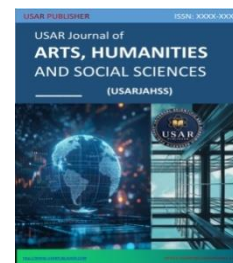




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Historical Study of the Emergence of the Fadjar Asia as the Newspaper of the Indonesian National Movement

BY

Arditya Prayogi

UIN KH Abdurrahman Wahid Pekalongan, Indonesia

***Corresponding author:** Arditya Prayogi

Abstract

The Fadjar Asia newspaper played a vital role in Indonesia's national movement as a medium for spreading nationalist and Islamic political ideas. Established in 1927, it was managed by prominent Sarekat Islam figures such as Tjokroaminoto and Agus Salim. Although not an official organ of Sarekat Islam, Fadjar Asia remained closely affiliated with its ideological foundations. The newspaper rapidly grew from a triweekly publication to a daily due to its increasing influence and readership. With content ranging from political discussions to religious perspectives, it not only reached Indonesian readers but also gained international circulation. Despite its impact, Fadjar Asia faced financial struggles, a common challenge for indigenous newspapers under colonial rule. These difficulties eventually led to its closure in 1930. The later involvement of Kartosoewirjo contributed to a shift towards a more radical stance, reinforcing its role as a dynamic political instrument. The newspaper's transformation into Pembela Ra'jat under Tjokroaminoto demonstrated the resilience of nationalist journalism in colonial Indonesia. This study highlights the strategic role of the press in shaping national identity, mobilizing the masses, and resisting colonial oppression. The legacy of Fadjar Asia underscores the significant influence of the press in Indonesia's struggle for independence and its continued relevance in modern political discourse.

Keywords: Nationalist press, Colonial-Era Journalism, Political Movements, Islamic Press

INTRODUCTION

The history of the Indonesian press can be seen as a long journey in reconstructing and establishing the national language of Indonesia, Bahasa Indonesia, which later became the foundation for fostering a sense of national identity and unity. This lengthy process gave rise to thousands of newspapers, each with its own prominent figures (Rahzen, 2007). Beyond language, the press (particularly newspapers) served as a primary communication tool in nurturing national consciousness and spreading the spirit of national awakening to achieve the goals of independence. Given its crucial role, the press during the national movement era was often backed

by nationalist organizations. It became an effective medium for national leaders to disseminate their ideas and ideologies. Additionally, these leaders used the press to educate the indigenous population and to fight for independence from Dutch colonial rule. Examples of newspapers linked to nationalist organizations include *Dharmo Kondo* by Boedi Oetomo and *Indonesia Merdeka* by Perhimpunan Indonesia (Shiraishi, 2005).

During that period, publishing newspapers was a common strategy employed by nationalist organizations. The relationship between these organizations and their newspapers was symbiotic, akin to conjoined twins. Newspapers provided a continuous and intensive platform for organizations to

socialize their movements and goals to the public (Kartodirdjo, 1993).

Nationalist leaders such as Dr. Wahidin Soedirohoesodo, H.O.S. Tjokroaminoto, and Dr. Soetoemo not only relied on public speeches but also utilized newspapers to voice their organizational principles, objectives, and action plans. As a result, many movement leaders placed great emphasis on the press, leading to a surge in newspaper publications during that era. By independently publishing newspapers, they could more freely, systematically, and effectively convey their aspirations (Gani, n.d).

One notable organization that leveraged the press for its struggle was Sarekat Islam. This organization played a significant role in the birth of numerous newspapers both in Java and beyond. *Oetoesan Hindia*, for instance, was the official newspaper launched after Sarekat Islam's first congress in Surabaya on July 26, 1913. Additionally, Sarekat Islam officially published newspapers such as *Sinar Djawa* in Semarang, *Pantjaran Warta* in Batavia, and *Saroetomo* in Surakarta, the latter being the first newspaper published by the organization (Surjomihardjo, 2002).

The last official newspaper of Sarekat Islam was *Bandera Islam*, which ceased publication in 1927. However, after its discontinuation, the editors remained determined to continue its mission. They relocated the publication to Batavia and renamed it *Fadjar Asia*. This decision was made to preserve the spirit and mission of *Bandera Islam* as a newspaper rooted in Islamic politics. This commitment was consistently reflected in every issue of *Fadjar Asia* (Humairah, 2010).

