

**Women writers' profiles of Soenting Melajoe Newspaper (1912-1921)****Maimon Herawati<sup>1</sup>, Siti Karlinah<sup>2</sup>, Herlina Agustin<sup>3</sup>, Nuryah Asri Sjafrah<sup>4</sup>**<sup>1,2,3,4</sup>Universitas Padjadjaran, Bandung, Indonesia**ABSTRACT**

**Soenting** Melajoe Newspaper (1912-1921) was Indonesia's first indigenous women's newspaper during the Dutch colonial period. Its readers considered this newspaper as a command in the women's movement in the Minangkabau society. Editors were deemed as generals, readers as soldiers. The articles in **Soenting Melajoe** were submitted by women from various regions. The newspaper became a means of exchanging ideas and debating between women, moderated by female editors; Rohana Kudus and Ratna Juwita. This writing constructed the profile of writers based on their writings in **Soenting Melajoe**. The theory used in this research was the feminist communication theory, focusing on the revalorism aspect of it. This research employed a historical method. Data collection was done through literature study. The subjects of this research are the writings of Indonesian women in **Soenting Melajoe**. The female writers of **Soenting Melajoe** came from the administrative center of the Hindia Dutch, port cities, and coffee warehouse regions. Most backgrounds of the writers of **Soenting Melajoe** were from families of Dutch employees, families managing educational institutions, and families of tribal leaders. Some of the writers of **Soenting Melajoe** learned to read and write at school. Others studied with family members. Further research can be done on the life of these female writer pioneers and the connection between ideas in **Soenting Melajoe** and other colonial newspapers.

**Keywords:** Colonial era; Minangkabau; **Soenting Melajoe**; women's education; women's representation

***Profil perempuan penulis koran Soenting Melajoe (1912-1921)*****ABSTRAK**

**Koran** *Soenting Melajoe* (1912-1921) adalah koran perempuan pribumi pertama di Indonesia pada masa penjajahan Belanda. Pembacanya menjadikan koran ini sebagai komando dalam pergerakan perempuan di alam Minangkabau. Redaktornya ditempatkan sebagai jenderal, dan pembaca sebagai serdadu. Perempuan dari berbagai wilayah mengirimkan tulisan pada *Soenting Melajoe*. *Soenting Melajoe* menjadi sarana pertukaran ide, dan bahkan adu argumentasi antara sesama perempuan yang dimoderatori redaktur yang juga perempuan; Rohana Kudus dan Ratna Juwita. Tulisan ini memetakan profil penulis berdasarkan tulisan mereka dalam *Soenting Melajoe*. Teori yang digunakan adalah teori komunikasi feminis dengan meletakkan fokus pada revalorisme. Penelitian ini menggunakan metode sejarah dan pengumpulan data dilakukan melalui studi pustaka. Subjek dari penelitian ini adalah tulisan perempuan Indonesia dalam *Soenting Melajoe*. Perempuan penulis *Soenting Melajoe* berasal dari wilayah pusat administrasi Belanda, kota pelabuhan, dan daerah gudang kopi. Latar belakang keluarga penulis *Soenting Melajoe* paling banyak berasal dari keluarga pegawai Belanda, keluarga pengelola intitusi pendidikan, dan keluarga pemimpin suku. Sebagian penulis *Soenting Melajoe* belajar membaca dan menulis di sekolah, dan sebagian lagi belajar dengan anggota keluarga. Selanjutnya, riset lebih dalam tentang para penulis pionir ini perlu dilakukan. Riset lain tentang keterkaitan ide yang dibahas di dalam *Soenting Melajoe* dengan ide dalam media masa kolonial lainnya juga perlu dilakukan.

**Kata-kata Kunci:** kolonial; Minangkabau; pendidikan perempuan; representasi perempuan; *Soenting Melajoe*

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## INTRODUCTION

The writing of Indonesian history lack of women studies. History writing is brimming with political dan military themes, both men's domain. Hence, Indonesian history reconstruction was androcentric, focusing on the men's realm (Kuntowijoyo, 2003). One short look showed us that one figure, such as Tirta Adhi Soerjo, had been discussed widely and variedly (Cote, 1998; Pratama, 2021; Wiratama et al., 2021; Yacob & Syam, 2016). We rarely see a body of knowledge regarding women and their domain in history.

Feminist communication theory place women and their experiences at the center of the study of communication. Women's voice is 'the means and ability to speak and to have one's speech heard and be taken into account (L. Rakow & Wackwitz, 2004). This research is a revalorist project to identify and honor women's presence in communication history (Littlejohn & Foss, 2009). The rich and important source for this is the first women's newspaper in Indonesia, *Soenting Melajoe*.

*Soenting Melajoe* newspaper (1912-1921) was the first women's newspaper in Indonesia which was managed purely by indigenous women during the Dutch colonial period (Adam, 1995). Before the publication of *Soenting Melajoe*, a newspaper for women, *Poetri Indies* was founded by Tirta Adhi Soerjo in 1908. The patron of this media was the Regent of Karanganyar, Raden Temenggung Tirta Koesoemo (Adam, 1995). The editor-in-chief was Laura Elmsdorp, T. Cereal, F. Kramer, Miss Visscher, and several prominent prijaji native women. It is difficult to call this newspaper purely the media of the Bumiputera because the editor-in-chief was a Dutch woman. *Poetri Indies* was aimed for high prijaji wives and families, although Chinese customers also existed (Adam, 1995). Whereas *Soenting Melajoe* was the outcome of communication between Rohana Kudus and Datuk Sutan Maharajo, the Chief Editor of the *Oetoesan Melajoe*. Datuk Sutan Maharajo was aware of the girls' school, Amai Setia Crafts, which Rohana had founded. Datuk Sutan Maharajo offered Rohana to write on the special page of *Oetoesan Melajoe* for women. Rohana requested a special newspaper for women, which was not part of any newspaper. In order to

realize the idea, Datuk Sutan Maharaja came to see Rohana Kudus in Koto Gadang. From their discussion, *Soenting Melajoe* was born in 1912. Taufik Abdullah considered this newspaper to be the first feminist newspaper from West Sumatra (Abdullah, 2007).

