



Beyond Borders: The Role of the Indonesian Student Diaspora in Egypt in the Pursuit of Independence

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Abstract

This article aims to explain the contribution/role of the Indonesian student diaspora in Egypt as national ambassadors to bilateral relations between Indonesia and Egypt, especially for Indonesian Independence. The Indonesian student diaspora in Egypt has an important role in seeking the support of Arab countries, especially Egypt; this effort was made long before Indonesia's Independence. The spirit of renewal of Indonesian students was also influenced by the idea of renewal raised by Muhammad Abduh and his students. So that, since 1920. Approaching 1945, the student political movement was increasingly active, and efforts to approach *soft diplomacy* had been made, introducing Indonesia as a Muslim country that needed help from other fellow Muslims. This effort paid off with the Egyptian State officially declaring Indonesia's Independence, followed by other Arab countries.

Keywords: *diaspora, contribution, egypt, indonesian students*

Abstrak

Artikel ini bertujuan untuk menjelaskan kontribusi/peran diaspora mahasiswa Indonesia di Mesir sebagai duta besar negara terhadap hubungan bilateral Indonesia dan Mesir, khususnya untuk Kemerdekaan Indonesia. Diaspora mahasiswa Indonesia di Mesir memiliki peran penting dalam mencari dukungan negara-negara Arab, khususnya Mesir; upaya ini telah dilakukan jauh sebelum Indonesia Merdeka. Semangat pembaharuan mahasiswa Indonesia juga dipengaruhi oleh gagasan pembaharuan yang digagas oleh Muhammad Abduh dan para mahasiswanya. Sehingga, sejak tahun 1920. Mendekati tahun 1945, gerakan politik mahasiswa semakin aktif, dan upaya pendekatan soft diplomacy telah dilakukan, memperkenalkan Indonesia sebagai negara muslim yang membutuhkan bantuan dari sesama muslim. Upaya ini membuahkan hasil dengan Negara Mesir secara resmi mendeklarasikan Kemerdekaan Indonesia, diikuti oleh negara-negara Arab lainnya.

Kata Kunci: *diaspora, kontribusi, mesir, mahasiswa indonesia*

INTRODUCTION

The relationship between Indonesia and Egypt has been established for a long time. This is evidenced by the results of research conducted by Archaeologist William J Perry on Indonesia and Egypt which states that there are cultural similarities between the two nations. Similarities in irrigation systems and the construction of temples from hard rocks as well as the construction of tombs and sculpture (الشرقاوي, n.d.). In addition, similarities are also seen in relics of historical objects such as reliefs, inscriptions on towering stones, and temples of stone. These historical objects are related to the worship of the spirits of ancestors and sacrificial ceremonies. In addition, sun worship ceremonies have also been popular in Egypt and Indonesia (Fachir, 2009).

Egypt is one of the most important countries for the people and nation of Indonesia because Egypt has an important role in Indonesia's Independence. The Kingdom of Egypt recognized Indonesia's Independence *de facto* on March 22, 1946. In addition to being the first country to recognize Indonesia's Independence, Egypt also played an important role in raising the issue of Indonesia's Independence in the

Arab League and fought hard for other Arab countries to recognize Indonesia's Independence (Hassan, 1980). The other Arab countries in question were Syria, Palestine, Lebanon, Iraq, Afghanistan, Yemen, Saudi Arabia, and Turkey.

Good relations between these two distant friends are not only in the political section, but also in terms of economics because the two countries need each other. For Indonesia, the position of Egypt is very strategic because it is a link to two regions, known as *MENA (Middle East North Africa)*, the Middle East and Africa Region (Cairo, n.d.). Egypt's position as a hub for the surrounding region allows many Indonesian products to enter the surrounding region through Egypt. Some of these products are robusta and arabica coffee beans, tire and rubber products, canned tuna, *frozen fish*, and cocoa. Egyptian domestic products in the form of agricultural products, such as dates, are also in great demand by the Indonesian people, especially during the month of Ramadan. In addition, *phosphate* products, which are Egyptian export commodities, are also needed by Indonesia as the main ingredient in making fertilizers in Indonesia (Sari, 2024).

In Culture, Indonesia intensively conducts promotional activities in Egypt, both by bringing in various cultural missions from Indonesia and by utilizing the cultural arts groups of Indonesian students and the Indonesian School in Cairo. Meanwhile, to revive emotional ties with the Egyptian people, the Indonesian Embassy in Cairo continues to maximize the role of the Indonesian Culture and Information Center (PUSKIN) and has succeeded in inviting the interest of many young Egyptians to learn Indonesian language and culture (*Diplomasi Indonesia*, n.d.).

