

Pan-Islamism and Islamic Nationalism: Sarekat Islam's Ideology in the Indonesian Independence Movement (1911–1927)

Pan-Islamisme dan Nasionalisme Islam: Ideologi Sarekat Islam
dalam Pergerakan Kemerdekaan Indonesia (1911–1927)

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Abstract: *The rise of Indonesian nationalism in the early twentieth century cannot be separated from the contribution of Sarekat Islam (SI), the largest Islamic political movement in colonial Indonesia. While previous studies have examined SI from political, organizational, and anti-colonial perspectives, limited attention has been given to the role of Pan-Islamism in shaping its ideological foundations. This study analyzes the reception of Pan-Islamism within SI and its contribution to the emergence of Islamic nationalism between 1911 and 1927. Using a qualitative historical approach based on archival documents, periodicals, and relevant scholarly literature, the study finds that SI adopted Pan-Islamism as a source of moral and political legitimacy in resisting colonial rule. Pan-Islamic ideas encouraged SI to develop strategies of mass mobilization, political education, economic empowerment, and organizational consolidation. Despite internal ideological tensions, SI maintained a nationalist orientation rooted in Islamic values. This article argues that Pan-Islamism functioned not merely as a transnational religious discourse but as an ideological framework that transformed Islamic solidarity into anti-colonial nationalism in colonial Indonesia. The study concludes that SI played a pivotal role in the formation of Islamic nationalism and the broader struggle for Indonesian independence.*

Keywords: Pan-Islamism; Sarekat Islam; Islamic nationalism; anti-colonial nationalism; transnational Islamism; colonialism.



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Abstrak: *Kebangkitan nasionalisme Indonesia pada awal abad ke-20 tidak dapat dipisahkan dari kontribusi Sarekat Islam (SI), organisasi politik Islam terbesar di Hindia Belanda. Meskipun berbagai penelitian telah mengkaji SI dari perspektif politik, organisasi, dan gerakan anti-kolonial, perhatian terhadap peran Pan-Islamisme sebagai fondasi ideologis gerakan ini masih relatif terbatas. Penelitian ini bertujuan menganalisis penerimaan Pan-Islamisme dalam tubuh SI serta kontribusinya terhadap kemunculan nasionalisme Islam pada periode 1911–1927. Penelitian menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif-historis dengan memanfaatkan arsip, surat kabar, dokumen organisasi, dan literatur akademik yang relevan. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa SI mengadopsi Pan-Islamisme sebagai sumber legitimasi moral dan politik dalam melawan kolonialisme. Gagasan Pan-Islamisme mendorong SI mengembangkan strategi mobilisasi massa, pendidikan politik, pemberdayaan ekonomi, dan penguatan organisasi. Meskipun menghadapi berbagai ketegangan ideologis internal, SI tetap mempertahankan orientasi nasionalisme yang berakar pada nilai-nilai Islam. Artikel ini berargumen bahwa Pan-Islamisme tidak hanya berfungsi sebagai wacana keagamaan transnasional, tetapi juga sebagai kerangka ideologis yang mentransformasikan solidaritas Islam menjadi nasionalisme anti-kolonial di Indonesia kolonial. Penelitian ini menyimpulkan bahwa SI memainkan peran penting dalam pembentukan nasionalisme Islam dan perjuangan kemerdekaan Indonesia.*

Kata Kunci: *Pan-Islamisme; Sarekat Islam; nasionalisme Islam; nasionalisme anti-kolonial; Indonesia kolonial.*

Introduction

The rise of Indonesian nationalism in the early twentieth century cannot be separated from the contribution of Islamic organizations that fostered collective awareness among indigenous communities regarding political emancipation and national independence.¹ Among these organizations, Sarekat Islam (SI) emerged as the largest and most influential socio-political movement, mobilizing broad Muslim constituencies under the leadership of H.O.S. Tjokroaminoto.² SI developed within the context of colonial domination that marginalized indigenous populations economically, politically, and socially.³ In this setting, Islam functioned not merely as a religious identity but also as an ideological framework through which resistance against colonial rule could be articulated and organized.⁴

One of the most significant intellectual currents influencing SI was Pan-Islamism, a transnational movement advocating solidarity among Muslims across territorial boundaries.⁵ Emerging in response to European imperial expansion and the weakening of Muslim political power, particularly the decline of the Ottoman Caliphate, Pan-Islamism promoted the idea that Muslims shared a common destiny and therefore should unite against foreign domination.⁶ These ideas reached the Dutch East Indies through networks of pilgrims, reformist scholars, and the rapidly expanding print media. Newspapers such as *Oetoesan Hindia* and *Sinar Djawa*

disseminated discourses on justice, equality, anti-colonialism, and Muslim solidarity, thereby shaping the political consciousness of indigenous Muslims and strengthening aspirations for self-determination.⁷

Scholarly discussions on Sarekat Islam have generally developed along four major themes. First, studies on SI and Indonesian nationalism emphasize its role in cultivating political awareness, mobilizing mass participation, and contributing to the formation of a national identity that transcended local and ethnic affiliations.⁸ These studies highlight SI as a pioneer of modern political organization in Indonesia and an important actor in the emergence of anti-colonial nationalism.⁹ Second, research on global Pan-Islamism has examined the circulation of Islamic reformist ideas across colonial territories and the influence of transnational Muslim networks in shaping local resistance movements.¹⁰ Such studies demonstrate that anti-colonial activism in many Muslim societies was often connected to broader intellectual and political developments in the Islamic world.