The editors of this newspaper were 2 women, Rohana Kudus and Ratna Juwita, from West Sumatra. Rohana Kudus was inaugurated as an Indonesian National Hero from the Indonesian government because of her contribution to this newspaper in 2019. For its readers, writing in *Soenting Melajoe* was a command in the women's movement in the Minangkabau world. Editors were positioned as generals, readers as soldiers, and *Soenting Melajoe* as its war banner. "Let all of us, women, as soldiers, faithfully follow our two editors as our generals on the battlefield, and *Soenting Melajoe* is our war banner." Ruhina, Durian, Sawahlunto, wrote in *Soenting Melajoe*, 7th edition, year 1.

The parable of the editor as a general, the reader as a soldier, and the media as the war banner showed the spirit of struggle. The words used were so distinctively masculine. The words 'general', 'soldier', and 'war banner' used by Ruhina, a reader from Sawahlunto, who sent a letter in August 1912, were masculine language and related to conflict conditions. This masculine language might be used because it was written by women from the Minangkabau matrilineal culture, which placed women on an equal footing with men, even in some circumstances, played a more important role than men. The woman writer of this letter might be accustomed to hearing the saga of *Sabai Nan Aluih*. This Minangkabau folk tale depicted the tenacity of women in carrying out men's obligation to protect family from outsiders' attack.

The choice of words such as 'war banner', 'general', 'and 'soldier' is, of course, interesting to be studied more deeply because the last war occurred in Minangkabau land was the Padri War, in 1803-1838, 74 years before Ruhina wrote a letter to *Soenting Melajoe*. According to the time, it had passed a generation after the Padri War. The *Soenting Melajoe* newspaper was published in a relatively peaceful Minangkabau atmosphere. The 'war' that arised in *Soenting Melajoe*'s writings was a war to summons women out of 'darkness' and towards

knowledge and independence. At that time, only a handful of women could read and write. Of the few, only some were exposed to the media intensely. Schools were limited to certain groups and were closely related to their current family position (Graves, 2007).

The editor of *Soenting Melajoe*, Rohana Kudus, had no formal education. She learned to read and write from her closest family. Rohana spoke several languages, including Dutch. She read media from within and outside the Indonesian archipelago. His father, who was a prosecutor, read the newspaper to her since she was little. Since she was eight, Rohana taught girls around her reading and writing (Djaja, 1980; Fitriyanti, 2001). Concerning women and their fate, Rohana encouraged to have her own media so that ideas for woman's advancement could be spread widely. It could be said that *Soenting Melajoe* was the mouthpiece used by Rohana to raise awareness of women's progress in Minangkabau (Djaja, 1980).

During their journey, women writers from various regions shared their views on education and what kind of progress they wanted for Minangkabau women. Women writers felt that their views on women and women's progress had no place in mainstream newspapers at that time. Women writers even observed the distrustful view of those around them that women could write too (Ratna Juwita, *Soenting Melajoe*, year 1, edition 5). These women felt that in *Soenting Melajoe*, they could freely discuss. Referring to the concept of the public sphere, *Soenting Melajoe* had become a women's public sphere. Diczco called it 'counter publics', 'alternative public spheres', or 'competing public spheres', which had their own ideas, different from the mainstream public sphere (Dicenzo et al., 2010) p.27. This paper mapped out the women who were involved in the discussion in this 'competing public sphere'. It examined the regions where these writers come from and what kind of family they were born into.

In the west, feminist research on women's struggles in the media was carried out, for example, by Victoria Joanne Rowan (1999), who researched women, newspapers, and urban literary culture in Paris, Rennes, and Lyon in the period of 1780-1800 (Rowan, 1999). Sarah Pedersen (2004) examined women's letters in daily newspapers in Aberdeen, Scotland, to find out who the women writers were and what

issues that were raised by women in the 1900-1918 newspaper publishing range (Pedersen, 2004). In Indonesia, there was no research about the newspaper female writers during the same era. Ahmat Adam only mentioned a little about *Soenting Melajoe* when discussing vernacular media and the awakening of the Indonesian nation's consciousness (Adam, 1995). Danil M. Chaniago included *Soenting Melajoe* in his research on the women's movement in fighting for their social rights in the early 20s, but it did not discuss who the writers were (Chaniago, 2014). Therefore, this study attempted to build a profile of the writers of *Soenting Melajoe* through their writings.

## RESEARCH METHOD

This research was a social history research, namely research on the social life of one group community (Kartodirdjo, 1992). The group community studied were women writers of *Soenting Melajoe*. The historical method had four main activities: (1) collecting relevant study materials; (2) selecting sources that could be used and needed in research; (3) Analyzing the selected materials; (4) And writing the results.

The data used in historical research had different levels of reliability. The most reliable sources were documents that existed at the time being during research. Contemporary letters, informers' reports, deposits, parliamentary and press reports; social inquiries; diaries, and autobiographies were rich and reliable historical sources (Gottschalk, 1969; Thomson, 1978). The sources above were considered primary sources, the main sources of historical studies. Newspaper, according to Gottschalk, was the most trusted public source because of the nature of the media itself. Media are widely disseminated and have a responsibility for fact verification. Gottschalk put reliability side by side with media integrity. The more reputable the media, the more trusted they are.

