

WOMEN WRITING, WRITTEN WOMEN: THE WOMEN FIGURE OF THE PRESS HISTORY IN SUMATRA

Suriani* & Syaiful Anwar

Program Studi Sejarah Peradaban Islam, Institut Agama Islam Negeri Bukittinggi, Indonesia

Abstract

This paper discusses the women figures of West Sumatra and North Sumatra who came from Minang. In some respects, women figure from Minang are more advanced because both the cultural (matrilineal) system supports the level of education, which during the colonial period was better than in other areas. Three central women characters became the subject of discussions in different places, such as Rohana Kudus, Rasuna Said, and Ani Idrus. The research method is a historical method that has heuristic stages, source criticism, interpretation, and historiography. The discussion results show that the struggles of women leaders are related to the world of writing, or in other words, they are engaged in the academic field, which is not only in the world of education but also in the press.

Keywords: *Women figure; press history; intellectual movement.*

INTRODUCTION

Women in Indonesian history are written and mentioned by name but do not describe being a woman who became the creator of history (women history). So, when are women present in the writing of Indonesian history? Why don't women come and create their history? There are essential things that must be considered first, namely the position of women in the writing of Indonesian history, whether women are only as "a supplement to history" or women who write "her-story" and create "women's history." This is a question of gender bias in historical writing, whereas the past does not belong to men but men and women together (Amini, 2018).

A kind of historical writing that presents women as a supplement to history includes H.C. Zentgraaff (Zentgraaff, 1983) and T.J. Veltman (Veltman, 1916), who tells about the women of Aceh in the Aceh War. They presented these women as a compliment in the history of the Aceh War. For the second, Kartini may be the woman who wrote and created women's history, arguing that by writing about her life. However, it was not intended to be published and only a "confide letters." In Kartini's letters, there is a picture of the treatment of women in society at that time. Her writings appeared the reality of women in Javanese culture at that time.

In addition to Kartini, several other women attend and join various women's organizations in Indonesia. We will find some women figures who have a significant role in the history of the women's movement in the archipelago by studying women's organizations that have existed (Amini, 2021). For example, in North Sumatra, there is the figure of Princess Lopian, the daughter of Sisingamangaraja XII. She was faithful until the end to accompany her father in an exhausting struggle. When the Dutch conducted a hunt for Sisingamangaraja XII, Lopian joined the group and joined the fight until finally killed.

Sumatra is an area that gave rise to several women figures of the national movement. Especially in Aceh, North Sumatra, and West Sumatra. We can mention

*Correspondance Author: suriani@iainbukittinggi.ac.id

Article History | Submitted: January 11, 2022 | Revised: January 27, 2022 | Accepted: January 31, 2022

How to Cite (APA 6th Edition style):

Suriani & Anwar, S. (2022). Women Writing, Written Women: The Women Figure of the Press History in Sumatra. *JUSPI: Jurnal Sejarah Peradaban Islam*. 5(2), 80-87.

DOI: [10.30829/juspi.v5i2.10855](https://doi.org/10.30829/juspi.v5i2.10855)

figures such as Cut Nyak Dien, Cut Nyak Meutia, to Malahayati, who took up arms opposing the Dutch Colonial. West Sumatra is somewhat different because struggles such as Rasuna Said, Rahma El Yunusiyah, and Inyiaq Upiak Palatiang are political and educational. However, all had a purpose in opposing the colonial occupation.

Meanwhile, women who struggle in press and education in North Sumatra can be traced to their connection with West Sumatra. In addition to being born and coming from the Minang tribe. For example, Ani Idrus became an influential press figure in North Sumatra. Her thoughts on women, modernity, and other women's issues (Suriani, 2018) He was in the newspapers during colonial times. The struggle that women echoed through the press at that time was not only limited to the opposition to the occupation but the struggle in the enforcement of women's degrees. It can be almost like Kartini's struggle, but the difference lies in the publication. Kartini did so by conscience with correspondence on J. Abendanon (Soeroto, 2011); Ani Idrus published newspapers and magazines.

This article aims to reveal how the role of the struggle in the writings, both written by women and those who write about women in their struggle, both increase the degree of women to opposition to the colonial side. The women figure in question focus on the regions of West Sumatra and North Sumatra that have a relationship in the form of struggles to cultural similarities in different spaces.

