republic of Turkey in Indonesian-language newspapers published in the Dutch Indies. The study looked at the perspectives

⁵ Frial Ramadhan Supratman, "Koleksi surat kabar langka Perpustakaan Nasional Republik Indonesia sebagai sumber penelitian sejarah global," *Jurnal Kajian Informasi & Perpustakaan*, 8, 1 (2020): pp. 85-100.

and opinions of Indonesian-language newspapers about Turkey's laicism and the reactions of Indonesian intellectuals to the implementation of laicism in Turkey in the turn of the twentieth century.

Secularism and Laicism

After the end of World War I (1914-1918), the Ottoman Empire was forced to accept the consequences of its defeat in a series of treaties, including the Treaties of Sevres and Lausanne. As a result, the United Kingdom and France received large swaths of its territory. Following that, the Turkish nationalists led by Mustafa Kemal rose to resist Anatolia and got rid of European influences, particularly Greece, which had planned to occupy Izmir. Mustafa Kemal declared the establishment of Republic of Turkey in September 1923, and abolished the sultanate a year later. The Muslim world praised and criticised this modern Turkish statesmen's policy. The Dutch Indies, which had long maintained ties with the Ottoman State, expressed their thoughts, reactions, and opinions on changes in modern Turkey. This fact demonstrated that relations between the two countries existed although the official diplomatic relations between them began after Indonesia's independence in 1945.

The young Turkish Nationalist leaders planned to create a new nation based on Turkish nationalism. This is seen as a logical outcome of the rejection of the Ottoman State socio-political reality, which was structured upon a multi-ethnic and multi-religious society. Aside from the new political foundation, there was another important aspect of the new Republic's fundamental ideology to consider. Although nationalism is an ideology supported by certain epistemological structure, the founding fathers intentionally followed the steps of political changes in Europe. In this regard, the new Republic's leadership cadre turned to France to gain some understanding of laicism as a form of *weltanschauung* of the new state.

Laicism is a modernization aspect pioneered by Western countries. This ideology emphasises the separation of religion and state. Thus, religion must not interfere with the social and political affairs of the state. The emergence of laicism has been linked to scientific, knowledge advancement, social and political dynamics since the end of the eighteenth century. Before 1800, the church limited the powers and authority of European kings, giving the church a strong position in

Europe. Since the French revolution in 1789, the church's power has been dwindling and weakening, allowing modern states based on people's sovereignty to emerge. Many European countries were influenced by the modern state concepts proposed by various French philosophers such as Montesquieu. As a result, Europe underwent such a significant transformation in 1984, with the establishment of numerous nation states based on the principle of nationalism. The Ottoman State was then affected by nationalism.

The Young Ottomans (*Genç Osmanlılar*) emerged in the Ottoman State in the middle of the nineteenth century, attempting to combine Islam and modernisation values. The Young Turks appeared at the end of the nineteenth century, attempting to apply modern ethics and political philosophy, and encouraging the Ottoman State to establish a parliament. Both the Young Ottomans and the Young Turks were precursors to modernise Republic of Turkey's emergence at the turn of the twentieth century.

After Europe invented laicism, many countries, including the United States, France, and Turkey, adopted the ideology. The laicism practiced in these countries, however, had its own set of differences and similarities. Ahmet T. Kuru divided laicism into two types: assertive secularism and passive laicism. Assertive laicism necessitated the intervention of the state in playing its assertive role to separate religion from the public space. Passive laicism, on the other hand, required the state to play a passive role in allowing religion to emerge in public. Therefore, passive laicism emphasised the government's neutrality in religious matters.⁶ Accordingly, it appears that active laicism stressed on the state's active role, whereas passive laicism indicated that the state was passive and did not play a crucial role in religious regulation. France adopted assertive laicism since the state played an active role in prohibiting the appearance of religion in the public space. France's policies played a significant role in limiting religious freedom. The prohibition of school students using or wearing religious symbols is an example of assertive laicism employed by France.⁷ Different cases occurred in the United States in which the government did not play any roles in religious regulations, and this country adopted a passive laicism. Because Turkey had been influenced

⁶ Ahmet T. Kuru, *Secularism and State Policies Toward Religion: The United States, France and Turkey* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009), p. 11.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 106.