This *Soenting Melajoe* newspaper was the main/primary data for this research. *Soenting Melajoe* published from July 1912 to January 1921. The number of its edition every year are presented in Table 1. The last edition of *Soenting Melajoe* was in year 10, edition 4, dated January 28, 1921. In February 1921, the printed company where *Soenting Melajoe* was

printed went on strike. As a result, *Soenting Melajoe* stopped publishing (Abdullah, 2007).

After selecting pages based on readable and unreadable, 1,472 pages of *Soenting Melajoe* became the primary source of this research material. On these pages, there were 1648 writings with the identity of the writers. The gender of the writer was collected based on the information the writer provided in the article. From the results of this mapping, it was known that there were 587 female writers who submitted their writings to *Soenting Melajoe* during 1912 to 1921. The female writer's profiles were constructed from information based on their age, location of residence, and family.

Table 1 Soenting Melajoe Edition

Year	Number of Edition
1912 - 1	26
1913 - 2	49
1914 - 3	49
1915 - 4	50
1916 - 5	51
1917 - 6	48
1918 - 7	50
1919 - 8	51
1920 - 9	47
1921 - 10	2

Source: Maimon Herawati, 2022



Source: Soenting Melajoe, 1912

Figure 1 Example of Primary Source

**RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

Writers' origin was the location where the writers lived. Detection of the writer's residence was based on the area they mentioned in their writing. There were several regions with no 'current' or modern names available. In this case, the data was discharged and not included in the discussion. There were also different names for the same area; for example, Betawi and Waltevreden. These two names were considered to represent one region, Jakarta. Fort de Kock was currently not a government administrative area, but this name was retained because historically, this name indicated the central Bukittinggi area and its surroundings (Table 2).

The following places had only one writer: Pulau Banyak, Kuta Cane Aceh, Muara Tiga, Sigli, Sinabang, Den Haag, Gedung Lupis, Pino, Grotontalo, Kedawung, Batang Hari, Muara Tembesi, Pulau Tengah, Sanggaran, Beran, Bondowoso, Tanggul, Bangkalan, Kediri, Jawa, Pulau Burnai, Kep. Tambelan, Rejai Lingga, Midai Natuna, Sukamenanti, Kalianda, Gunung Sugih, Tulang Bawang, Air Tiris, Bangkinang, Sulawesi, Sumatra Timur, Sungai Talang, Tanjung Pati, Candung, Batusangkar, Bandar Olo, Kabun Lubeg, Kampung Tarandam, Lubuk Alung, Lubuk Begalung, Pulai Aie, Sawahan, Seberang Padang, Sicincin, Kambang, Kampung Tarandam, Pasir Ampalu, Pauh Kambar, Tepan, Katiagan, Lingkung Aur, Lubuk Sikaping, Rao, Bunian, Koto nan IV, Asam Kumbang, Tanjung Ampalu, Taratak Baru, Sijunjung, Guguk Sarai, Panyakalan, Sulit Air, Takang, Lintau, Pagar Alam, Tanjungraja, Petumbukan, Sungai Rampa, Labuhan Bilik, Panyabungan.

Figure 2 was Indonesian map according to Dutch naming system. Some places were named significantly different than modern Indonesia.

The writers' family background was analyzed based on the information that the writer provided in their writing. Writers' backgrounds were categorized based on their family position, family profession, or profession. In the life of the Minang people, the title of men will indicate their position in the clan. Every man whose title begins with the word 'datuk', is the chief of the tribe. Every man who holds the title 'chief of the chief' or 'chief of *penghulu*, is the leader of the clan chiefs.

Family background from the field of

**Table 2 Location of Female Writers Soenting Melajoe**

Region	Number of writers
Kayu Tanam	23
Padang	19
Menggala Lampung	18
Pasaman	17
Payakumbuh	17
Pariaman	16
Padang Panjang	13
Sungai Penuh	12
Tanjung Karang	12
Fort de Kock	10
Sawahlunto	10
Koto Gadang	8
Fort de Capellen	8
Sasak	8
Tapan	8
Solok	8
Medan	8
Teluk Betung	7
Curup	6
Waltevreden/Betawi	6
Matur	6
Lubuk Alung	6
Durian	6
Palembang	6
Bengkulu	4
Kepahiang	4
Bangko	4
Muara Sabak	4
Pasar krui, Lampung	4
Muara Aman	3
Purus	3
Alahan Panjang	3
Tebing Tinggi	3
Bandung	2
Jambi	2
Blitar	2
Probolinggo	2
Bandar Muharam Johor	2
Suliki	2
Maninjau	2

(continued on next page)

Table 2 (continued)

Anduring	2
Sungai Limau	2
Sarilamak	2
Singkarak	2
Sungai Lasi	2
Surian Pantai Cermin	2
Semende	2
Baturaja	2
Binjai	2
Asahan	2
Lubuk Pakam	2
Deli	2