METHOD

This article uses historical methods with a qualitative approach. As outlined in the historical method, some stages are followed, such as heuristics, source criticism, interpretation, and historiographical processes (Daliman, 2012). The heuristic process is the collection of sources carried out by searching for contemporary sources such as newspapers *Perempoean Bergerak*; *Soenting Melajoe*; magazine *Menara Poetri*; *Dunia Wanita* published in the 1950s, the chronicle of the history of the press in the North Sumatra Press Museum to several articles related to women from *Pewartar Deli* in colonial times.

Furthermore, criticism of sources and interpretations that use discourse analysis with various phenomenological approaches to see the extent of reproduction of the writing in the depiction of the spirit of the times. Including comparing the lives of the characters with the situation of the times. Some external and internal influences can influence the results of writing about women that can sometimes be different from the interpretation. This will be an interpretation that is impossible to eliminate the element of the author's subjectivity. After that, it will be processed into the historiography process to be presented to the readers.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Rohana Kudus: Pioneer of Women's Education and Publishing

Rohana Kudus born in Koto Gadang, Agam Regency, West Sumatra, December 20, 1884. Rohana Kudus lives in a Minangkabau society that is very strict against customs and traditions (Djaja, 1980). Minangkabau society uses a matrilineal system that provides special status for women, but women don't have freedom. Rohana Kudus'

struggle liberates the Minangkabau women from the customs and traditions that restrain them. Rohana Kudus was trying to open women's eyes. These traditions and customs are one of the causes of women being left behind by many men. At that time, it can be said that women's freedom was in the hands of men; even to determine the *ninik-mamak* role was huge.

The freedom for other Minangkabau women is in terms of getting an education. Minangkabau women are forbidden to attend school. There was a presumption in society that women would later go to the kitchen at that time. Therefore, all this time, Rohana Kudus only got an education through her parents, who served as prosecutors; besides, he studied self-taught (Djaja, [1980](#)).

Because they don't want women to continue to be in shackles and backwards, Rohana Kudus founded an all-girls school, even as a forum for him to establish an organization as known as Amai Setia. Amai Setia is an organization that accommodates the women's skills school established by Rohana Kudus in her hometown, Koto Gadang. In Bukittinggi, Rohana Kudus also founded a school with the name Rohana School. Rohana runs her school without asking anyone for help to avoid unwanted problems recurring. The school is very famous for many pupils, not only from Bukittinggi but also from other regions. This is because Rohana is already quite popular with her quality work, and her position as Editor-in-Chief of *Sunting Melayu* makes her existence no doubt.

After that, Rohana Kudus continues her ideas and thoughts in the form of writings in newspapers. Rohana Kudus became the first women journalist in West Sumatra. She published *Soenting Melajoe* on July 10, 1912. *Soenting Melajoe* is the first women's newspaper in Indonesia whose editor-in-chief, editor, and writer are women. After west Sumatra, Rohana Kudus played a role in publishing newspapers *Perempoean Bergerak* in 1919 in East Sumatra (Said, [1976](#)). Rohana Kudus was also a newspaper editor for *Radio by Chinese-Malay* in Padang and *Cahaya Sumatera* soon.

Perempoean Bergerak was first published in 1919 with "To Support the Movement." The newspaper's mission is to advance women and challenge social systems that discriminate against them. This newspaper became a forum for the movement of East Sumatran women (Samry, [2013](#)). This newspaper became a new space for women in Medan to show themselves. This means that space for women is no longer just a kitchen, well [bathroom], or mattress in domestic life but has extended to the world of the press. Through the press, the presence and involvement of women in the national movement are planned.

Rohana Kudus leads herself. As a woman, she is also able to do what men do. The emancipation offered and carried out by Rohana demands equal rights of women with men and the strengthening of the natural function of women themselves by nature. To function as an honest woman, it should also need science and skills, for that is the need for education for women (Agustinarsih, [2019](#)).

Rasuna Said: Sumatera Thawalib and Menara Putri

Rangkayo Rasuna Said was born in Maninjau, West Sumatra, on September 14, 1910. He is descended from the Minang nobles. Her father was Muhamad Said, a businessman and former activist of the movement. After elementary school, Rasuna was

sent by her father to study at ar-Rashidiyah boarding school. He is known as an intelligent, agile, and courageous student. Later, he transferred to school at Diniyah Putri school in Padang Panjang. Here, he met a teacher named Zainuddin Labai el-Junusiah, a figure of the Thawalib movement.