Thus, as a country that is often mentioned in the Quran, Egypt is very familiar to the people of Indonesia. In addition to going on hajj to Mecca, Indonesians usually also visit Egypt as a religious tourism destination. In the field of education, Egypt has greatly influenced Indonesia in the spread and development of Islam. In addition to the influence of the thoughts of Muhammad Abduh and Rasyid Ridha in the early 20th century. Al-Azhar Asy-Syarif Educational Institution has contributed a lot to the people of Indonesia, especially in spreading the understanding of Islam. Even Indonesian President Soekarno advised

Egyptian President Gamal Abdul Nasser not to close Al-Azhar. According to Soekarno, the relationship between Egypt and Al-Azhar is like two sides of a coin that cannot be separated. In addition, the arrival of Indonesian students to Egypt was caused by Al Azhar (Sani, 2021).

After proclaiming Indonesia's Independence on 17 August 1945, the *Founding Fathers* and the Indonesian community began to seek international support to recognize and support Indonesia's Independence. One of the Indonesian communities abroad that played an active role in seeking support for Indonesia's Independence was the Indonesian students in Egypt. Various efforts were made by the Indonesian Diaspora in Egypt, meeting with Egyptian political figures and movements, writing letters to Egyptian officials, holding demonstrations at the Dutch Embassy in Egypt to demand Independence, and even burning their *passports* issued by the Dutch East Indies Government (Fachir, 2009).

Studies on the Diaspora of Indonesian students can be found in several works. The works in question are the book "Portrait of Indonesia - Egypt Relations" written by Abdurrahman Mohammad Fachir when he was still serving as the Indonesian Ambassador to Egypt. This work was published by the Indonesian Embassy in Cairo. In addition, there is also research conducted by Budi Sutrisno on "*The Role of Indonesian Youth in the Revolutionary Diplomacy Movement in Egypt*": Case Study of Prof. H.M Nur Asyik. MA

The Indonesian Diaspora in Egypt is dominated by Indonesian students studying at Al - Azhar University in Cairo, Egypt. This study is important considering the contribution made by Indonesian students in Egypt in the effort to recognize Indonesia's Independence from the colonizers.

METHODS

The method used in this research is the historical research method. This method is used to compile facts, describe, and draw conclusions about the past. Activities carried out in the historical method are topic selection, heuristics, criticism, interpretation and historical writing. This research was conducted with a literature study

approach (*Library Research*) with the main sources being books, scientific articles and news.

DISCUSSION

Indonesian Diaspora

The term Diaspora was first used by the ancient Greeks to describe people or communities who migrated to colonized territories or who lived in colonized territories with the intention of making the area part of the empire. Diaspora can also be understood as the movement of people due to war or economic factors, seeking better sources of livelihood. In the modern world, migrants who stay for a certain time can be said to be a diaspora of a nation (Fernando et al., 2020). The Indonesian Diaspora can be understood as Indonesian citizens who live abroad for a certain duration of time and stay for a long time. They still have ties to Indonesia, both culturally, socially, and politically, as well as by descent. The diaspora group consists of various elements of society, such as students studying at universities, migrant workers, professionals, entrepreneurs, and Indonesians who live abroad due to marriage and other reasons.

The Indonesian Diaspora can be understood as Indonesians who have lived abroad for a long time. In addition, the Diaspora can be understood as a group of immigrants and their descendants who live abroad, outside their ancestral origins, but still maintain emotional ties and kinship with their home country. For the Indonesian Diaspora, from the perspective of Indonesian law, there are several categories; the first category is Indonesian citizens who live abroad and still legally hold Indonesian passports. The second category is Indonesians who have become foreign citizens due to the naturalization process and no longer hold Indonesian passports. The third category is foreign nationals who have ancestors from Indonesia. The fourth category is foreign nationals who do not have ancestors from Indonesia but have extraordinary attention to Indonesia. This fourth Diaspora often publishes their opinions about problems in Indonesia in the mass media and then contributes to solving them (Shinta, 2019).