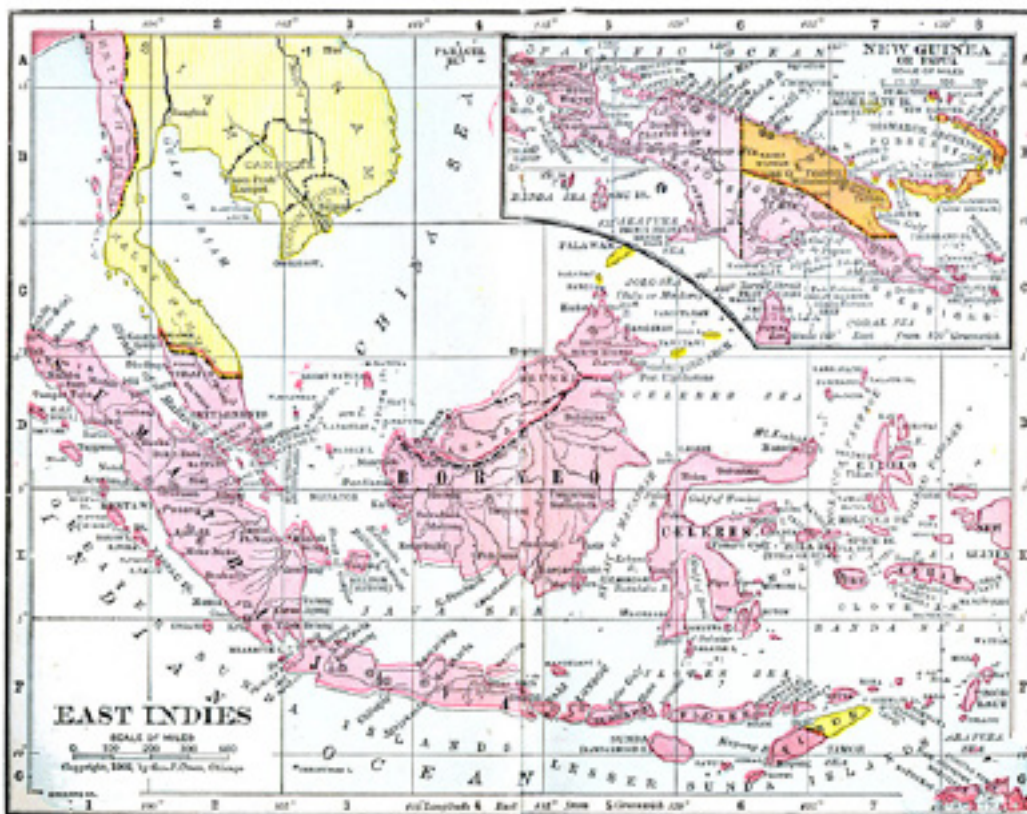
Source: Maimon Herawati, 2022

education was reflected in the identity that used the word *onderwijzer*, *inlandsche ondwopl school*, *hoofd ondw*, and teacher. The family background of the head of the region whom the Dutch appointed usually used the words

*larashoofd*, head of *laras*, *Tuanku Laras*, *Demang*, and others. The profession during the colonial period was closely related to the positions created by the Dutch to be filled by the natives. The types of professions include, for example, *beambte* stations, *mantri*, prosecutors, *schrijver*, *Javanese* doctors, *wijkmeester*, and others.

Name of Hamidah bint Sutan Saripada Attorney Sawahlunto for example; shows that Hamidah’s father was a prosecutor appointed by the Dutch. Nur’aini bint Hassan, *Schrijver* Pasar Krui; Nur’aini’s father, Hassan, was a scribe. R. Hadida bint Hj Abdul Rahman, *wijkmesster*; Hadida’s father was the area manager. The clan leader’s daughter could easily be detected. Any writer whose father was ‘*datuk*’, was a clan leader’s daughter. Rusila bint Datuk Raja Angat; Siti Rusila’s father was a clan leader.

Based on information from the writers of *Soenting Melajoe*, most of their family backgrounds are Dutch government employees, ranging from prosecutors, *Javanese* doctors, *mantri*, clerks, supervisors, managers, cooks, to station employees. The second most common family background is teachers, principals, or



East Indies, 1906 (Cram, 1906)

Figure 2 Map of Indonesia with Dutch naming system

**Table 3 Writer's Family Background**

Dutch employees	72
Teachers, head teachers	45
Clan leaders	26
Region leaders	13

Source: Maimon Herawati, 2022

retired teachers. The least in family background is the head of the region, such as *demang*, *laras*, *village heads*, and others (Table 3).

The rest of the writer's family background cannot be determined. For example, names such as Sitti Raminat, and Kayu Tanam, could not be identified who her family was or what their profession was.

To build the profile of the writers of *Soenting Melajoe*, the primary source was used as the main source, either from the writer's stories about themselves and their families in their writings, or other people's stories about them. After that, secondary information was taken from outside *Soenting Melajoe*, both from fragments of writings in other media about the writers, quotes from other media that appeared in certain books, and historical documents about the Indonesian people during the Dutch colonial period.

The *Oetoesan Melajoe* newspaper, for example, was difficult to find in its entirety. In Indonesia, there was also no annual school book archiving one's life story. Death announcements were also not present in Indonesia during the Dutch colonial. Dutch documents were available for some information. The only obstacle was the language barrier. Crowd information gathering was implemented using social media to find traces of the writer of *Soenting Melajoe* but to no avail. Thus, only women writers whose information about themselves was known were displayed in this paper.

Rohana Kudus was the daughter of Muhammad Rasyad Maharaja Sutan, a prosecutor in Medan with Kiam. Rohana was born on December 20, 1884 in Koto Gadang. Her parents brought Rohana to live in Alahan Panjang, following her father's job as a prosecutor's clerk. There, little Rohana spent time with the prosecutor's wife, Adiesa, who has no biological children.

Adiesa treated Rohana as her own child and educated Rohana from a young age. With

Adiesa, Rohana learnt to read the Qur'an, read and wrote Latin letters. Adiesa also passed her weaving skills on Rohana (Djaja, 1980).

When Rohana's mother died in 1897, Rohana returned to Koto Gadang. Since then, she has been interested in teaching the girls around her to weave and read the Qur'an. She gathered the little girls around her. Even though she was still in her teens, Rohana organizes a women's class in her village, Koto Gadang.