Third, scholarship on Islam and anti-colonial resistance has explored how Islamic teachings, symbols, and institutions provided moral legitimacy for political struggle against colonial authorities. This body of literature argues that Islamic movements were not solely concerned with religious reform but also played crucial roles in challenging structures of domination and advocating social justice.¹¹ Fourth, studies on the internal dynamics of Sarekat Islam have focused on ideological contestation between Islamic and socialist-communist factions. These analyses reveal how competing visions of liberation and social transformation contributed to organizational fragmentation, particularly during the 1920s when socialist influences intensified through connections with international communist movements.

Although these strands of scholarship have significantly enriched understanding of Sarekat Islam, important gaps remain. Existing studies tend to examine SI primarily from political, organizational, economic, or ideological-conflict perspectives.¹² Meanwhile, the role of Pan-Islamism as a foundational ideological framework that shaped SI's conception of nationalism has received comparatively limited attention.¹³ Most studies treat Pan-Islamism as a contextual influence rather than as a central analytical category explaining how Islamic solidarity was transformed into a nationalist political project in colonial Indonesia. Consequently, the relationship between transnational Islamic thought and the formation of Indonesian nationalism remains insufficiently explored.

The leadership of H.O.S. Tjokroaminoto provides an important entry point for addressing this gap. Under his leadership, SI evolved from a socio-economic association into a mass political movement with a coherent ideological orientation. Tjokroaminoto articulated a vision that integrated Islamic values, human dignity, social justice, and national independence. His conception of "Islam and Nationality"

sought to reconcile religious commitment with the aspiration for a sovereign nation-state. Through congresses, publications, educational initiatives, and organizational networks, SI disseminated this vision throughout the archipelago, fostering political consciousness among Muslims and encouraging collective resistance to colonial rule¹⁴. At the same time, SI's commitment to economic empowerment and educational development reflected a broader strategy of nation-building. Programs supporting indigenous trade networks, opposition to economic monopolies, cadre formation, and educational institutions demonstrated that SI viewed political liberation as inseparable from social and economic advancement. These initiatives contributed to the emergence of a politically aware Muslim public and strengthened the organizational foundations of the nationalist movement.

This study argues that Pan-Islamism was not merely an external influence on Sarekat Islam but constituted a significant ideological foundation through which SI articulated anti-colonial nationalism. By examining the period from 1911 to 1927, this article analyzes how Pan-Islamic ideas were received, interpreted, and transformed within SI; how these ideas shaped organizational strategies and political mobilization; and how they contributed to the development of an Islamic-oriented nationalism in Indonesia. In doing so, the study offers a new perspective on the interaction between transnational Islamic thought and local nationalist movements.

The originality of this article lies in its effort to bridge the historiography of Indonesian nationalism with studies of global Islamic political thought. Rather than treating nationalism and Pan-Islamism as separate or competing phenomena, this research demonstrates how both were intertwined within the ideological framework of Sarekat Islam. By highlighting this relationship, the article contributes to broader debates on Islam, nationalism, and anti-colonial resistance while providing a deeper understanding of the intellectual foundations of Indonesia's struggle for independence.

Method

This study employs a qualitative historical approach to examine the role of Pan-Islamism in shaping the ideology of Sarekat Islam (SI) and its contribution to the Indonesian independence movement during the period 1911–1927. A historical approach is appropriate because the study focuses on reconstructing and analyzing the development of Pan-Islamic ideas within SI and their influence on anti-colonial political mobilization. Following Gottschalk's historical method, the research proceeds through four stages: heuristics, source criticism, interpretation, and historiography. These stages enable the systematic reconstruction of historical events and the critical analysis of ideological developments within their socio-political context.¹⁵ In this regard, the study adopts a historical-analytical perspective to

examine the relationship between Pan-Islamic thought and SI's political practices in the context of Dutch colonial rule, in line with historical approaches commonly employed in studies of Indonesian nationalism.¹⁶

The sources used in this study consist of both primary and secondary materials. Primary sources include Dutch colonial archives such as Colonial Verslag and Volksraad proceedings, organizational documents of Sarekat Islam, including statutes, congress reports, and party decisions, as well as contemporary newspapers such as *Oetoesan Hindia*, *Sinar Djawa*, and *Het Tijdschrift*. The speeches and writings of H.O.S. Tjokroaminoto, particularly those concerning Islam, politics, and social transformation, are also utilized to reconstruct the ideological orientation of SI.¹⁷ Secondary sources consist of books, journal articles, and scholarly publications indexed in SINTA and Scopus that discuss Pan-Islamism, Sarekat Islam, Islamic nationalism, and anti-colonial movements in colonial Indonesia.¹⁸ The use of diverse sources allows for historical triangulation and enhances the validity of the findings.