In Egypt, the Indonesian Diaspora initially consisted of Indonesian students who continued their studies at Al Azhar, both those who came

directly from Indonesia and from Mecca. The Indonesian community in Egypt first encountered it in the 1850s, which is evidenced by the existence of Ruwaq Jawi in the courtyard of the Al Azhar Mosque. Among the Indonesian students who lived there was Abdul Manan Dipomenggolo, the founder of the Tremas Pacitan pesantren. Ruwaq Jawi can be interpreted as a small residence located between Ruwaq Salmaniyah and Ruwaq Syawwan. The word *Jawi* refers to the word Javanese, which is interpreted as the name of a Muslim student who comes from Southeast Asia (Roff, 1970). Alfred von Kremer, in 1863, noted that Ruwaq Jawi was populated by a mix of Southeast Asian, Indian, and Arab students. This interregional connection suggests the involvement of members of the Hadrami diaspora in the formation of the ruwaq, although an examination of the original waqf deed (wakaf saleh) that established it would be necessary to prove this. The institution was noted by the then Minister of Education, 'Ali Mubarak, as having its own library and a sheikh elected by all students. It must be said that this Ruwaq was also heavily dominated by Malays and was an extension of the much older Jawi community in Mecca (Laffan, 2004). In 1871 Goldizer visited Ruwaq Jawi and found 6 students there. The number of these students began to increase over time. In 1912 the number of Indonesian students living in Ruwaq Jawi had increased to as many as 30 students from Indonesia, Malaysia and Thailand (Fachir, 2009).

Apart from being the center of Islamic science, Egypt is also more advanced in terms of printing. So the Nusantara students and scholars also cooperated in publishing and printing books there to be distributed in Indonesia. Some of the books printed in Egypt include *Fath al-Mujib bi Syarh Mukhtashor al-khatib*, published in 1859, *Bahjat Al-Wasail bi Syarh Al-Masail* and *Targhib Mustaqin li Bayan Manzhumat Al-Sayyid Al-Barzani* published in 1876. These two books are the works of Sheikh Nawawi Al-Bantani published by *Maktabah Bulaq* Cairo. In addition to these books, his other works published by *Maktabah Wahbiyah* are the books *Uqud Al-Lujain fi Bayan Huquq Al-Zaujain* and *Madarij Al Shu'ud Ila Iktisa' Al Buruj* in 1878. Another book published is a trilingual dictionary; Arabic-Malay and Javanese by Sheikh Abu Bakar bin Abdul Quddus Al Tubbani. Another book on Matrilineal Culture in West

Sumatra by Sheikh Ahmad Khatib Al-Minangkabawi was published in the 1890s (Fachir, 2009).

At the end of the 19th century, the flow of Indonesian students and Youth to Egypt began to increase. In addition to the influence of Al-Azhar University as the center of Islamic Education and Science in the World, the arrival of Indonesian Youth was caused by Muhammad Abduh's thoughts that reached Indonesia. The thoughts of Muhammad Abduh and Jamaluddin Al-Afghani spread to Indonesia through the magazine *Al-Urwath Al-Wusqho* which was published in Paris and then spread to Indonesia secretly through the port of Tuban.

Al-Manah magazine published by Rashid Ridha in 1898 also contained Muhammad Abduh's ideas and thoughts (Fachir, 2009). The backwardness of Muslims is caused by internal conditions that consider that general knowledge is not an important science and needs special attention. So according to Muhammad Abduh, Muslims need a new plan that can catch up with the modern era. Muslims must renew their understanding (*Tajdid Al-Fahm*) with the intention of maintaining the values and basic principles of Islam (Muqoyyidin, 2013).

The arrival of students to Egypt was also influenced by the unstable political conditions in Hijaz, Saudi Arabia, due to the war between Ibn Saud and Sharif Hussein. So, the purpose of Malay students coming to Saudi Arabia has now shifted to Egypt. (Haris & Othman, 2015).

Students of Pre-Independence Indonesia

The existence of diasporas in *host countries* who have lived for a long time with a variety of different backgrounds allows them to become partners for both countries. On the one hand, they contribute to Indonesia by channeling the new knowledge they gain. On the other hand, the Indonesian Diaspora also spearheads Indonesia's promotion of Indonesian culture and economy abroad. In addition, the existence of people of Indonesian blood and those who are cultured and love Indonesia abroad also have a responsibility to contribute to their homeland (SD, 2017). Therefore, in the view that if the Diaspora stays abroad for a long time, it will provide benefits for Indonesia in various aspects. In this case, the existence of Indonesian students in Egypt

makes them the spearhead in introducing Indonesia, as well as requesting and seeking support from Egypt and other Arab countries to recognize Indonesia's Independence.