Fadjar Asia was published for three years, from 1927 to 1930. Although it was led and managed by prominent Sarekat Islam figures such as Tjokroaminoto (editor-in-chief) and Agus Salim (editor), with support from three editorial staff members—Sj. Latif, Dr. Soekiman, and Wondosoewirjo—it was not an official organ of Sarekat Islam. The editorial team clarified that *Fadjar Asia* was "a media for the general movement, specifically the Islamic movement in Indonesia, aimed at achieving the independence of the Indonesian nation" (Humairah, 2010). The reports and articles

published in *Fadjar Asia* were naturally rooted in Islamic ideology, as the newspaper had declared itself an Islamic-oriented publication.

This study is essential to understand the strategic role of the press in Indonesia's national movement, particularly in the context of the struggle for independence. By analyzing newspapers like *Fadjar Asia*, we can see how the media served as an effective tool for spreading ideology, building national consciousness, and mobilizing society against colonialism. Furthermore, this study provides insights into how movement leaders utilized the media to fight for people's rights and create a sense of national identity. Through this research, we can appreciate the legacy of the Indonesian press, which was not merely a communication tool but also a force for social and political change. This study is also relevant for understanding contemporary media dynamics, where the press remains a crucial pillar of democracy and public opinion formation. Thus, this research holds not only historical value but also offers valuable lessons for current and future generations about the power of media in shaping civilization.

METHOD

The research method used in this article is the historical method, which consists of four stages: heuristics, criticism, interpretation, and historiography. The first stage, heuristics, involves searching and collecting sources through literature studies. The historical sources used in writing this article include written materials such as books, newspapers, and magazines. Primary sources were obtained from the newspaper *Fadjar Asia*, available in microfilm form at the National Library of Indonesia. Meanwhile, secondary sources were gathered from books, magazines, scholarly articles, and similar materials. The second stage is criticism, which is divided into two types: external criticism and internal criticism. The criticism process involves examining the authenticity and reliability of historical sources to ensure the accuracy of the information they contain. After the criticism stage, relevant historical data related to the article's topic were collected. The next stage is interpretation, where the critiqued and processed data are analyzed to form a coherent narrative.

The final stage is historiography, where the interpreted results are presented in a systematic and informative historical writing (Prayogi, Fasya, Nasrullah, 2025).

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Indonesia as a country with a pluralistic population, it is not surprising that the early history of the press in Indonesia has special characteristics related to the state of society, culture, and politics. Since its growth, the press in Indonesia has reflected the structure of its pluralistic society, with separate population groups, namely the Dutch, Chinese, Arab, and Indian population groups. The indigenous population during the colonial era was also within the boundaries of tribal life. With that, the language used became different and the press was used as a medium for news and different opinions. Not infrequently the press was a voice supporting various ideologies (Surjomihardjo, 2002).

The history of the Indonesian press also cannot be separated from the state of society as a whole. This means that one influences the other. The great progress of the leaders of the national and religious movements in Indonesia, where they simultaneously served as editors-in-chief or assistants or at least correspondents of the movement media that they managed either on behalf of the organizations they founded or personally, has formed opinions against the colonizers and aroused the spirit of nationalism (Nurudin, 2009). This condition was realized by the movement figures. They realized that the struggle through the press would spread more quickly in society. Their various ideas about Indonesian nationalism in various forms were easier to voice through the press, although on the other hand they were also aware of the risks that would come to them more quickly.

The press became a partner for movement figures, both individually and those who were active in movement organizations. The press also functioned as a tool to fulfill commercial interests and a medium to spread ideas that were closely related to improving the standard of living of the indigenous people who lived in misery under the colonial government of the Dutch East Indies. Of course, the emergence and development of the indigenous press cannot be

separated from the figures who gave birth to it (Prayogi & Nasrullah, 2024).

Almost all publications of the indigenous press were carried out by movement figures, both those who were active in the social, political, educational, religious and other fields that were based on the spirit of Indonesian independence. Therefore, the thoughts and affiliations of the leaders of the indigenous press to certain organizations and the goals they wanted to achieve would give a unique color to the press that was published and managed by them. If the press media was published and managed by figures or movement groups who had an Islamic ideology, then it was certain that the same ideology was carried by the press. Likewise, the press published by figures or movement groups with nationalist (nationalist) and communist ideologies (Humairah, 2010).