Thawalib movement is a movement built by Islamic reformers in West Sumatra. Many of the movement's leaders were influenced by Turkish Islamic-nationalist Mustafa Kamal (Kamal Attaturk). Rasuna Said grew up in the popular nationalist movement, Marxism, and modernist Islam in West Sumatra. The line between leftist activists, nationalists, and Islam was not so firm and thick back then. Rasuna was a great orator. H. Hashim once described Rasuna's speech ability as follows: "Rasuna's speeches are like lightning during the day. Her words are sharp." Her bold, sharp, and empowered speech sharpened the colonial order. No wonder, because of her speech, Rasuna often deals with PID (Dutch secret police). He was arrested and detained in Payakumbuh. News of her arrest was widely published in the newspaper. At that time, Rasuna was charged with the hate-speech (*spreekdelict*). He ended up in prison in Semarang, Central Java. Rasuna Said is also known as the "Lioness" who played a role in Indonesia's struggle for independence in West Sumatra (White, [2013](#)).

In 1937, Rasuna established a women's college in Medan. Previously in West Sumatra, along with Rahma El-Yunusiah, she also founded a public school called Sekolah Menyesal, which focused on eradicating illiteracy among the commoners. She also established women's courses to advance women's social and political consciousness. Rasuna believes that they must be good at reading and writing to advance the people.

To spread her ideas, he created a weekly magazine called *Menara Poeteri*. The slogan of this newspaper is like Soekarno's slogan, "This is my chest, where is your chest." This newspaper talks a lot about women. The main goal is to supply awareness of the movement, namely anti-colonialism, among women. Rasuna Said managing the "Podjok" rubric. He often used a pseudonym "Seliguri", which is said to be the name of a flower.

Rasuna's writings are known to be sharp, peeled off-targets, and always take an outspoken anti-colonial stance. A newspaper in Surabaya, *Penjebar Semangat* once wrote about *Menara Poetri* that "... in Medan, there is a newspaper called *Menara Poetri*; It's meant for the women world. The language is good, led by Rangkayo Rasuna Said, a daughter who once went to prison for sacrificing for the national movement." (Jahroni, [2002](#)).

Unfortunately, *Menara Poetri* is not long-lived. The problem is that most of its customers don't pay their newspaper bills. That said, only 10 percent of *Menara Poetri* readers pay the bill. Until finally, *Menara Poetri* had to shut down. Many magazines or newspapers were indeed shut down because of funding issues. Rasuna chose to return to her hometown.

Ani Idrus: The Founder of *Dunia Wanita* in Medan

Ani Idrus was born to Sidi Idrus and Djalisah on November 25, 1918, in Sawahlunto. Ani Idrus lived in a strict Minang culture, with all customary rules that must be obeyed. But she did not fully agree and liked the customs and provisions in the

Minang community. The first thing she disagreed with was her father's treatment of her mother. Her father was part of most Minang men who practiced polygamy.

Ani Idrus lived in Sawahlunto only until she was 11 years old, after which she was invited to live with her mother in Medan. Ani Idrus and her brother attended Methodist Girl School, then moved to an all-girls school, Meisjes Kopschool, until finished and continued school at Taman Siswa Medan (Idrus & Notodidjojo, [1989](#)).

The first step that Ani Idrus took to participate in the national movement was to join the organization Indonesia Muda. Ani Idrus signed up as a member in 1934, when he was a student at Taman Siswa, Medan. The other members she met were also students in schools in Medan (Bangun, [1990](#)). At that young age, Ani Idrus had shown her nationalist spirit. Finished from Indonesia Muda, Ani Idrus continued her political activities within the Gerindo Party, known as the Radical Nationalist party. Political activity stagnated in the 1940s but returned to politics with the PNI after Indonesia became independent.

Ani Idrus joined the PNI in 1949 and joined the Wanita Demokrat organization under the PNI. Ani Idrus was active in the organization and became the organization's chairman when her husband became the party's general chairman in 1950. Wanita Demokrat later changed their name to the Gerakan Wanita Marhaenis.