by French laicism since the nineteenth century, it adopted an assertive laicism. The state played a crucial role in restricting religious activities in the public space. For instance, wearing *medreses* (traditional religious school) and teaching Islamic Religion subject were prohibited in Turkey in 1924.⁸

Turkey, which was established in 1923, is a modern state with a European political philosophy. The Young Turks movement had already been established in the Ottoman State since the end of the nineteenth century, and they were member of the Ottoman elite who received civil and military education. However, members of the Young Turks movement were dominated by the military group. Modern values influenced the military and bureaucrat groups the most. They were taught and trained in a variety of foreign languages, including French, English, and German. They also learned modern subjects such as physics, mathematics, chemistry, biology, geography, and history. Thus, their upbringings differed significantly from that of religious traditionalists who continued to study traditional subjects like Islamic jurisprudence, *fiqh*, and *hadith*. As a result, the military and bureaucrat groups were the forerunners of the Ottoman State's modernisation movement. Mustafa Kemal was a member of the Young Turks movement who rose to prominence at the end of the nineteenth century.⁹

Mustafa Kemal was the most important figure in Turkey's establishment of assertive laicism. He took several steps to lay the groundwork for laicism, including abolishing the caliphate institution in 1924. Following the establishment of the Republic of Turkey in 1923, the country was led by the President, who also served as head of the state, and the government was led by the prime minister, who served as the head of government. Turkey, like the rest of Europe, adopted a parliamentary system. Because the President was the symbol of the state in the parliamentary system, it was impossible for two symbols to coexist in a country. The sultan was seen as a threat to the President's position. Therefore, the sultan was no longer the symbol of the state, but it was the world's symbol of Muslim leadership. Sultan Abdulmecid V was the sultan of the Ottoman state at that time. However, in 1924, Turkey abolished the sultanate institution and

⁸ Ibid., p. 165.

⁹ Hüsrev Tabak, "Transnational Kemalism; Power, Hegemony, and Dissidence," *Bustan: The Middle East Book Review* 11, 2 (2020): 145-55. doi:10.5325/bustan.11.2.0145.

decided to deport the sultan and all other members of the Ottoman dynasty to another country. Since then, the sultan and his family had been barred from entering Turkey.

Turkey abolished Islamic Sharia law, which had been apply by the Ottoman state to implement the assertive laicism policy. The Swiss Code has taken place of Sharia law. Sufi boarding schools were also closed down, and traditional education was replaced with modern educational institutions. The establishment of Istanbul University was one of the most significant turning points in the early era of the Republic of Turkey. The university offered modern faculties such as Pharmacy, Medicine, Engineering, Mathematics and Natural Sciences. Turkey's government also implemented a controversial policy by changing the *adzan* summon from Arabic to Turkish. These policies were some of the effects of Turkification, which began in the early of the twentieth century when the government saw the need to standardise the language. Turkish language was a key component in encouraging Turkish nationalism. The Ottoman Turkish language was replaced by the modern Turkish language using Latin alphabets after being used for hundreds of years during the Ottoman State.¹⁰ The language institution also looked into replacing Ottoman Turkish vocabulary with modern Turkish vocabulary, such as replacing *zêlzele* (earthquake) with *deprem*. Another example of Turkey's laicism power is the government's decision to change the status of Hagia Sophia Mosque, which was turned into a museum. The policy was deemed so contentious that it elicited a wide range of responses from Muslim from all over the world. Since 1453, Hagia Sophia had served as the Ottoman Empire's grand mosque. Mustafa Kemal later changed its status to that of a museum. nonetheless, in the decades following Mustafa Kemal's death, Kemal's successors began to change their laicism policies.¹¹

¹⁰ The use of Latin alphabets in Turkish language was also debated in Indonesian-language newspapers, see: "Pers di Toerki," *Kamadjoean*, No. 63 Tahoen VI (September 1929), p. 3. (Note: In fact, this revolutionary change happened on 1 November 1928. There must be a printing mistake); "Hoerof Arab Turkij," *Bintang Islam*, No. 6, 7, 8, 25 Maret and 10-25 April 1929, Tahoen VIII, p. 119.