Rohana married her cousin, Abdul Kudus Pamuncak Sutan in 1908. At that time, Rohana's female students were producing more and more woven and lace products. She felt the need to manage it well so that these handicrafts could be sold to a wider market. It too would enable the girls to earn an income, at least as a substitute for yarn and cloth costs. In 1911, Rohana founded Kerajinan Amai Setia (KAS) with 60 members. This association did not only work in the economic sector, managing and marketing Koto Gadang women's handicrafts, but also taught reading, writing, arithmetic, cooking, and managing the house. In addition, religious education was also held. KAS was the first women's school and a company initiated and managed by women.

In 1907, Datuk Sutan Maharaja in Padang also founded a weaving school for girls and schools for boys. In 1908 Datuk Sutan Maharaja held the first Malay tenstoonstelling or an exhibition. This weekend was such a success that it became an annual exhibition activity. Three Minang women were sent to Belgium by the Dutch government to show off their weaving skills. In 1909, Datuk Sutan Maharaja founded the first weaving school in Padang.

When KAS was established and growing rapidly, communication between Rohana and Datuk Sutan Maharaja was established. Both felt the need to convey views, information, and advances to women more broadly. Datuk Sutan Maharaja offered a special sheet for women, which was inserted into the *Utusan Melayu* newspaper. Rohana asked for a special newspaper to be separated from other newspapers. One source mentioned that Rohana asked for a special sheet for women, and Datuk Sutan Maharaja offered a separate newspaper. Whoever offered which one, the fact was they communicated and decided together to publish the women's newspaper *Soenting Melajoe*. Rohana was the editor of *Soenting Melajoe*,



Source: Datuk Sutan Maharaja, 1917

Figure 3 Maklumat

actively working from Koto Gadang, assisted by Zubaidah Ratna Juwita, who lives in the city of Padang (Abdullah, 2007).

Rohana was Agus Salim's cousin, and the older brother of Sutan Syahril, with a different mother (Graves, 2007). In 2019, Rohana's struggle to promote women was recognized by the Government of the Republic of Indonesia as a contribution that deserves the title of a national hero. On November 8, 2019, Rohana Kudus was named a national hero.

Zubaidah was the daughter of Datuk Sutan Maharaja. Her husband was Sutan Maharaja Kayo. There was not much information about Zubaidah Ratna Juwita. On August 17, 1917, Zubaidah Ratna Juwita resigned from the editorship of *Soenting Melajoe*. At the same time, Sitti Nurmah was asked to accompany Rohana as editor of *Soenting Melajoe*.

Sitti Nurmah was born in Koto Gadang, Rohana's birthplace. Since childhood, Nurmah had lived in Padang, following the move of her father, Sutan Maharaja Kayo, winkel mas Padang. Sitti Nurmah called Datuk Sutan Maharaja 'inyik'. In Minang language, it meant grandfather. It was very likely that Sitti Nurmah was Ratna Juwita's child because in the second year of publishing *Soenting Melajoe*, 1913, Ratna Juwita mentioned that her daughter was still in school.

As a very young child, in 1904, Nurmah

studied a little reading, writing, and arithmetic in the *Taman Pengetahuan* school for two or three years. This school was founded by Datuk Sutan Maharaja because there were only a few government schools at that time.

After mastering writing and reading in Dutch and Arabic letters, Nurmah was able to enter the third government school in Padang until she reached the final grade. In addition to studying at a government school, Nurmah also learned Minangkabau natural heritage skills, weaving at the Padang weaving school. Nurmah was praised by the teacher for her intelligence and hard work.

At the flower parade celebrating the Kingdom of the Netherlands in 1913, Nurmah sat in a vehicle while weaving. She got the first prize. In 1914, at the celebration of Princess Yuliana's fifth birthday, Nurmah came forward to give a speech in fluent Dutch in front of Governor Ballot. (Datuk Sutan Maharaja, *Soenting Melajoe*, year 6, ed. 30). One of the gurindam which Published in *Soenting Melajoe*, year 2, edition 12 that Nurmah sent before becoming an editor showed her language skills.

On October 26, 1917, Datuk Sutan Maharaja asked Amna, who was then about 18 years old, to be the editor of *Soenting Melajoe*. Amna was the daughter of (late) Abdul Karim, the principal of a school in Bengkulu. In 1905 at the tender age of 6, Amna was brought by her father to school. Apart from Amna, there were only 3-4 girls in the school. Amna and her sisters, as well as the teacher's daughter. Women around her laughed at Amna and her sisters. The boys who went to school with them also made fun of them. There was no use for girls to study in school. Only men need to learn, Amna was told many times.

Amna often conveyed the condition of Bengkulu women in *Soenting Melajoe*. In her writings, Amna called on Bengkulu leaders to facilitate women's learning and skills. When the school was established, Amna requested that a night market week like the one in Minangkabau be held in Bengkulu as a forum for exhibitions of the skills of Bengkulu female students.

One writer of *Soenting Melajoe*, B.B, followed Amna work and wrote this article about Amna when she was 18 years old, in *Soenting Melajoe*, year 6, edition 37.