The *Fadjar Asia* newspaper was a continuation of the *Bandera Islam* newspaper published in Yogyakarta in 1924-1927. *Bandera Islam* was managed by Sarekat Islam leaders such as Tjokroaminoto, Agus Salim, and Sjahbuddin Latif. After existing for four years, this mouthpiece of the *Sarekat Islam* movement was hit by a financial crisis because many customers and agents had not or perhaps did not pay their "obligations". Internal problems were exacerbated by Tjokroaminoto's move to Batavia in 1927. However, the editor remained adamant about continuing the publication of *Bandera Islam* (Humairah, 2010).

After *Bandera Islam* stopped publishing, the newspaper that was considered the successor was *Fadjar Asia*. Its purpose was to provide Islamic information about religion, manners, and politics. The possibility of publishing *Fadjar Asia* opened up when Agus Salim returned from Mecca in 1927 while attending the Islamic World Congress. At that time, the king of Saudi Arabia was impressed to hear Agus Salim's ideals to raise the awareness of the Indonesian people so that they would later be able to free themselves and their homeland from the grip of the colonizers. The king then agreed to donate some money, which was then used by Agus Salim to publish a newspaper. This effort was carried out together with Tjokroaminoto and a colleague who had strong capital (Panitia, 1984). Moving the publication place of

Bandera Islam to Batavia and changing its name to *Fadjar Asia* became the editorial choice to maintain the spirit and mission of *Bandera Islam*, namely a newspaper based on Islamic politics. This spirit is always included in every publication of *Fadjar Asia*.

Fadjar Asia began publishing on Tuesday, November 8, 1927, using the Malay language. Initially published every Tuesday, Thursday, and Saturday and since the 12th edition published on December 3, 1927, this newspaper became a daily publication and was not published on holidays. This change in publication period was accompanied by the addition of the number of sheets from one sheet (4 pages) to one and a half sheets (6 pages). In addition, the subscription price which was originally f.1.20/month for within the Dutch East Indies and f.2/month for outside the Dutch East Indies became f.1.70/month and f.2.70/month for within and outside the Dutch East Indies.

This newspaper was printed and published by *Drukkerijk Uitgevers en handel Maatschappij Fadjar Asia* with a length of 32 cm and a width of 42 cm per sheet. Initially, the editorial address was at *Pasar Senen* Number 125 *Weltevreden* with the telephone number 1825, then it was moved to *Sluisbrugstraat* Number 31C also in *Weltevreden* and the telephone number remained the same. There is no information on the number (circulation) of *Fadjar Asia* each time it was published. However, from one edition it can be seen that this newspaper has a fairly large circulation and its circulation is not only in the Dutch East Indies (Indonesia) but also reaches overseas, such as London, Den Hag, Moscow, Egypt, India, Malacca, and China. The wide circulation of this media can at least also be seen from the number of correspondents and articles received by the editorial team from various regions both from within and outside the Dutch East Indies (Humairah, 2010).

The name *Fadjar Asia* itself was chosen as the name of this newspaper on the grounds that the Asian nation is expected to rise up against the West. Although it was not the official newspaper of *Sarekat Islam*, the name of the *Fadjar Asia* newspaper was still closely influenced by *Bandera Islam* and *Oetoesan Hindia* which were the official newspapers of

Sarekat Islam. The number of circulations that reached outside the Dutch East Indies, apart from receiving correspondence from outside, also seemed to be inseparable from the role and influence of *Sarekat Islam* itself, where in the early days of *Sarekat Islam's* birth, this organization did have followers outside the Dutch East Indies (Arditya, 2023).

Fadjar Asia also claims that their circulation has expanded to foreign countries, including London, The Hague, Moscow, Egypt, Lahore, Kuala Langsar and Peking. In addition, *Fadjar Asia* has also expanded throughout Indonesia. This causes *Fadjar Asia* to confidently offer its readers to advertise in *Fadjar Asia*. In addition to coming from subscription fees, the publication costs of this globe-shaped newspaper are also supported by advertising costs of f. 1.00/column for one load. Almost all advertisements in *Fadjar Asia* are always published on the last page. Advertisements in *Fadjar Asia* are mostly limited to words and some are accompanied by images. To attract interest in advertising in *Fadjar Asia*, jargon is often included. Not only that, the editorial team of *Fadjar Asia* also offers discounts on advertising rates by providing advertising time packages, such as one-year, six-month and three-month rates to parties who want to advertise in *Fadjar Asia*. Not enough to rely on contributions and advertising fees as income, *Fadjar Asia* also often publishes various books and scriptures, especially about Islamic religious teachings written by Tjokroaminoto and Agus Salim as other income. This is because on the other hand *Fadjar Asia* is also a printing business where they also have their own printing machine that can support them in printing other media besides newspapers.