Data collection was conducted through library research and archival documentation. The heuristic stage involved identifying and collecting relevant archives, historical documents, newspapers, and academic literature from the National Library of Indonesia, the National Archives of Indonesia, KITLV collections, and digital repositories such as the National Library E-Resources database.¹⁹ Documentary materials, including original manuscripts, organizational records, newspaper clippings, and photographs, were systematically examined to trace the evolution of Pan-Islamic discourse within SI. Since the study focuses on historical materials, interviews were not conducted.

To strengthen the analytical framework, this study combines historical inquiry with intellectual history, discourse analysis, and political ideology analysis. The intellectual history approach is employed to trace the transmission, adaptation, and transformation of Pan-Islamic ideas within Sarekat Islam and to understand how global Islamic political thought was interpreted by indigenous Muslim intellectuals in the colonial context. Discourse analysis is used to examine the language, narratives, concepts, and political vocabularies articulated in speeches, organizational documents, newspapers, and writings of SI leaders, particularly H.O.S. Tjokroaminoto. Through this approach, the study identifies how concepts such as Muslim solidarity, anti-colonialism, justice, independence, and nationality were constructed and disseminated among SI members and the broader public. Political ideology analysis is further employed to investigate the interaction between Islamic principles, Pan-Islamic consciousness, and emerging nationalist aspirations in shaping SI's ideological orientation.

Data analysis was conducted through external and internal source criticism to evaluate the authenticity, reliability, and credibility of historical materials.²⁰ External criticism focused on the physical authenticity, chronology, and provenance of documents, while internal criticism assessed the accuracy, bias, and ideological position of the sources. Subsequently, thematic interpretation was employed to identify key ideological patterns and their historical significance. The findings were then synthesized through historiographical analysis and presented in a narrative-analytical form in accordance with academic standards of historical writing.²¹ This analytical procedure enables the study to explain how Pan-Islamism functioned not merely as a transnational religious discourse but as an ideological framework that contributed to the emergence of Islamic nationalism and anti-colonial political mobilization in colonial Indonesia.

Reception and Construction of Pan-Islamism in Sarekat Islam: An Analytical Reconsideration

The reception of Pan-Islamism within Sarekat Islam (SI) cannot be understood merely as the importation of a foreign doctrine, but as a process of ideological construction in which a transnational idea was indigenized to address the structural injustices of Dutch colonial rule.²² Pan-Islamism resonated strongly among Muslim populations in the colony precisely because it offered an interpretive framework capable of naming and explaining the experience of subordination produced by colonialism.²³ Under the leadership of H.O.S. Tjokroaminoto, the idea was reconstituted as a moral and religious instrument for awakening collective consciousness against oppression.²⁴ Here Benedict Anderson's concept of the *imagined community* is analytically instructive: the *ukhuwwah islāmiyah* that SI emphasized functioned as a mechanism for imagining a horizontal comradeship that transcended class, ethnicity, and locality.²⁵ Members who would never meet one another came to conceive of themselves as belonging to a single fraternal body, furnishing the colonized population with a novel political identity that of fighters for justice and human dignity.²⁶ In this sense, Islam supplied the symbolic and emotional infrastructure through which a dispersed colonial population could imagine itself as a unified moral community.²⁷

This construction is best read through the lens of *religious nationalism*, in which sacred categories provide the grammar of political belonging. SI's political *da'wah* asserted the equality of all Muslims before divine law, and this theological claim carried a sharply subversive social charge.²⁸ By proclaiming spiritual equality, SI's preaching eroded the racialized hierarchy of the colonial order that consigned the *inlander* to a position of structural inferiority. The theological assertion of equality before God was thus translated into a political claim to equal rights within the polity,

allowing religious doctrine to function as a foundation for social democratization in colonial society. Religion here was not an obstacle to modern political mobilization but its very engine: it converted metaphysical equality into a demand for civic and political equality, mobilizing a sense of collective selfhood among a people previously denied recognition as political subjects.

The consolidation of SI's ideology was achieved in significant part through the strategic deployment of symbols and slogans capable of fusing the global and the local. Mass formulations such as "Islam Rises" and "the Unity of Muslims" condensed abstract transnational solidarity into accessible emotional appeals, binding the immediate grievances of the colonized to the wider drama of the global Muslim community. This symbolic strategy proved more effective at generating broad political enthusiasm than competing movements of the same period, in part because it operated simultaneously on affective and ideological registers. Equally decisive was the role of the *'ulamā'* network and charismatic religious figures who, like Tjokroaminoto himself, possessed the rhetorical capacity to render the idea of political Islam in idioms intelligible to ordinary people. Public assemblies and the colonial-era vernacular print media notably *Oetoesan Hindia* functioned as the connective tissue through which the ideology was internalized down to the grassroots. This points again to Anderson's insight regarding print-capitalism: the periodical press did not merely transmit ideas but actively manufactured simultaneity, enabling geographically scattered readers to participate in a shared imaginative horizon and to recognize their local struggle as part of a larger collective narrative.