*The Opening of the Night Market in Bengkulu*



*It could be said, because of your hard work, now there was a women's school in Bengkulu. This helped Bengkulu boys and girls learn to read, write, count, and various craft skills, such as weaving and batik.*

*Was not that all intelligence will bring the biggest profit and result for Bengkulu girls nowadays, which should not be easily forgotten.*

*[This school] fulfilled the intentions and aspirations of Amna, a girl from my sister who lived in Bengkulu. [Amna] yearned for the advancement of her sister, wanted to lead her sister in the country. [out] from a dark place to a bright place. [Her wish] had been the subject of questions in the newspapers.*

*I was happy to read Amna's words in the newspapers explaining the state of her region, requesting a weaving school was also established in Bengkulu. Highest praise from the writer to Amna, who was a Bengkulu girl, who leaned towards progress, and did not like to remain silent before what she means to accomplish was achieved.*

*It seems that Amna had worked so hard all this time, putting these good aspirations and intentions. God was slowly giving them now and could already be shown during the recent Night Market crowds; Everyone could see with their own eyes how the Bengkulu girls were progressing nowadays, Amna wrote in the newspapers.*

*Anyone who entered the Night Market could see how many girls in the weaving booth were sitting weaving, each on her woven bench. Bengkulu girls had been thinking a lot and holding their hands in silence, to no avail. They were slowly led by Amna. She pulled and led out step by step, leaving a quiet place.*

*How Amna lead her homeland sisters Bengkulu, it could be said that everyone already knew. There were no other Bengkulu girls who took the trouble to help establish a weaving school apart from Amna.*

*During this time, Amna had always been diligent in visiting newspapers, bringing opinions and thoughts that came out of her heart and the views of her eyes that the writer really paid attention to. But now, for some reason, Amna was rarely seen in the newspapers reporting how things were in her region. This was why the writer was a little worried because the writer did not get any more news about the Bengkulu girls.*

*The writer was happy to see with the writer's own two eyes, the Bengkulu girl Amna was busy bringing some of her fellow countrywomen to a happy field of "Progress". In the first night market, only Amna, M, and Fatmah, a child of the teacher; Darwis, showed off their skills.*

*It is unbelievable. The writer was so happy to see Amna's ability to show various skills that put her on par with girls from other countries. With the intelligence of a sharp mind girl who was still 15-16 years old.*

*When the Night Market was first seen, Amna was doing various handicrafts. The readers of the newspaper "Tjermin", of course knew. Engku Soetan Andomo, administrator of the newspaper "Tjermin," wrote about Amna. Indeed, making nets was usually done by men, but it seemed that Amna did not want to be left behind. She also learned the skill of making nets.*

*Likewise, in the recent Night Market, Amna also showed her craft skills. There was a weaving bench in the booth. It was being worked on by a girl who was approximately 10-11 years old. Every minute Amna looked at her. Reportedly, the girl was Amna's own niece. And many other women who were sitting showing their respective knowledge that there was her own student, at a branch of the weaving school. Amna herself sat embroidering, facing the legged Singer machine, available there to demonstrate how the embroidery works, so that everyone who entered the Night Market could see with their eyes. Enough of all of Amna's intelligence.*

*Most of what female school students showed the art of weaving and batik making, from Kepahiang and Tjoereop. In Amna's place, all the skills were shown one by one in turn.*

*For other Bengkulu girls, it was okay to have taken the example of cloth to Amna! Go forth my sisters, have mercy on the poor!*

*Sitti Jatiah was a young woman from Pasar Johar, Kayu Tanam. Sitti Jatiah wrote 28 articles in *Soenting Melajoe*. She was married to Datuk Rajo Nando in 1908. When her husband moved to work in Padang, Datuk Sutan Maharaja asked Jatiah to be part of *Soenting Melajoe*. On May 24, 1918, Sitti Jatiah began working as an editor of *Soenting Melajoe*.*

*Sitti Jatiah as a child did not go to school to learn to write. After marrying Datuk Rajo*

Nando, her desire arose to study. Since getting married, she learned to read and write from her husband. Apart from Jatiah, there were also many Minang women who were good at reading and writing after studying from their husbands.

According to Datuk Sutan Maharaja, although Jatiah's handwriting was not as beautiful as the handwriting of a woman attending school, the content of Jatiah's writing was good. Jatiah's essay was not inferior to women who went to school. Jatiah was good at composing poetry that made readers amused and laughed.

On July 28, 1920, Sitti Jatiah died, and her family submitted Sitti Jatiah's will, pleading with Datuk Sutan Maharaja so that her sister, Sitti Nursiah, be allowed to replace Sitti Jatiah as editor. Datuk Sutan Maharaja agreed.

Siti Sundari Darmobroto was the daughter of Wirio Darmobroto, a gentleman of Ponorogo who was also the school's principal. There was not much information about Siti Sundari's childhood life. Siti Sundari was one of the *Javanese* women's magazine editors, *Wanita Sworo*. Siti Sundari also established a girls' school in Java (Blackburn, 2004). Siti Sundari was fluent in Dutch and some English.

In the early 1900s, girls began to enter school, learning to read and write. All-girls schools were established one after another. Unfortunately, there was no financial support for girls' schools. Male and female activists who care about education urged the Netherlands to provide assistance to this school.

One of the forums formed to improve the girls' school was the Declining Welfare Commission. In 1914 they received input and evidence of the state of the field from the crowd. One of those who gave input was Raden Ayu Siti Sundari. Siti Sundari distinguished the need for types of education based on social strata in Java. For village women, if they learnt to read *Javanese* and Latin letters and could do simple counts, this was enough. In addition, she taught them how to cook, sew, and make batik which would be useful if they opened a shop or became a cook, she explained (Blackburn, 2004). In 1915 Siti Sundari left for the Netherlands to seek opportunities to continue her education. In 1916 the Netherlands convened the First Colonial Teaching Congress in The Hague. Siti Sundari also shared her views in the forum (Poeze, 1986). There were three arguments by

Siti Sundari against the provision of women's education; women were children's first teachers so they ought to be educated; educated men instinctively wanted educated wives; and education was important for the dignity of the *Javanese* nation (Blackburn, 2004).

Siti Sundari also spoke at the First Women's Congress in Yogyakarta.