As a movement newspaper, *Fadjar Asia* also received various donations from the community, especially from *Sarekat Islam* circles to support its publication. Although *Fadjar Asia* was led and managed by *Sarekat Islam's* leading figures, namely Tjokraminoto (chief editor) and Agus Salim (editor) and assisted by three editorial staff, this media was not an organ or tool of *Sarekat Islam's* struggle.

Fadjar Asia was published from 1927 to 1930. Although it was not an official organ of *Sarekat Islam*, during that period *Fadjar Asia* contained many political and Islamic

views of *Sarekat Islam* leaders, especially Tjokroaminoto and Agus Salim. This emphasized the purpose of establishing *Fadjar Asia* with its identity as an Islamic newspaper. *Fadjar Asia* as an Islamic newspaper began publishing in November 1927 (Prayogi, Nasrullah, Mutaqin, 2024). Not only about Islam, *Fadjar Asia* which was also a movement newspaper contained various reports on various movement activities in the Dutch East Indies. Various coverage of events both from within and outside the country were also found in *Fadjar Asia*.

1927 was the first year that *Fadjar Asia* was published. At the beginning of its publication, *Fadjar Asia* was only published three times a week, namely on Tuesday, Thursday, and Saturday. At the beginning of its publication, the writings of Tjokroaminoto and Agus Salim often decorated *Fadjar Asia*. *Fadjar Asia* as a movement newspaper, at the beginning of its publication also reported various congresses and activities of movement organizations. At the beginning of its publication, *Fadjar Asia* immediately experienced arrears in payments from its subscribers. However, the delay in payment in the first year did not hinder the publication of *Fadjar Asia* in the following editions, in fact the response from subscribers and readers was even greater, resulting in various requests for *Fadjar Asia* to be published as a daily. This change in the publication pattern of *Fadjar Asia* was also accompanied by a change in subscription prices (Agus & Arditya, 2023).

Entering 1928, *Fadjar Asia* had become a fairly well-established newspaper. Tjokroaminoto and Agus Salim were able to manage *Fadjar Asia* well in its second year. This can be seen from the publication which experienced almost no significant obstacles. The main problem of native newspapers, namely capital, especially payment of subscription fees, seems to be able to be overcome by the management of *Fadjar Asia*. There was no notification of arrears payment by *Fadjar Asia* during its publication in 1928. The ability to manage newspapers owned by Tjokroaminoto and Agus Salim in managing *Fadjar Asia* improved again this year. This was marked by the establishment of a "company" *Fadjar Asia*.

Fadjar Asia at the beginning of its publication was under the auspices of the printing company "*Fadjar Hindia*".

The establishment of the *Fadjar Asia* company, seems to be a replacement for the *Fadjar Hindia* company. The establishment of this company can be understood as one way to obtain financing/capital other than relying on subscription payments and advertising revenue from newspapers alone. It was later recorded that the *Fadjar Asia* printing company also received various orders for written prints such as books, books, and so on to be sold. This company was also supported by the ownership of adequate printing machines (Prayogi, 2023; Prayogi, 2024). Not only for additional capital, the establishment of this company can also be used as new propaganda for the people's movement struggle through the form of a company, something different from organizations and parties.

In its second year, *Fadjar Asia* also remained consistent in maintaining its principles based on Islam. *Fadjar Asia's* political view saw that religion and politics were inseparable. Not only about Islam, in 1928 there were many reports on the activities of various movement organizations that were included in *Fadjar Asia's* coverage, although it cannot be denied that the majority of the reports in *Fadjar Asia* this year were used for news about *Sarekat Islam*. However, *Fadjar Asia* did not limit itself to reporting on *Sarekat Islam* activities alone, for example, reports on the Indonesian National Party or PNI congress published in the *Fadjar Asia* issue dated June 16, 1928 and several other organizational congresses (Humairah, 2010).