SI's relationship with the wider Islamic world lends the case its distinctly transnational Islamist character, in which the unit of political imagination exceeds the territorial boundaries of the emergent nation. Correspondence with religious figures in the Middle East, together with circulating news concerning the condition of the Ottoman Caliphate, cultivated a moral solidarity that framed the struggle in the Dutch East Indies as one front within an international resistance to imperialism. The Caliphate operated as a potent symbolic referent a locus of legitimacy and a sign that the colonized Muslims of the archipelago belonged to a global umma engaged in a common struggle. This transnational orientation positioned SI not only as a national actor but as a node within a broader axis of Islamic revival, illustrating how anti-colonial consciousness in this period was frequently articulated through supranational rather than strictly territorial frameworks of belonging.

Yet the movement's significance also lies in the way Pan-Islamism was operationalized as a concrete program of anti-colonial nationalism with material and institutional dimensions. The ideology was enacted economically through boycotts of foreign goods, conceived as a form of economic resistance against colonial

capitalism, and through campaigns for economic self-reliance intended to forge the collective strength necessary for structural liberation. Institutionally, the formation of an internal fatwa body to provide juridical guidance on the social and economic dilemmas generated by colonialism demonstrates an effort to render Islam a practical and governing solution rather than an abstract creed. This fusion of religious legitimacy with concrete economic and juridical action reveals the hybrid character of SI's project: it was at once a religiously imagined community, a vehicle of anti-colonial nationalist mobilization, and a participant in a transnational Islamic movement.

Taken together, these practices demonstrate that Pan-Islamism within SI was never a purely theoretical doctrine but a lived ideology embodied as social, political, and economic energy that affirmed Islam as a force of liberation. By synthesizing the imaginative resources of religious community, the mobilizational logic of anti-colonial nationalism, and the expansive horizon of transnational Islamism, SI transformed itself into the largest and most revolutionary popular organization in the early twentieth-century Dutch East Indies. In doing so, it positioned Islam at the very center of the legitimacy of the independence struggle and, more broadly, it exemplifies how religious universalism and emergent nationalism, far from being antagonistic, could be mutually constitutive in the anti-colonial moment.

The Influence of Pan-Islamism on the Political Strategy of Sarekat Islam (1911–1927): An Analytical Reconsideration

Pan-Islamism furnished Sarekat Islam (SI) with a strategic orientation that enabled it to operate as a modern political organization grounded in the mobilization of a mass Muslim base. The significance of this ideological foundation lies in its capacity to fuse two registers of struggle that are often analytically separated: the anti-colonial cause was framed not merely as a matter of national self-determination but as a religious obligation to uphold the dignity of the *umma*. This fusion is precisely what the concept of *religious nationalism* seeks to capture a political formation in which sacred duty and territorial liberation become mutually reinforcing rather than competing imperatives.²⁹ Acting on this vision, SI undertook the political education of the populace through schools, mass assemblies, and a preaching of liberation designed to elevate popular political consciousness.³⁰ In doing so, it pioneered the formation of a structured Islamic political base in the archipelago, demonstrating how religious idiom could be marshaled to produce distinctly modern forms of political organization and pedagogy.

SI's strategy of mass mobilization was realized through the construction of an extensive network of branches dispersed across the archipelago, reaching even interior regions that had previously enjoyed minimal access to the national

movement. This organizational architecture is best understood through Benedict Anderson's notion of the *imagined community*: the branch network did not simply administer members but knitted geographically scattered and socially heterogeneous populations into a single imagined collectivity, allowing a peasant in the interior to conceive of common cause with a trader on the coast.³¹ The result was the largest organization of resistance in the history of colonial Indonesia of its era. Crucially, popular adherence flowed from the perception that SI's struggle was an extension of the faith and Islamic identity that members already held, indicating that the movement's mobilizing power derived less from abstract organizational appeal than from its grounding in a pre-existing reservoir of religious belonging that it reconstituted as political solidarity.³²

Pan-Islamism likewise shaped SI's communicative strategy, and here the dynamics of *transnational Islamism* and print-mediated nationalism converge most visibly.³³ Through organs such as *Oetoesan Hindia*, SI disseminated a discourse of equality, social justice, and critique of colonial exploitation articulated in a language that mobilized religious and national sentiment simultaneously. The newspaper thus became a key instrument for the circulation of a modern political Islam and for the formation of an anti-imperialist public. Anderson's argument concerning print-capitalism is analytically pertinent: the periodical press manufactured a sense of simultaneity among its readers, enabling them to experience their dispersed local grievances as moments within a single unfolding narrative of resistance.³⁴ What distinguishes the SI case, however, is that this imagined community was not bounded by the territorial nation alone; the religious framing implicitly linked the colonial readership to the wider Muslim world, lending the emergent national consciousness a transnational horizon.