¹¹ Perin E. Gürel, "Good Headscarf, Bad Headscarf: Drawing the (Hair)lines of Turkishness," *Journal of the Ottoman and Turkish Studies Association* 5, 2 (2018): pp. 171-93.

Mustafa Kemal as a Muslim Hero

It is of great interests to study the news on Mustafa Kemal both from Islamist and nationalist newspapers. Mustafa Kemal was portrayed not only as a nationalist hero, but also a Muslim hero who elevated Turkey above Western hegemony. The Turks, once known as Europe's sick man, have resurrected as a powerful nation. Mustafa Kemal was undoubtedly the driving force behind Turkey's revival as a Muslim country. According to *Oetoesan Hindia*, a newspaper owned by Sarekat Islam, he was credited in making a significant contribution to the Muslim world, and hoped that all of Kemal's policies would bring Turkey closer to what the Holy Quran suggested.¹²

Hatta described Mustafa Kemal as a worthy leader despite the fact that the Ottoman Sultan initially despised him. According to Hatta, Mustafa Kemal was regarded as a rebel when he led the Turkish independent movement from 1919 to 1921; however, once he was able to repel the Greeks from Anatolia and free Turkey from humiliation, he was then praised and hailed.¹³

When covering the news of Mustafa Kemal's death, *Adil* magazine, an Islamic magazine owned by *Muhammadiyah*, made a headline titled "Kemal Attaturk: Turkish Hero." In that coverage, *Adil* elaborated the story of Mustafa's life heroically, and his great achievements in building modern Turkey. Mustafa Kemal was highly praised since he was able to rise up the Turks' dignity equal to that of the Westerners. *Adil* magazine concluded its coverage by expressing its hoped that Turkey would continue to be a developed country, avoid western influence and maintain its adherence the Holy Quran, allowing the Islamic world to be proud of Turkey.¹⁴

Mustafa Kemal's death was reported in 1938 by *Peroendingan* newspaper, which mentioned his virtues. It said that Mustafa Kemal died in Ramadan, a month highly glorified by Muslims. Mustafa Kemal died at the age of 59, one year younger than Prophet Muhammad's age.¹⁵ The newspaper appeared to portray Mustafa Kemal as a ghazi (a Muslim hero) who was admired not only by Turks but also Muslims all over the world.

¹² *Oetoesan Hindia*, January 24, 1923.

¹³ *Darmo Kondo*, September 15, 1933.

¹⁴ *Adil*, November 19-26, 1938.

¹⁵ *Peroendingan*, November 11, 1938.

Due to his efforts to modernise Turkey in various fields, Mustafa Kemal was considered as the “Father of Modern Turkey”. He was also the first President of Republic of Turkey established in 1923. He worked at the Ottoman military institution before becoming a president. Mustafa Kemal rose to prominence during World War I (1914-1918), owing to his pivotal role in the Battle of Gallipoli in 1915. Then, in 1919, he became well-known for his efforts to combat Western imperialism. As a result, many Indonesian-language newspapers praised Mustafa Kemal. *Soeara Moehammadijab* said, “Mustafa Kemal saved Turkey after Turkey lost the war”.¹⁶ *Doenia Achirat* gave Mustafa Kemal the title ‘*senopati*’, a title given to a Javanese knight. *Bintang Hindia* also dubbed Mustafa Kemal ‘a Muslim Tiger’.¹⁷ Other Indonesian-language newspapers also gave Mustafa Kemal heroic titles.¹⁸

Apart from praises for Mustafa Kemal, Muslim activists in the Dutch Indies criticised Turkish leaders’ laicism at the turn of the twentieth century. The Muslims of Dutch Indies believed Turkey had become an anti-Islamic country. *Soeara Islam*, a newspaper published in Bukittinggi, was one of the newspapers that expressed disappointment with Turkey’s conversion to a secular.¹⁹ However, various Muslim media owned by the Dutch Indies countered the criticisms on Turkey’s laicism. *Pandji Islam* was one of the newspapers actively attempting to correct the misinformation. It was said that Turkey intended to modernise for a long time ago, but its efforts have been hampered by the conservative ‘*ulamā*’ group.²⁰ *Pandji Islam* claimed that the purpose of the Mustafa Kemal’s modernisation policies was not to destroy Islam, but rather to enable Islam adapt to Western progress and

¹⁶ *Soeara Moehammadijab*, December 3, 1939.