At the end of 1928, precisely in November, *Fadjar Asia* was "left" by its two *Hoofredactie* due to illness. The illness of Tjokroaminoto and Agus Salim did not mean that it disrupted the publication process of *Fadjar Asia*. Their positions as *Hoofredactie* were also not replaced. Entering the third year of publication of *Fadjar Asia* or in 1929, there was a change of office. The announcement regarding the change of office was delivered in the February 23, 1929 edition of *Fadjar Asia*. Not only the change of office, in this year *Fadjar Asia* was left by Agus Salim as one of the *Hoofredacteur* permanently because Agus Salim would leave for Switzerland to attend the World Labor Conference in Geneva, Switzerland. One of the reasons Agus Salim left for Switzerland was

because of Agus Salim's position as a journalist for *Fadjar Asia* where for this Agus Salim himself as one of the leaders often went into the field, entering the interior areas on the islands of Java, Sumatra and Kalimantan. He reported on the conditions of the workers whose energy was really being squeezed. In this regard, *Fadjar Asia* wrote a replacement for Agus Salim as *Hoofredacteur* and Directie in the edition dated April 30, 1929 (Panitia, 1984).

Although it had been officially announced, in each edition during 1929, *Fadjar Asia* still included Agus Salim's name as *Hoofredacteur* and Directie of *Fadjar Asia*. Kartosoewirjo's name was then included in the *Fadjar Asia* edition in 1929 also as *Hoofredacteur*. This replacement certainly influenced the content of *Fadjar Asia*.

Fadjar Asia developed into a newspaper with a radical Islamic orientation and tended not to have room for compromise in it. Kartosoewirjo's entry into the editorial ranks of *Fadjar Asia* further strengthened this identity attitude. Kartosoewirjo then wrote many articles in *Fadjar Asia*. In some of his writings, Kartosoewirjo used *Fadjar Asia* as a medium to debate with several editors and other newspapers, especially with Parada Harahap with his *Bintang Timoer*. *Fadjar Asia* emphasized their status as not being an organ of the *Sarekat Islam*, although it cannot be denied that the leader of *Fadjar Asia* was a member and high-ranking official of the *Sarekat Islam*.

In the last year of its publication, *Fadjar Asia* began to be abandoned by several of its administrators. Kartosoewirjo, and several names that were previously listed in each publication of *Fadjar Asia* began to disappear. Only the name Tjokroaminoto was recorded as *Hoofredacteur*, without any other names like in the previous year. In its last year, *Fadjar Asia* began to experience financial problems. Notification of these arrears was then made by the administration of *Fadjar Asia* which had been taken over by Tjokroaminoto's wife. This indicated that the problems that commonly afflict native newspapers began to be felt by *Fadjar Asia*.

Fadjar Asia was only able to survive for three years. The lack of operational funds made *Fadjar Asia* withdraw

from circulation little by little where there was a notification that *Fadjar Asia* would be published three times a week. This was as conveyed by the editors of *Fadjar Asia* on July 26, 1930. July 31, 1930 became the last edition of *Fadjar Asia*, where in August 1930 Tjokroaminoto then changed the appearance and name of the *Fadjar Asia* newspaper to *Pembela Ra'jat*.

CONCLUSION

The *Fadjar Asia* newspaper played a crucial role in Indonesia's national movement by serving as a platform for disseminating nationalist and Islamic ideas. As a successor to *Bandera Islam*, it continued the mission of Sarekat Islam leaders such as H.O.S. Tjokroaminoto and Agus Salim. Despite not being the official organ of Sarekat Islam, *Fadjar Asia* was deeply influenced by the organization's ideology and objectives. The newspaper provided an essential space for discussing political, religious, and social issues, reaching not only audiences within the Dutch East Indies but also international readers. Its rapid transformation from a triweekly publication to a daily newspaper reflected its growing influence and readership.

However, like many indigenous newspapers of the time, *Fadjar Asia* faced financial difficulties that ultimately led to its closure in 1930. Despite its brief existence, the newspaper left a significant impact on the nationalist press and political discourse in Indonesia. The involvement of figures such as Kartosoewirjo later gave *Fadjar Asia* a more radical stance, further demonstrating how newspapers were dynamic tools of ideological expression. Its transformation into *Pembela Ra'jat* under Tjokroaminoto marked the continuation of its mission, emphasizing the resilience of the nationalist press in the fight against colonialism. The legacy of *Fadjar Asia* serves as a reminder of the power of the press in shaping national consciousness and mobilizing the struggle for independence.

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