Beyond ideological resistance, SI pursued legal and political advocacy by employing the Volksraad as an entry point through which to press for indigenous political rights. Although colonial domination sharply circumscribed the efficacy of such participation, SI treated the parliamentary arena as a space for articulating demands for the restoration of the people's dignity. This dual posture is analytically revealing, for it demonstrates SI's capacity to combine a moral-religious mode of resistance with the instrumental, procedural logic of modern politics. The case thus complicates any simple opposition between "traditional" religious mobilization and "modern" institutional politics; SI exemplifies what scholars of *anti-colonial nationalism* have described as the creative hybridity of colonial-era political movements, which appropriated the institutional forms of the colonial state while subverting its legitimating hierarchy.³⁵

SI's trajectory was not, however, without rupture, and the most consequential fracture exposes the tensions inherent in mobilizing through a global ideology. As

communism began to penetrate and shape a faction of cadres subsequently known as "SI Merah," an internal ideological conflict emerged that set Pan-Islamism against a Comintern-style ethic of class struggle. This schism illuminates a structural vulnerability of movements built upon a transnational ideology: such movements are liable to fracture when they encounter a rival transnationalism competing for the same constituency. The confrontation between Pan-Islamism and international communism was, in effect, a collision between two universalisms one organized around the *umma*, the other around the global proletariat each offering the colonized a framework of belonging that exceeded the boundaries of the nation. The split therefore reveals not merely a contingent factional dispute but the broader predicament of anti-colonial movements compelled to choose among competing transnational sources of legitimacy.

While the division structurally weakened the organization, it simultaneously clarified SI's self-definition as a vehicle of Islamic nationalism. Pan-Islamism came to function as an ideological filter ensuring that SI's struggle remained aligned with Islamic values rather than dissolving into a secular revolutionary movement detached from its congregational base. This act of ideological boundary-drawing is itself analytically significant: in expelling the Comintern-oriented faction, SI was not merely resolving a personnel dispute but reaffirming the religious foundations of its imagined community, thereby preserving its legitimacy in the eyes of the wider Muslim public.³⁶ The episode demonstrates that the consolidation of a movement's identity often proceeds through such moments of exclusion, in which the community defines itself as much by what it refuses as by what it affirms.³⁷

Taken together, these dynamics indicate that Pan-Islamism determined not only the organizational structure of the SI movement but also supplied the spiritual legitimacy underwriting its political struggle against colonialism. By integrating preaching, political education, media mobilization, and parliamentary diplomacy, SI demonstrated that Islam could serve as a thoroughly modern framework for cultivating a progressive and inclusive national consciousness. In this respect the SI experience constitutes a compelling instance of the convergence of religious nationalism, anti-colonial nationalism, and transnational Islamism, in which religious universalism functioned not as an impediment to modern political subjectivity but as its very condition of possibility. SI thus played a central role in the historical transformation of Muslims into political subjects within the narrative of Indonesian independence.

Sarekat Islam in the Formation of Indonesian Islamic Nationalism: An Analytical Reconsideration

1. SI's Contribution to the Formation of Indonesian Islamic Nationalism

Sarekat Islam (SI) functioned as a pioneer in articulating a formulation of nationalism grounded in Islamic teaching, and its significance is best grasped when this achievement is read through the conceptual lens of *religious nationalism*. SI advanced the claim that the struggle for independence constituted not merely a political question but a sacred trust a religious obligation to abolish tyranny and uphold justice on earth.³⁸ Through this narrative, SI integrated Muslim identity as a constitutive element of an Indonesian nation entitled to live freely and sovereignly. What is analytically notable here is the inversion of a familiar assumption: rather than treating religion as a parochial attachment to be transcended by modern nationhood, SI rendered religious belonging the very ground upon which national consciousness was raised.³⁹ The sacred and the national were not sequential stages but mutually constitutive registers.

SI's principal contribution to this Islamic nationalism lay in its success in producing a *collective consciousness* the conviction that Muslims constituted the largest socio-political force capable of determining the direction of the national struggle.⁴⁰ Here Benedict Anderson's concept of the *imagined community* is indispensable: SI enabled a vast and dispersed population, the overwhelming majority of whom would never meet, to imagine themselves as a single political body bound by shared faith and common subjection. Each Muslim was assured that participation in the struggle was a manifestation of solidarity with fellow believers, and this imagined fraternity translated into a broad spirit of popular resistance. The movement thus converted a religiously imagined community into a politically mobilized one, demonstrating how the affective resources of faith could be marshaled to generate modern national feeling.