¹⁷ Chiara Formichi, “Mustafa Kemal’s Abrogation of the Ottoman Caliphate and its Impact on the Indonesian Nationalist Movement,” Madawi Al-Rasheed, Carool Kersten and Marat Shterin, *Demystifying the Caliphate* (London: Hurst & Co, 2012), pp. 99-100.

¹⁸ “Nagara Anoe Merdika: Kemadjoean Turki,” *Tjabja Islam*, No. 56, 5 July 1934–Mauloed 1353, Tahoen 1, p. 13-5; “Djenazat Attaturk,” *Pedoman Masjarakat*, No. 51 Arba’a, 21 December 1938, Tahoen IV, p. 1031; “Ghazy Mustafa Kemal Attaturk,” *Pedoman Masjarakat*, No. 48 Arba’a, November 31, 1938, Tahoen IV (olmalh tarih), pp. 956-7.

¹⁹ “Nasib Kaoem Moeslimin di Timoer Dekat,” *Soeara Islam*, 1 September 1931, No 3, Tahoen 1, Bockit Tinggi, p. 2.

²⁰ *Pandji Islam*, July 5, 1938.

modernity: “Everyone exchanged ideas with modern *syaiikhs* who perceived their religion with their narrow-mindedness and who perceived surrounding events without abhorrence and hatred.”²¹ The news further reported that Turkey’s policies were designed to enable Islam to adapt to the modern progress of the age. *Pandji Islam* was concerned about the closure of Hagia Sophia Mosque, and it attempted to correct the information about the conversion of Hagia Sophia Mosque to a museum.

The Republic of Turkey always continued to strengthen the national front, it did not discriminate Muslims and Christians, and that was one of the reasons why the status of Hagia Sophia mosque was changed. It was changed in order the Republic of Turkey would be fair and not hurt Christian Turks’ minority group. Therefore, Hagia Sophia was made neutral; it was not a mosque or a church (Wasn’t it originally a church?); in fact, it was a building of statues. There were also pictures of Maria and Christian signatures on its walls, so Muslims would object to use it as a mosque.²²

Pandji Islam clearly supported Turkey’s laicism as the newspapers believed that laicism practiced by Turkey was not intended to destroy Islam, but rather to place Islam in the context of modern life, allowing Islam to adapt to the changing times: “Turkey’s officials never announced that they left Islam.”²³ *Pandji Islam* also mentioned Turkey’s advancement due to its application of laicism, such as women’s emancipation which allows to appear in public. Women had already played an important role in public life during the Ottoman era; however, they played a larger role in developing their country at the start of the Republic of Turkey. The first Turkish female pilot, Sabiha Gokcen, was an example of a successful Turkish woman, and *Pandji Islam* published an article about her, calling her “Anatolian heroine.”²⁴

Debates between Sukarno and Natsir over Turkey’s Laicism

Prior to the 1920s, a significant number of Javanese intellectuals expressed a clear and exclusive nationalism. It developed significantly as a rejection of both Dutch cultural dominance and the artificial

²¹ Ibid.

²² Ibid.

²³ *Pandji Islam*, 25 July 1938.

²⁴ *Pandji Islam*, 25 August 1938.

political framework of the colonial state.²⁵ A small group of educated upper class Indonesians became more aware of their basic similarities as Dutch administration welded Indonesia into one centrally governed administrative unit.²⁶ The frequent changes of ministerial cabinets, the antagonism between Masyumi and Partai Nasional Indonesia (PNI, National Party of Indonesia), the continuous power struggle between the civilian government and the army, and the scattered rebellions revealed the federal state's instability. As a result of this situation, there was no consistent policy toward the Darul Islam-Negara Islam Indonesia. The Islamic groups, led by Muhammad Natsir and Masyumi, were committed to a political solution to the 'Darul Islam problem,' but the secular nationalist faction, fearful of the country's unity, invoked 'the duty to restore peace.' Masyumi's political capital and dwindled, and it was dissolved in 1960 after losing election in 1955. Kartosuwiryo was captured, tried and executed, and 65 the army had defeated the Darul Islam from Aceh to Sulawesi by 1965.²⁷