During her time as chairman of this organization, there were several things initiated and realized by Ani Idrus for advancing women. Taman Indria was one of Ani Idrus and other organization members did in 1953. Taman Indria is a daycare agency for working mothers. This institute shows the concern of Wanita Demokrat organizations for the common problems that women faced. Working women have and other administrators about the interests of women at that time (Suriani, [2015](#)).

In addition to establishing the institution, under Ani Idrus, this organization is also quite active in carrying out many activities. This organization regularly conducts charity activities when celebrating Kartini Day in April. Ani Idrus' activities in the organization Wanita Demokrat allowed Ani Idrus to understand the living conditions of women in Medan. He gave up her position as chairman of the organization in 1956, and the reason was the busyness of Ani Idrus, who was then chairman of the Medan branch of Persatuan Wartawan Indonesia (Bangun, [1990](#)).

Ani Idrus and Her Writings in Newspapers and Magazines

The emergence of several women's newspapers in the East Sumatra region shows that women also do not want to be left behind by men. Women use media as a means of movement. Through newspapers and media, women convey various discourses and problems that have been, are, and will be faced by women. This is what is done by several women's movement organizations.

Ani Idrus discusses women's issues in some of her writings. Her writing relates to suitable and unsuitable jobs for women, the rules of women's association; women face modernity; women's dress styles; marriage and polygamy on women. Some of the writings of Ani Idrus are *Perempoean dan Pekerjaannya*; *Penoelis Perempoean*; *Kemodernan Perempuan Membawa Bencana?*; *Poetri dalam Pergaoelan*; *Mode Barat dan Poetri Timoer di Sumatera Barat*. Ani Idrus also has her way of conveying her thoughts,

the problems he wants to address in connected fiction stories published in *Seruan Kita* (Suriani, [2015](#)).

In late 1945, Ani Idrus published a women's magazine *Wanita* and few years later she published *Dunia Wanita* in 1949. *Dunia Wanita* magazine is published as a form of women's awareness to provide knowledge and illumination to other women and a form of devotion to the advancement of women. Ani Idrus chose to publish a women's magazine because he realized that he could convey various kinds of information to her people through the women's magazine.

In the first issue, it contains writings *Gadis Rasjid*, *Soen(doro) Menunggu Bung Karno*, Adinegoro's writings *Wanita dan Lectura* and some rubrics such as education, history, sewing, cooking, health, and entertainment rubrics in the form of picture pages, mirrors, and short stories (Bangun, [1990](#)).

Emancipation discourse becomes prima donna in the publication of this magazine. In later publications, the magazine discussed women's issues and up-to-date politics. Ani Idrus, who became the editor of this magazine, always gives introductory writing in every issue.

The early period, during the 1950s, was the primary concern of Ani Idrus was about women's awareness to act immediately (Idrus, [1950a](#)). Ani Idrus's writings in the introduction to the magazine contained appeals to women in her introduction. Women have many who participate in organizations, but not just getting together. Women must further improve their struggle, and women must show themselves more so that men who have long-held views can change their thoughts so that they no longer consider the struggle not only theirs but also play a role in it.

“Wanita kita oleh karena politik penjajahan, kurang dalam segala-galanya. Miskin dengan pengetahuan dan tidak mengetahui akan hak-haknya.”

[Our women, because of colonial politics, are lacking in everything. Poor with knowledge and unaware of her rights.]

- Ani Idrus in *Dunia Wanita*, October 1949

Women should make themselves knowledgeable by being able to read and write. Not a few women in her area are still illiterate, so they cannot keep up with the world's progress through newspaper and magazine news. Some essential things that are always presented in the magazine are the issue of the struggle of women from various countries in the world. The magazine wants to appeal to its readers that women struggle not only in our own country. In other countries, women also struggle because they suffer the same fate they faced in Indonesia.

The discourses presented in the *Dunia Wanita* are part of the women's emancipation discourse that Kartini had previously demanded. Ani Idrus understood the concept of emancipation in her way. The idea of emancipation presented by Ani Idrus is no longer just prosecution of equal treatment of women or about the ability of women to do the work that men also do and the freedom of women to leave the house without the permission of their father or husband. The concept of emancipation that Ani Idrus wants is more about the awareness of women for the progress of their people.

This can be demonstrated by the participation of women in all areas of life in society (Idrus, 1950b).