This nationalism was not, however, a purely ideational construct; it acquired material density through SI's economic program. By developing cooperatives, educational institutions, and economic advocacy on behalf of the indigenous population, SI sought to free the colonized from the grip of colonial capitalism.⁴¹ This dimension situates SI squarely within the tradition of *anti-colonial nationalism*, in which the assertion of national dignity is inseparable from the struggle for economic self-determination.⁴² The campaign for economic independence cultivated a national self-confidence a sense that the colonized constituted a nation capable of standing on equal footing with others. In this respect the nationalism SI fostered was not merely a political abstraction but a social reality that the population could experience directly in the conduct of everyday economic life.

SI further exerted a formative influence on the political thought of the succeeding generation of the movement. National figures such as Soekarno, Semaoen, and Agus Salim were forged within the SI tradition of struggle, with the result that Islamic ideas, framed in national terms, came to color the earliest conceptions of Indonesian independence.⁴³ SI thus served as a *kawah candradimuka* a crucible for the nation's founding figures, a fact that underscores its role less as a single organization than as a pedagogical formation through which an entire generation acquired its political grammar. Moreover, SI disseminated principles of inter-ethnic brotherhood and popular sovereignty derived from the Islamic principle of *ukhuwwah*. These values furnished a crucial social foundation for an *inclusive nationalism* that did not negate the religious identity of society an analytically important point, since it demonstrates that the universalism of religious brotherhood could underwrite rather than obstruct a cross-ethnic national solidarity, visible in the emergence of national solidarity across regions in response to oppressive colonial policy.⁴⁴

Finally, the SI movement opened a path for large-scale Muslim political participation at the national level through active involvement in the Volksraad and other political forums. Although the colonial framework of reform was severely circumscribed, SI exploited this constrained space to voice popular interests and to introduce the concept of a state governed by its own people, thereby strengthening the intellectual runway of Indonesian nationalism. It may therefore be emphasized that SI pioneered the construction of an Islamic nationalism that prepared the ideological, social, and political foundations for the birth of an independent Indonesia.⁴⁵ In doing so, SI offered a decisive refutation of the assumption that Islam stood opposed to modernity or nationhood; on the contrary, it rendered religion a source of legitimacy that reinforced both the assertion of national identity and the vision of a just and godly future state.

2. Internal Dynamics and Ideological Challenges (1921–1923)

The internal dynamics within SI during 1921–1923 constituted a decisive phase in the formation of the organization's political identity, and they are best understood as a confrontation between two rival universalisms competing for the allegiance of the same colonized population. Entering the 1920s, tension emerged between adherents of Pan-Islamism and groups influenced by the socialist ideas of international communism.⁴⁶ This divergence of orientation produced a dualism of strategy and political vision within the body of SI. The Comintern influence carried by figures such as Semaoen and Darsono introduced a framework that prioritized the economic class conflict between proletariat and bourgeoisie, whereas SI sought to retain Islam as the principal foundation of the movement, judging an exclusive emphasis on material aspects to be inattentive to the moral and spiritual obligations

of the *umma*. The collision of these two currents generated an increasingly open ideological contestation.⁴⁷

This episode is analytically richer than a mere factional dispute, for it dramatizes the structural predicament of *transnational Islamism* when it encounters a competing transnationalism. Both Pan-Islamism and Comintern communism offered the colonized a horizon of belonging that exceeded the boundaries of the emergent nation one organized around the global *umma*, the other around the international proletariat.⁴⁸ The conflict was therefore a contest between two imagined communities of global scope, each laying claim to the same constituency of workers and peasants.⁴⁹ Tjokroaminoto, as leader, sought to harmonize the difference through appeals to the unity of the *umma*. Yet the ideological incompatibility proved increasingly unmanageable, aggravated by the deliberate provocations of a colonial administration practiced in the politics of divide-and-rule, which actively deepened the fissure between the two factions.⁵⁰

The split reached its culmination at the 1923 SI National Congress, when the communist faction was formally expelled and the Red Sarekat Islam was constituted. This decision marked the consolidation of SI as an Islamic political organization that refused subordination to the international communist movement.⁵¹ Analytically, the expulsion functioned as an act of *boundary-drawing* through which the imagined community defined itself as much by what it refused as by what it affirmed. The consequence, however, was a contraction of SI's mass base in certain regions, as segments of the workers and peasants chose to follow the left. The schism weakened SI's political strength in the Volksraad and narrowed its influence in national political forums.⁵²

From an ideological standpoint, nonetheless, this very rupture clarified the direction of SI's struggle as the bearer of an Islamic nationalism grounded in faith and *sharia*, indicating that internal conflict itself participated in the formation of a more cohesive Islamic political identity. External challenges stringent colonial surveillance and repressive measures such as the exile of cadres further diminished SI's capacity for large-scale mass mobilization.⁵³ Yet colonial pressure paradoxically strengthened the narrative of struggle, framing the necessity of unity against injustice as a form of *political jihad*. The internal dynamics and ideological challenges of this period may therefore be read as a phase of organizational maturation, in which SI succeeded in defending Pan-Islamism as the identity of its struggle while clarifying that Islam was the principal driver of the movement for national liberation.⁵⁴