The arrival of the students in the 1920s meant that they were not only presented with religious lessons, but the conditions in Egypt meant that they also learned politics there. Among the young people who came was Muchtar Luthfi, the nephew of Sheikh Daud Rasyidi, one of the reforms; Mukhtar was forced to leave Minangkabau after publishing news to attack the Dutch. Ilyas Ya'kub, a writer and activist in student politics (Roff, 1970). Although political education is open to students there, not all learners are involved in political activities; most of them remain focused on education, and when they return to their home country, they stay away from politics (Haris & Othman, 2015).

Students from Indonesia and Malay lands are not only preoccupied with studying, but are also actively involved in various other activities, such as magazine printing and union organizations. Indonesian students were also more active in political activities (Haris & Othman, 2013). With the increasing number of Indonesian and other Asian students, students began to establish the social association organization *al jam'iyah al khairryah al jhawiyah* officially in 1923 with an official letter from the Egyptian government with number 323, chairman Djanan Thaib. originally this association was formed to accommodate student social activities, then also moved in the political field with the spirit of calling for a nationalism awakening movement. Members of this group came from Indonesia, Malaysia and Thailand (Fachir, 2009).

Apart from establishing student associations, students were also active in writing and spreading their ideas through magazines and newspapers, including *Seruan Al-Azhar* and *Pilehan Timoer*. *Seruan Azhar* was first published in October 1925; this magazine was printed in jawi script and published monthly; *Seruan Azhar*, since its establishment, this magazine published news as many as 31 editions. This magazine was chaired by Djanan Thaib, assisted by other writers: Raden Fathul Rahman Khafrawy, Ilyas Ya'cub, Muhammad Idris Marbawy, Abdul Wahab Abdullah and Mahmoud Yunus, Iskandar Haji Ahmad and Othman Abdullah. *Pilihan Timoer* magazine was printed

to promote more radical thoughts against the Dutch colonizers, so the magazine was banned from publication in Indonesia (Haris & Othman, 2013). Both magazines were closed and no longer published due to financial problems. (Roff, 1970)

The *al jamiaya al khairryah al jhawiyah* association sent Dhajan Thaib to attend the World *Islamic Congress* in Saudi, this association also formed a special committee "*Difa' Al Watani*" National Guard). This committee was assigned to seriously discuss the political efforts that could be taken in order to campaign for Indonesian Independence and expel Dutch colonialism (Wilandra, 2019). The association changed into the Indonesian-Malayan Youth Association (Perpindom) (Huda & Afrita, 2023).

One year before Indonesia's Independence, on September 6, 1944, the Pan-Arab Congress was held, which was attended by Arab countries. This congress was the forerunner of the Arab League. Two Indonesian students; M Zain Hassan and Ismail Banda managed to get into the congress after disguising themselves as Iraqis. Both of them met the leaders of Arab countries to ask for support for Indonesian Independence. During the meeting, the student envoys conveyed 3 things; Requesting full support from Arab countries for Indonesia's Independence, Guaranteeing the unity of Indonesia after Independence (no territorial division of Indonesia) and Indonesia being involved in world peace issues. (Fachir, 2009). The Arab delegates agreed to the Indonesian delegation's proposal, but apparently could not convey it openly, this was because the Arab countries were still under British and French colonization.

Efforts to campaign for Indonesian Independence have been intensively carried out by students in Egypt, the demand for Indonesian Independence has openly started through Arabic media. This activity began one year before Indonesia's Independence. In addition, students also actively communicate with political figures and leaders of Arab countries and the Secretary General of the Arab League.

Contributions of Indonesian Students After Independence

Indonesia successfully declared its Independence on August 17, 1945. However, this news had not yet reached Egypt. Indonesian students in

Egypt continued to campaign for Indonesian Independence, on August 28, 1945, *Al-Ahram* Newspaper published the news of *Mathalib Indonesia* (Indonesian demands) which contained a copy of the Memorandum from Indonesian Youth containing demands about the state of Indonesia. This memorandum was sent to Arab leaders in the hope that they would be willing to fulfill the 3 demands of Indonesian Youth; Indonesian Independence, Indonesian Unity and Indonesian involvement in world peace. (Fachir, 2009)

News of Indonesia's Independence only reached Egypt in September; this information was obtained by Mansur Abu Makarim, who worked at the Dutch Embassy. News of Indonesian Independence was published in the magazine *Vrij Nederland*. Responding to the news of Indonesian Independence, the students formed the Indonesian Independence Association (*Jam'iyat Istiqlal Indonesia*). The main focus of this association was to disseminate news of Indonesian Independence to the Egyptian media. Kotan *Ikhwanul Muslimin* made the first news of Indonesian Independence on September 20, 1945 with the headline "*First Islamic Republic in the Far East*". Then the news of Indonesia's Independence was also published in *Al Ahram* newspaper on September 21, 1945, followed by other Egyptian mass media (Fachir, 2009).