CONCLUSION

Women's struggle in the late colonial period until independence peaked in intellectually related conditions. Everything has done by Rasuna Said and so by Ani Idrus cannot be separated from the issue of education because it concerns the position of women in her writing. Likewise, attending school changes the mindset in patriarchal power conditions with the right to education. The struggle of Indonesian women today is no longer what Kartini fought for, but that does not mean that women's struggle today becomes less and lighter. Although the situation is now free, women's struggle is still heavy. Women's struggle fills independence and overcomes the problems women face in economic, social, and political life, and fights for the fate of women who are still discriminated against by culture.

Discrimination experienced by women occurs in various areas of life, such as the world of work, career advancement, and practical politics. Women struggle to achieve a position because many Indonesians still adhere to patriarchy, resulting in decisions and attitudes that are gender-biased. To achieve a status equal to the men, such as leader and decision-maker, women must have more prominent achievement advantages. They must go through a brutal struggle, even though this kind of demand for men is not felt necessary.

REFERENCES

- Agustiningsih, E. P. (2019). Pergerakan Perempuan di Minangkabau: Kiprah Rohana Kudus dalam Nasionalisme Tahun 1912-1972. *Titian: Jurnal Ilmu Humaniora*, 3(2), 260-275. <https://doi.org/10.22437/titian.v3i2.8180>
- Amini, M. (2018). Gender Bias in Historiography of Indonesia and the Writing of Women's History. *Jurnal Perempuan*, 23(3), 153-160. <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.34309/jp.v23i3.245>
- Amini, M. (2021). *Sejarah Organisasi Perempuan Indonesia: 1928-1998*. UGM Press.
- Bangun, T. (1990). *Hajjah Ani Idrus: tokoh wartawan Indonesia*. Haji Masagung. <https://books.google.co.id/books?id=QtwLAAAAIAAJ>
- Daliman, A. (2012). *Metode penelitian sejarah*. Penerbit Ombak. <https://books.google.co.id/books?id=wvsWnQAACAAJ>
- Djaja, T. (1980). *Rohana Kudus: srikandi Indonesia: riwayat hidup dan perjuangannya*. Mutiara.
- Idrus, A., & Notodidjojo, S. I. (1989). *Ani Idrus: wartawan, usahawan, sosiawan : otobiografi*. Prakarsa Abadi Press. <https://books.google.co.id/books?id=SwssAAAAIAAJ>
- Idrus, Ani. (1950a). Wanita harus bertindak. *Dunia Wanita*.
- Idrus, Ani. (1950b, September). Emansipasi Wanita dalam arti yang lebih tepat. *Dunia Wanita*.
- Jahroni, J. (2002). Haji rangkayo Rasuna Said: pejuang politik dan penulis pergerakan. In *Ulama Perempuan Indonesia* (pp. 68-99). Gramedia Pustaka Utama.
- Said, M. (1976). *Sejarah pers di Sumatera Utara, dengan masyarakat yang dicerminkannya, 1885-Maret-1942*. Waspada. <https://books.google.co.id/books?id=QjFeAAAAIAAJ>
- Samry, W. (2013). *Penerbitan Akhbar dan Majalah di Sumatera Utara 1902-1942: Proses Perjuangan Identiti dan Kebangsaan*. Universitas Kebangsaan Malaysia.
- Soeroto, S. S. M. (2011). *Kartini Sebuah Biografi*. Balai Pustaka. <https://books.google.co.id/books?id=rtZOEAAAQBAJ>

- Suriani, S. (2015). *Perempuan Dalam Pers dan Politik di Kota Medan : Biografi Ani Idrus 1930an-1970an*. Gadjah Mada University.
- Suriani, S. (2018). Dari Modernitas Hingga Poligami : Pemikiran Ani Idrus. *HUMANISMA : Journal of Gender Studies*, 2(1), 45-54.
<https://doi.org/http://dx.doi.org/10.30983/jh.v2i1.809>
- Veltman, T. J. (1916). *Nota over de geschiedenis van het landschap Pidie*.
<https://books.google.co.id/books?id=pfEomwEACAAJ>
- White, S. (2013). Rasuna Said: Lioness of the Indonesian Independence Movement. In *Women in Southeast Asian Nationalist Movements*. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctv1qv1g3.9>
- Zentgraaff, H. C. (1983). *Aceh*. Beuna. <https://books.google.co.id/books?id=mKxwAAAAMAAJ>