Ideological Dynamics in Sarekat Islam: Islamism, Nationalism, and Socialism

The ideological dynamics within SI represent a creative response to the colonial situation and to the new consciousness of Muslims in the Dutch East Indies. From

the outset, SI grounded its struggle in an Islamic ideology that repudiated oppression and advanced justice and equality; Islam was understood not solely as spiritual teaching but as a guide for socio-political action demanding liberation from colonialism.⁵⁵ The character of SI's ideology was therefore *transformative*, constituting Islam as a force of popular liberation rather than a quietist creed.⁵⁶ This transformative reading of religion is precisely what distinguishes religious nationalism from mere religious revivalism: the sacred tradition is mobilized as an instrument of this-worldly emancipation.⁵⁷

In its early development, the ideology of nationalism became incorporated into SI, particularly because the demand for national liberation could not be separated from the struggle of the community of believers.⁵⁸ Islam, as a collective identity, became the foundation of an *inclusive religious nationalism* in which Muslims constituted the largest component of a colonized Indonesian nation.⁵⁹ SI thereby pioneered the unification of religious and national interests in order to cultivate a solidarity that crossed lines of ethnicity and social class. This achievement illustrates a point central to the study of anti-colonial nationalism: that the imagined national community in the colonial world was frequently assembled not in opposition to inherited religious identities but through their creative reinterpretation.⁶⁰

SI's encounter with Western ideology, and with socialism in particular, was unavoidable, and many younger SI figures adopted socialist ideas to advance economic justice for the people.⁶¹ Crucially, however, socialism was interpreted within an Islamic frame so that it would not contradict the principles of *tawhid* and the brotherhood of believers.⁶² The egalitarian economic idealism of socialism was judged consonant with the teachings of *zakat*, the prohibition of oppression, and the imperative of social responsibility in Islam.⁶³ This selective indigenization is analytically significant, for it demonstrates that SI did not passively receive transnational ideologies but actively filtered and reconstituted them through an indigenous religious idiom an instance of the ideological hybridity characteristic of colonial-era political thought.⁶⁴

The ideological contest grew more complex as communist groups began to influence SI's mass base, especially the economically vulnerable workers and peasants who regarded SI as a strategic vehicle for the development of class struggle.⁶⁵ This condition triggered internal tension between the Islamic-nationalist faction led by Tjokroaminoto and an increasingly radical communist camp. The rupture culminated in 1921–1923, when communist radicalism provoked open ideological conflict. SI subsequently severed its relationship with the communist movement and undertook a more assertive ideological consolidation through the establishment of the White Sarekat Islam, later the Partai Sarekat Islam (PSI), which affirmed Islamic principles as the basis of struggle (Fandani, 2020). Even so, the ideal of social justice

was retained: Tjokroaminoto developed the concept of *Islamic Socialism*, a synthesis of the principle of justice in Islam with the struggle to liberate the people from structural poverty.⁶⁶ This concept became the principal differentiator distinguishing SI from rival nationalist and communist movements an original ideological formation that refused the secularizing premises of European socialism while appropriating its critique of economic exploitation.⁶⁷

The Position of Sarekat Islam in the Narrative of Indonesian Independence

From a historiographical perspective, SI occupies a strategic position in the history of the Indonesian struggle. As the largest Islamic-based mass organization of the early twentieth century, SI was able to articulate Islam simultaneously as an identity of nationhood and as the moral basis for resistance to colonialism, positioning religion as an ideology capable of mobilizing popular consciousness toward freedom and social justice. Its decisive achievement was the expansion of the meaning of popular struggle from sporadic resistance into an organized, modern political movement. By drawing upon the teaching of *ukhuwwah*, SI assembled diverse social strata traders, workers, and religious scholars alike into a single front against colonial oppression, generating the collective consciousness that Muslims constituted a national community entitled to determine its own destiny. This is the *imagined community* made concrete in organizational form.

SI's strength is evident in its capacity to build a movement network on a national scale. Branches dispersed across numerous regions became nodes of popular struggle at the local grassroots, subsequently linked within a single vision of religious nationalism. The diffusion of national ideas grew more massive precisely because SI commanded an effective model of political communication operating through mass assemblies, the periodical press, and systematic cadre formation. Here, again, Anderson's argument concerning print-mediated nationalism is pertinent: the newspaper and the public meeting manufactured the simultaneity that allowed geographically scattered adherents to experience their local grievances as moments within a single national narrative.

Beyond this, SI offered a narrative of liberation that was distinctly moral and spiritual in character. The struggle was directed not only at expelling the colonizer but at upholding the dignity of the *umma* and abolishing the injustice that had long ensnared the population; political struggle was thereby fused with the mission of *amar ma'ruf nahi munkar* within a national frame. SI also played an important role in the democratization of indigenous political life. The modern organizational mechanisms it employed the conduct of elections, deliberative assembly, and public advocacy fostered a new and more egalitarian political culture, familiarizing society with the modern organizational forms that would later furnish the foundations of

post-independence political life.⁶⁸ This dimension reveals SI as an agent of political modernization, schooling a colonized population in the procedural repertoire of modern citizenship.