The utilization of mass media is not only done by students in Egypt. Diaspora Indonesian students abroad also use mass media, be it print media (magazines, bulletins, or newsletters) to interact among themselves (fellow members of the Indonesian student community) and build their Indonesian identity. In the Pre-Independence era until Independence, students actively conveyed ideas and ideas for Independence and news of Indonesia's Independence abroad (Widodo, 2017).

In addition, the struggle of Indonesian students in Egypt in an effort to maintain Independence abroad faced severe challenges from the Dutch, they tried to close all access and networks of Indonesian students in Egypt. After the first news of Indonesia's Independence reached Egypt, the Dutch embassy launched their propaganda actions, accusing Soekarno and Hatta of being Japanese collaborators/accomplices. In addition, the Dutch embassy also tried to

influence Indonesian students by providing financial assistance while studying at Al Azhar in exchange for recognizing the Dutch government's sovereignty over Indonesia. The students responded by demonstrating at the Dutch embassy, even burning passports issued by the Dutch government and refusing to sign the financial aid. The Dutch government's efforts did not end there, they also tried to pressure the Egyptian government by threatening to cut diplomatic relations with Egypt (Rahman, 2007).

In conveying their actions, the Indonesian students used Arabic. That way, their critical writings were also understood by Egyptians and other Arabs, making it easier for them to gain international support, especially from the people and government of Egypt and other Arab countries. The use of Arabic is very important in ensuring Egyptian support for Indonesian Independence followed by other Arab countries. During his visit to Egypt, Agus Salim used Arabic to communicate, which facilitated the diplomacy of communication between the two countries (Huda & Afrita, 2023).

Another effort made by the students was to urge the Arab League to recognize Indonesia's Independence. Through its Secretary General Muhammad Azzam Pasya, the students continued to meet repeatedly and hoped for the help that the Arab League could do, although in reality, it was tough to force the Arab countries. In the end, these efforts bore sweet fruit, the Arab League was ready to declare its attitude towards Indonesian Independence and would even send its Secretary General directly to Indonesia (Hassan, 1980). Despite the many obstacles faced, the Arab League delegation represented by Muhammad Abdul Mun'im, Consul General of Egypt in India managed to reach Indonesia after a series of dangerous trips from India to Indonesia just to convey its support directly to the Indonesian government (Fachir, 2009).

CONCLUSION

Indonesian students were not only busy fulfilling their responsibilities as students in Egypt, but also active in political activities that led to the struggle for Indonesian Independence in Egypt (Haris & Othman, 2013). Through various efforts that they could make, starting from

spreading the ideas of nationalism and the spirit of love for the country, slowly, the efforts were successful. Even after Independence, students' efforts in supporting Independence were no less important. This was evident in their efforts to persuade other Arab countries to support Indonesian Independence.

The Indonesian Diaspora has a vital role in various aspects of life, both domestically and in international relations. (Syafitria et al., 2023). The role given by Indonesian students is not only while in Egypt, upon their return to their homeland, they are active in various fields; Education, politics, social and others with the aim of serving the homeland.

In terms of culture, the Diaspora can introduce Indonesian culture to the *Host Countries*. In addition, every Indonesian diaspora student is able to carry a collectivist national identity. This spirit encourages the Indonesian Diaspora to always be able to maintain the country's identity well and learn about good culture with the hope that in the future, when returning to the lap of the Indonesian homeland, all knowledge can be useful in building the nation ... (Fernando et al., 2020).

Meanwhile, the good relations between Indonesia and Egypt continue to run until now, this is evidenced by the closeness between the Egyptian people and the Indonesian people who are always friendly when they meet, even many in daily chats, the Egyptian people always say "*Masri Ummu Dunya wa Indonesia Abuhu*" which can be understood that *Egypt is the mother of the world, with Indonesia as its father* ".. (Tunggal, 2019).

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