Most Muslims in the Dutch Indies agreed to the establishment of Republic of Turkey Before the 1940s. The establishment of Republic of Turkey was discussed at Al Islam Indies congress. At that congress, Hajj Agus Salim expressed his gratitude to Mustafa Kemal who had saved the Republic of Turkey from the Western occupation.²⁸ *Pedoman Masyarakat* magazine published a story about Atatürk's contributions to Turkey after he died.²⁹ The controversy began when Sukarno wrote about the separation of religion and state in *Pandji Islam* magazine, suggesting that Indonesia should learn from Turkey about the role of religion in the state. On June 1, 1940, The article was reprinted in a number of magazines and newspapers, including the *Adil* newspaper. On July 20, 1940, Mohammad Natsir published a harsh rebuke in *Adil* newspaper. Sukarno's support for Turkey's laicism appeared to have elicited indirect responses from Muslim intellectuals in the Dutch

²⁵ David Henley, *Nationalism and Regionalism in a Colonial Context: Minabasa in the Dutch East Indies* (Leiden: KITLV, 1996). p. 2.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 5

²⁷ Chiara Formichi, *Islam and the Making of the Nation: Kartosuwiryo and Political Islam in 20th Century Indonesia* (Leiden: KITLV, 2012), p. 11.

²⁸ Martin Van Bruinessen, "Muslims of Dutch East Indies and the Caliphate Question," *Studia Islamika* 2, 3 (1995), pp. 126-127.

²⁹ *Pedoman Masyarakat*, November 16, 1938.

Indies. Even Natsir used an alias name of Ahmad Muchlis when responded to Soekarno's opinion.

Sukarno and Natsir were Indonesian Muslim intellectuals who played crucial roles in politics after the country's independence in 1945. Sukarno was Indonesia's first President for more than 20 years, and Natsir, a Masyumi politician, was the country's first Prime Minister in the 1950s. Sukarno was known as a symbol of national and religious revivalism. He founded the Indonesian National Party (PNI), which served as the foundation for the *priyayi* (nobility) and *abangan* (non-practitioner). Clifford Geertz divided the Javanese people into three groups: *santri* (religious people), *abangan* (non-practitioners), and *priyayi* (nobility). The *abangan* was a community that emphasized animism and *kejawen* teachings (a Javanese spiritual belief system). Meanwhile, the *santri* were a religious group identical to the *pesantren* (a traditional Islamic boarding school). Muhammad Natsir, a West Sumatera native, was a representative of the *santri* group, which clung tenaciously to Islam's teachings. He was a prominent member of the Masyumi Party, which was backed by two of Indonesia's most powerful Islamic groups, *Nahdlatul Ulama* and *Muhammadiyah*.

Sukarno and Natsir had different views on Turkey's laicism. Their points of views were surely inseparable from their political, social, and cultural activities that they were involved in before 1940s. Sukarno was the son of Raden Soekemi Sostodihardjo, a Javanese nobleman. Sukarno's mother was a Balinese, and she was a teacher and member of the Theosophy Association. Sukarno undoubtedly lived the high life, considering his father's position. He was even be able to continue his studies in Surabaya and Bandung. Sukarno became a student of Cokroaminoto, a prominent figure in *Sarekat Islam*, in Surabaya. Sukarno learned a lot of political lessons from his time with Cokroaminoto. Sukarno met with other Cokroaminoto students such as Hajj Agus Salim, Suwardi Suryaningrat (Ki Hajar Dewantara), Semaun, Muso, Alimin, and Wahab Chasbullah.³⁰ Sukarno then became a member of the Study Club and founded the PNI political party. The Dutch colonial government arrested and imprisoned him for his political activities. Natsir, on the other hand, was a member of the *Jong Islameten Bond*. He spent a lot of time there socializing with

³⁰ Yohanes Sulaiman, "The Banteng and the Eagle: Indonesian foreign policy and the United States of America during the Sukarno era" (Unpublished Dissertation: The Ohio State University, 2008), pp. 43-44.