SI's influence extended into education and the popular economy as well, through cadre education programs, cooperatives, and boycotts of foreign economic domination concrete instruments of popular empowerment that may be read as an early articulation of nation- and character-building within an Islamic horizon.⁶⁹ This formative significance is further underscored by SI's role as a mentor to the succeeding nationalist generation: Tjokroaminoto, most notably, nurtured major figures such as Soekarno, Semaoen, and Kartosuwiryo, who would become principal leaders of the independence movement. That these protégés ultimately pursued sharply divergent ideological paths secular nationalist, communist, and Islamist respectively is itself revealing, for it confirms SI's status as the most influential "school of politics" of the pre-independence era, a common crucible from which the major rival currents of Indonesian political thought all emerged.⁷⁰

Within the larger framework of the national movement, SI functioned as a bridge connecting Islamic aspiration, nationalism, and social justice, giving rise to the conviction that the Indonesian nation must stand independent as a state guaranteeing popular welfare free of colonial discrimination. The SI legacy did not terminate with independence; the principles it advanced nationhood, social justice, and the unity of the people remain part of the national consensus, reflected in a state ideology that recognizes the importance of religion, the equality of citizens, and national unity. The position of SI in the narrative of Indonesian independence is therefore not merely historical but ideological and structural: SI pioneered the modern Islamic organization capable of making religion the basis of the legitimacy of struggle, of constructing a national movement network, and of producing the cadre of national leaders. It is this monumental role that establishes SI as one of the principal foundations of Indonesian independence.

Conclusion

This study has demonstrated that Pan-Islamism functioned within Sarekat Islam (SI) not as an imported doctrine passively received, but as a generative ideological framework actively indigenized to confront the structural injustices of Dutch colonial rule. Across the organization's trajectory from 1911 to 1927, Pan-Islamism operated simultaneously as a source of collective identity, a strategy of mass mobilization, and a wellspring of moral legitimacy for anti-colonial struggle. Its central achievement was the constitution of a religiously imagined community: through the principle of *ukhuwwah islāmiyah*, the diffusion of mass symbols and slogans, the periodical press, and an extensive network of branches, SI enabled a vast

and dispersed colonial population to conceive of itself as a single political body bound by shared faith and common subjection. In this respect, the SI experience confirms that religious belonging, far from constituting a parochial obstacle to modern political consciousness, could supply the very symbolic and affective infrastructure upon which a national consciousness was raised.

The analysis has further shown that the four theoretical lenses employed Anderson's imagined communities, religious nationalism, anti-colonial nationalism, and transnational Islamism are not merely complementary but mutually illuminating when applied to the SI case. SI exemplifies how religious nationalism rendered the sacred and the national mutually constitutive rather than sequential, transforming the duty to uphold the dignity of the umma into a claim to national self-determination. It illustrates how anti-colonial nationalism in the colonial world was frequently assembled not in opposition to inherited religious identities but through their creative reinterpretation, and how the assertion of national dignity remained inseparable from the struggle for economic self-determination, manifested in cooperatives, boycotts, and campaigns for economic independence. And it reveals how transnational Islamism furnished the movement with a horizon of belonging that exceeded the territorial nation, linking the colonized Muslims of the archipelago to a global umma and to the wider axis of Islamic revival.

The internal ruptures of the 1921–1923 period, culminating in the expulsion of the communist faction at the 1923 Congress, emerge from this analysis as more than contingent factional disputes. They dramatize the structural predicament of a movement built upon a transnational ideology when it encounters a rival transnationalism competing for the same constituency a confrontation between two universalisms, one organized around the global umma and the other around the international proletariat. Yet this very rupture proved clarifying rather than merely destructive: through an act of ideological boundary-drawing, SI defined its imagined community as much by what it refused as by what it affirmed, preserving its religious foundations while developing, in Tjokroaminoto's concept of Islamic Socialism, an original synthesis that appropriated socialism's critique of exploitation while rejecting its secularizing premises.

Taken together, these findings establish that Pan-Islamism was never a purely theoretical doctrine but a lived ideology embodied as social, political, and economic energy that affirmed Islam as a force of liberation. SI thereby offered a decisive refutation of the assumption that Islam stood opposed to modernity or nationhood; on the contrary, it rendered religion a source of legitimacy that simultaneously reinforced national identity, fostered a more egalitarian political culture, and schooled a colonized population in the procedural repertoire of modern citizenship. As the largest and most revolutionary popular organization of the early twentieth-

century Dutch East Indies and as the "school of politics" that produced the divergent founding figures of the subsequent independence movement SI occupies a position in the narrative of Indonesian independence that is at once historical, ideological, and structural. Its enduring legacy, reflected in a national consensus that recognizes the importance of religion, the equality of citizens, and national unity, attests to the lasting significance of a movement that placed Islam at the very center of the legitimacy of the struggle for an independent and just Indonesia.

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