Jong Sumatraan praises Siti Sundari in *Soenting Melajoe*, year 4, 17th edition.

*'In Java, there were already some female leaders who were not afraid to fight using newspapers or face-to-face with male journalists to defend the rights of the women of the nation.*

*Now, the male could not just walk around doing things as they please with no regard for the honor, freedom, and health of women!*

*One of them who was very well known in Java, namely R.A. Siti Sundari, recently went to Europe to continue her studies."*

There were two writings of Siti Sundari published in *Soenting Melajoe*. Both were full of arguments in defense of women, education, marriage, and culture. 'And parents ought to give permission to daughters who wanted to seek intelligence, do not let (girls) be locked up again in a cage like wild birds, never taken out of the house if not married. Girls ought to be taught as boys, otherwise, the girls would not be happy in this world.'

Siti Sundari hoped that *Javanese* women after learning and being fluent in Dutch, would not become *ver Europeesch*, westernized, discarding their customs. There were many Dutch customs that were not worthy of emulation, although there were good customs that should be followed. Dutch customs that did not deserve to be imitated, for example, dancing, men, and women having fun in a quiet place. Sitti Sundari emphasized the importance of religion for life.

Sources who could not verify this research stated that Siti Sundari was brought to the Netherlands by her father to avoid being arrested by the Dutch because of her speeches. According to this source, Siti Sundari was one of the reasons Mas Marco went to the Netherlands. Mas Marco liked Sitti Sundari and wanted to take her home. This source might think that Siti Sundari Darmobroto was Siti Sundari, who often made speeches in front of

labor meetings. There were several Siti Sundari in Indonesian history. Siti Sundari, a pro-labor activist, written by Pramudya Ananta Toer; Siti Sundari, the wife of Muhammad Yamin; Siti Sundari, the sister of Dr. Soetomo, and Siti Sundari Darmobroto, a women's activist and writer of *Soenting Melajoe*.

Putri was the wife of Datuk Baginda, a teacher at Alahan Panjang. Putri never studied formally at school but found free time at home to learn to read and write. Putri asked the editor for help to improve the writing she sent because she did not know and understand how best to compose writing.

Interestingly, in her writing, Putri used a Dutch word, *kandwerk*, which meant a candle holder, to describe a situation without work, just sitting around. Putri was aware of the benefits of being good at reading and writing. After working in the kitchen, Putri learned to read and write.

In addition, between 8 am and 1 pm, Putri learnt to sew from the principal's wife.

Putri sent two articles to the newspaper *Soenting Melajoe*.

Hamidah was the daughter of a prosecutor in Sawahlunto. Hamidah asked readers to make *Soenting Melajoe* a place for consensus and looking for the best for women. Hamidah requested readers to avoid arguing and debating such like other newspapers.

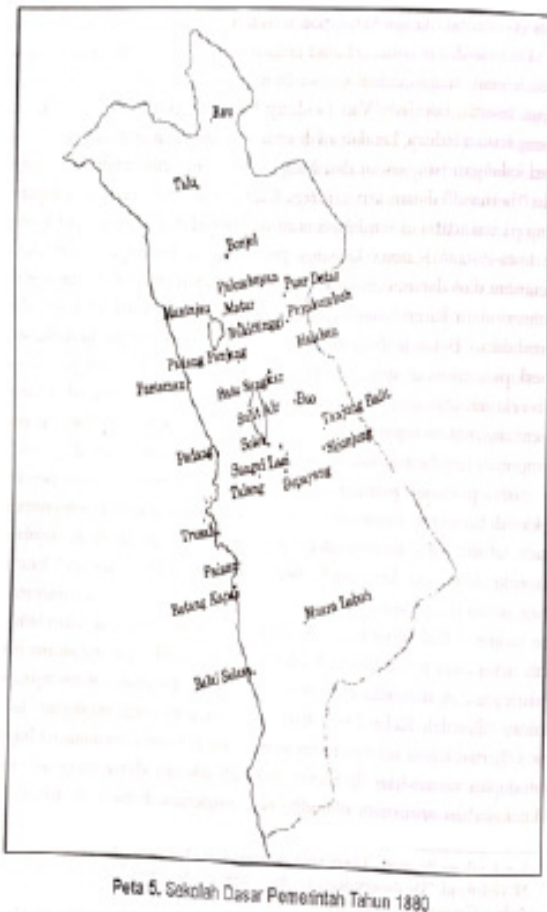
Table 4 shows the eight writers who could represent other writers of *Soenting Melajoe*.

Minangkabau interaction with the Dutch began when the Dutch conquered West Sumatra in 1837. The Dutch needed local residents with basic skills such as reading, writing, and arithmetic to fill positions in the expanding colonial government (Graves, 2007) (Kahn, 1980). The Dutch then set up a school. The school was also intended to be used by the Dutch to create an educated elite class of

**Table 4 Profile of Soenting Melajoe Writers**

Name	Age at 1912	Place of Origin	Education	Status	Family	Number of writings
Rohana Kudus	24	Koto Gadang, Bukittinggi	Home-educated	Married	Father Muhammad Rasyad Maharaja Sutan, jaksa. Mother Kiam. Younger step sibling Sutan Syahrir. Husband Abdul Kudus Pamuncak Sutan.	6
Zubaidah Ratna Juwita	-	Padang	-	Married	Father Datuk Sutan Maharaja. Husband Sutan Maharaja Kayo.	1
Sitti Nurmah	14	Koto Gadang, Bukittinggi	Taman Pengetahuan School, Government school	-	Father Sutan Maharaja Kayo	3
Amna Karim	13	Bengkulu	Government school	-	Father Abdul Karim, headteacher	31
Siti Jatiah	-	Kayu Tanam	Home-educated with husband	Married	Husband Datuk Rajo Nando	28
Siti Sundari Darmobroto	-	Ponorogo	-	-	Father Wirio Darmobroto, headteacher	2
Putri Sitti	-	Alahan Panjang	Home-educated, likely with husband	Married	Datuk Baginda, teacher	2
Sitti Hamidah	-	Sawahlunto	Government School	-	Father was an attorney	11