Islamist activists like Kasman Singodimedjo, Mohammad Roem, and Sjafrudin Prawiranegara.³¹ He was a student of Ahmad Hasan, the founder of *Persatuan Islam* (Persis). In the beginning of the twentieth century, A. Hasan was well known as a modern Islamist activist who emphasized Islamic fundamentalism, or returning Islam to its essence as defined by the Holy Quran and the Hadith. Therefore, A. Hasan frequently chastised old-fashioned and traditional religious practices, and Natsir was a member of *Muhammadiyah* and *Persis*.³²

Suhelmi³³ had written about the rivalry between the two statesmen, but he had only addressed their disagreement over Islamic state. In fact, the focus of the debate was not on ideas about an Islamic state, but rather on secularisation practices in Turkey and how Indonesia could adopt them. Most foreign researchers focused too much on the Islamists' agenda of establishing an Islamic state when portraying Islam's dynamics in Indonesia, especially on the eve of Indonesia's independence.³⁴ Despite Natsir's harsh criticism of Sukarno's article, their perspectives on Islam had a lot in common. Both of them wished for Islam to be saved from backward traditions, as well as for Islam to be able to adapt to modernity. It was highly likely that their differences stemmed from the fact that they had both become Ahmad Hasan's students. Sukarno and Natsir, however, had opposing viewpoints on Turkey's laicism.

Sukarno's article titled "Why did Turkey separate Religion from the state?" was published in *Pandji Islam* magazine. Sukarno began his article by quoting a well-known Turkish sociologist, Ziya Goka, who was also Attaturk's inspiration. Ziya Gokalp said that "We come from the East, and we are heading for the West".³⁵ Actually, Sukarno's stance in the article was he supported Ziya Gokalp's ideas. Sukarno attempted to present Muslims' negative views on other Muslims who had already converted to laicism. Many Muslims misunderstood with the purpose

³¹ Dardiri Husni, "Jong Islamieten Bond: A Study of a Muslim Youth Movement in Indonesia during the Dutch Colonial Era, 1924-1942" (Unpublished MA Thesis: McGill University Montreal, 1998), p. 33.

³² Ibid., p. 61.

³³ Ahmad Suhelmi, *Polemik Negara Islam: Sukarno Vs Natsir* (Jakarta: UI Press, 2014).

³⁴ See Michael Freeman, Katherine Ellena, and Amina Kator-Mubarez, "Islamism in Indonesia," Michael Freeman, *The Global Spread of Islamism and the Consequences for Terrorism* (Lincoln: Potomac Books and University of Nebraska Press, 2021), pp. 23-56.

³⁵ *Adil*, 1 June 1940.

of Turkey's laicism, and Sukarno wanted to make it to the readers that Turkey's laicism was intended to "feed Islam".

"Some say that Turkey is now anti-Islam; Frances Woodsmall, a Turkey expert, says that 'Modern Turkey is opposed to obsolescence and kerks (churches), but this is not against religion. Islam as a belief system has not been abolished. Prayers in mosques were not prohibited, nor were religious rules and regulations abolished."³⁶

Sukarno was attempting to convey to the public that modern Turkey was not intended to abolish religion; rather, Turkey's laicism was intended to free religion from the state's constraints. As a result, Sukarno cited the views of several prominent Turkish figures, including writer Halide Edip and Justice Minister Mahmud Esad Bey. Both of them believed that religion needed to be "liberated from government restraint in order to flourish."³⁷ Sukarno quoted Ataturk's opinion supporting religion-state separation in order that "Islam will not merely be religious rituals only spinning *tasbeih* (prayer beads) at the mosques, but it will become a religious belief leading to noble struggle." Furthermore, he stated that a democratic community should not be concerned about the separation of religion and state because "as long as the majority of parliament members are religious, then all members of parliament will be religious." There will never be any bills proposed against Islamic values as long as the majority of parliamentarians' politics is political Islam.³⁸

Sukarno then went on to explain the relationship between economy and laicism in the article. He highlighted the fact that he "had evidence that the Young Turks were insufficient." Sukarno admitted that his ability to analyze situations in Turkey was not entirely accurate because he had not learned much about the country. He linked laicism to economic development. "Practically, Muslim Turks were not capable of making the Turkish economy healthy and flourish; indeed, they had weakened it," he said.³⁹ Therefore, he thought that religious practices having previously been conducted in Turkey could not improve Turkey's economy due to the fact that the unity of religion and the

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ *Adil*, 8 June 1940.

state had resulted in legal conflicts of interests. During the era of the Ottoman state, there were two kinds of legal jurisprudences namely Sharia Law and *Qanun* Law. Sukarno stated that the division made the hearts of the Turks' community torn apart, *scheur* (cracked); therefore, the Turks' community was always divided." Then, Sukarno discussed the concept of *kismet* (fate) deep-rooted in the Turks' community during the era of the Ottoman state. Sukarno said, "There are no other countries understanding *qadar* so old-fashionably and misunderstood it more than the Turks."⁴⁰ Sukarno deemed that the misunderstood meaning of *kismet* (fate) made Islam experience a decline.

As a result, any initiative would be limited. Any desire to advance would be suppressed; it would be prohibited in the name of *kismet* (fate). Because the government's hands and legs were tied to *shaikh al-islām* and *muftis*, it was incapable of immediately enforcing any new regulations unless they were critical. Their *fatwa* frequently contains the word 'do not.'⁴¹

Sukarno went on to criticised *tariqa* and *takhayul* which are deeply rooted in the Turks' community. He quoted an opinion of C.H. Becker, a German orientalist. Becker said that *tariqa* made the Turks lazy and "led them to mysticism life".⁴² This factor, according to Sukarno, contributed to the Turks' economic decline. He claimed that rather than focusing on growing the economy, Turkey was inhabited by a large number of *darwishes* or *tariqa* practitioners. The whole country "was full of darwishes whose clothes were full of patches and worn out, who lived as beggars, were jobless, became shrine gravediggers, and sold amulets."⁴³ There were various *tariqa* groups in the Ottoman state, such as *Bektasbi*, *Qadiriya*, *Naqsyabandiyah*, *Halveti*, and *Maulawiyah*. *Maulawiyah* was a *tariqa* group well known for its whirling dance (whirling *darwish*) taught by a sufi leader named Maulana Jalaluddin Rumi. Sukarno said that those *darwishes* created many *keburafat* (senselessness) so the various *keburafat* practices made Turkey's economy suffer a decline: "Various kinds of *keburafat* and Islamic

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² *Adil*, 12 June 1940.

⁴³ Ibid.

impurities have made the economic status of the Turks low and made their economy backward.”⁴⁴

Muhammad Natsir intellectually responded to Sukarno's article in an Indonesian newspaper about Turkey's laicism. On July 20, 1940, *Adil* newspaper published Natsir's article for the first time. Natsir chastised ordinary people for believing that religion only referred to religious rituals such as salah (prayer) and saum (fasting). In fact, “all *ḥudūd* rules, in our muamalat (transactions or dealings), in the community [staat] already stipulated by Islam, and serving as part of Muslims' future goals and ideology” were included in the definition of religion.⁴⁵ In this regard, Natsir wanted to clarify that because Islam encompassed such a broad ideology in all aspects of human life, it could not be considered a religion solely focused on rituals. He criticised Mustafa Kemal, saying, “Do not be angry; we do not throw religion into people's hands in order for religion to ‘flourish’.”⁴⁶ In this regard, Turkey adopted Swiss legal code on the grounds that Islam would “flourish”. Then, Natsir asked again, “Will the Swiss *grondwet* (constitution) used to replace Islamic *grondwet* (constitution) “be able to flourish better” if Kemal and the government of Turkey in general continue to give examples to the millions of Turkish people?”⁴⁷ Therefore, Natsir wanted Turkey to also show justice in treating the Islamic Sharia Law.