Source: Maimon Herawati, 2022



Source: Graves, 2007

Figure 4 Map of the elementary school set up by the Dutch in 1880

Bumiputra from the traditional ‘enlightened’ ruling class like in Java. The Nagari adat leader was not interested in the school. There were suspicions about the Dutch who were Christian. After all, they already had a privileged position in society without the school. Thus, those who took advantage of this educational opportunity were ordinary families who lived in Dutch management areas such as coffee plantations and ports (Graves, 2007). Since then, a new generation from the previously ordinary family has emerged. They were good at reading, writing, and arithmetic. They had the opportunity to work as clerks and warehouse managers. Their children usually got easy access to education.

There were usually private schools in the vicinity of these government schools. The presence of these private schools due to government schools could not accommodate all students, or because the types of lessons provided by the Dutch were not in accordance with the wishes of the community. The map below shows the locations of schools built in

the Netherlands (Graves, 2007).

It is interesting that the area with the most writers is Kayu Tanam. Very little data on Kayu Tanam before INS, *Indonesisch Nederlandsche School*, a native school founded by Muhammad Syafei in 1926 as a form of resistance to the Dutch education system whose curriculum and teaching patterns were aimed at producing low-ranking Dutch employees. On the other hand, INS strived to educate bright graduates with growing potential. This historical record of INS indicates the character of the Kayu Tanam community, which was ‘dare to fight the system’.

The establishment of INS was only in 1926, five years after *Soenting Melajoe* stopped publishing, but the character of the society should not change much. The Kayu Tanam resistance in education showed people who were brave to work against the flow. These women writers of Kayu Tanam who shared their views in the media were the second indication of the courageous character of Kayu Tanam people.

Kayu Tanam is located in the area of Piaman Laweh, which is now divided into Pariaman, Padang Pariaman, and part of Padang. Piaman Laweh was a bustling port area before the railway line was made to Padang. The Dutch government school was developed in Pariaman. It was fairly enough to assume that people could read and write early in Pariaman. Besides Kayu Tanam, Piaman’s other areas were Sicincin, Sungai Limau, and Pauh. All places had *Soenting Melajoe* writers. The record showed that school establishments had been recorded in Sungai Limau since the 1850s (Graves, 2007).

Besides Pariaman, other port cities were Painan, Padang, and Air Bangis. The Padang school establishment began in 1853, Air Bangis in 1854, and Painan in 1855 (Graves, 2007). From Painan there was one writer, while Air Bangis had two writers. From all regions of Piaman Laweh, there were 52 writers. Padang (combined with Purus, Bandar Olo, Sawahan, and others) was the area with the second largest number of writers, with 31 writers.

For the hilly area, the first schools built by the Dutch were in the coffee plantation areas such as Buo, Puar Datar, Rao, Bonjol, Lubuk Sikaping, Panti, Talu, Halaban, and Palembang. These areas were coffee producers. Dutch had implemented compulsory coffee cultivation in Indonesia since 1830. Each village was forced

to set aside 20 percent of their land to grow export commodities such as coffee, tea, and sugar cane (Graves, 2007). There were writers from Rao and Lubuk Sikaping.

The Dutch administrative center areas such as Bukittinggi, Payakumbuh, Solok, and Batusangkar were among the areas where schools were initially established. Bukittinggi was chosen by the Dutch as the center of Dutch military operations against Padri. The Dutch built the Fort de Kock. Another military fort was in Payakumbuh, Fort van der Capellen, which was the largest and the main fort in the inland area. Payakumbuh and Solok had 21 writers each, while Bukittinggi had 10 writers. From Batusangkar, only one writer was detected.

Interestingly, these schools had their own characteristics based on the community's character. In Buo, the majority of those who attended school were heads of local government because they were required by the Dutch. In Halaban, most of the students came from clerical and farmer families because geographically, Halaban was not as fertile as other areas and was narrow. The school was one way to achieve a better future. In other areas, the majority of students were children of indigenous Dutch employees or children of clan leaders because their family position provided easier access to education. After they graduated, some of them would enter the same profession as their father. Women's education initially began with the inclusion of girls in these government public schools. Over time, there was a demand for all-girls schools with additional domestic lessons (Schrijvers & Postel-Coster, 1977).

In addition to the areas above, some writers came from isolated areas such as Pulau Banyak and Singkil Aceh, located about 37 km from mainland Sumatra. The Rejai area on Lingga Island, Riau Islands, was also isolated. Likewise, the Tambelan Islands and Midai Natuna. Their locations were far in the middle of the sea. It was safe to assume that *Soenting Melajoe* newspaper reached them via sea transportation. Likewise, they sent writings to the editor through the same means. These islands were on the sea transportation route. Apart from the island of Sumatra, some writers came from Sulawesi, Kalimantan, and Java. Few of them were from Malaysia and Netherlands.

## CONCLUSION

Based on their identity, most of the writers of *Soenting Melajoe* came from the Dutch official society. The second largest background was people in the education profession. Next were clan chiefs and village heads. From the information on the location of the writers' origin, the writers came from the center of Dutch administration, Dutch coffee warehouse areas, or Dutch military centers. Further research can be done on the life of these female writer pioneers as well as the connection between ideas in *Soenting Melajoe* and other colonial newspapers.

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