Furthermore, Sukarno discussed an opinion expressed by Minister Essad Bey in the article, who stated that “if religion is used to rule, it will be used as a means of punishment by despots, cruel people, and iron-handed kings.”⁴⁸ Natsir then attempted to refute Sukarno's use of an Essad Bey quote. According to Natsir, Essad Bey's claims “weren't backed up by real evidence whose veracity could be verified and investigated by those who accepted the fatwa.”⁴⁹ Therefore, Natsir wanted to inform his readers that the repressions that occurred during the Ottoman state's reign could not be linked to Islam.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ *Adil*, 20 July 1940.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ *Adil*, 3 August 1940.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

Iron-fisted leaders existed during the Ottoman state's era, and it made no sense to exclude Islam from state affairs; however, what can we say! Because the tongue lacks bones, there are numerous ways to conceal one's attitudes and intentions.⁵⁰

When discussing laicism, Sukarno tried to explain his readers that it was not sufficient for the government to use sharia law to rule the country; therefore, secularization was an unavoidable process for the Republic of Turkey. In the article, Natsir wanted to show that the Holy Quran could be used to regulate the religion. He admitted that Quran does contain manual instructions for governing a state and that there was no information about *contingenteering*. In fact, “the Quran did not explain how to install an antenna, and the *Sunnah* did not explain matters concerning air protection (*luchtbescherming*) evacuation and 1001 similar other things, making our modern state situations complex and complicated *gecompliceerd*.”⁵¹ He said that the Holy Quran dealt with “fixed matters” which he defined as “things that have never changed and whose importance has lasted as long as humans have lived”. As a result, people's safety and several traits were regulated by Islam. Natsir emphasised that the Holy Quran was more concerned with the essence of humanity than with technological advancements.

To put it simply, we can conclude that Islam regulates such matters. Islamic law establishes equal rules and regulations that govern both individual and social life. All of these factors cannot be changed for the sake of individual and social safety as long as individuals and communities are composed of blood and flesh and are not composed of angels.⁵²

Natsir realised that the Holy Quran did not govern technical or easily-changed issues, but it governed eternal and humanistic matters. He stressed the importance of exercising caution when attempting to link the Quran to modern developments. In terms of politics, the Holy Quran was unquestionably beneficial because it regulated human ethics. The Holy Quran, in fact, emphasised how Islam regulated the qualities that a leader should possess. He emphasised that the most important aspect of leadership was its characteristics, not its title. He did not hold against a leader who borrowed laws or rules and

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ *Adil*, 3 August 1940.

⁵² Ibid.

regulations from other countries as long as the laws were in accordance with religious goals. However, Natsir believes that a leader cannot “adopt all those laws with vicious eyes and swallow them whole”.⁵³

Natsir also criticised Sukarno’s views on “Islam and Democracy.” Sukarno stated in the article that in a democratic world, Islamic values could still exist as long as Islamist politicians dominated parliament, and while religion was separated from the state, religion could still exist in legislation. Natsir criticised the viewpoint by observing the political situation in Turkey. He said that Members of the parliament “did not appreciate religious values.” Despite Natsir’s criticism of the concept of democracy, Islam itself was “democratic and against *istibdat* (autocracy), absolutism, and despotism.”⁵⁴

Conclusion

The establishment of Republic of Turkey in 1923 had an impact not only on Turkey’s history, but also on the history of other countries, particularly the colonies of European imperialists. The Dutch Indies was a colony with a large number of Muslim populations as well as communities of Chinese and Arabs. Many Muslims have been influenced by nationalist movements since the early of the twentieth century. They used newspapers to express their thoughts, ideas, and opinions. The changes of Republic of Turkey encouraged newspapers to cover and report on what was going on in the country, and one of the topics discussed in Indonesian-language newspapers was laicism. The newspapers reported and debated Turkey’s laicism openly. Their goal in covering news about Turkey’s laicism was to correct misinformation about the ideas that underpin the country’s laicism. Furthermore, several prominent Indonesian nationalist figures such as Sukarno and Natsir openly discussed Turkey’s laicism in newspapers.

As a result, the readers obtained knowledge and information about Turkey’s laicism. This article argues that newspaper coverage of Turkey’s secularization has a significant impact on Indonesian intellectuals’ thinking in building the foundation of the state. The acrimonious debates between Sukarno and Natsir were not about the establishment of an Islamic state; rather, they were about their views on Turkey’s secularization. The establishment of modern Turkey appeared to have influence on the Indonesian’ journey in determining

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

its course and the status of religion when declared the Republic of Indonesia on August 17, 1945. []

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