

DISCUSSIONS ON GENDER EQUALITY IN THE SUARA 'AISYIYAH MAGAZINE DURING THE PRE-INDEPENDENCE PERIOD

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Abstract

The discussion of gender equality is not a new idea in knowledge production in Indonesia. Although not systematically and comprehensively formulated, the Suara 'Aisyiyah, a magazine organization of 'Aisyiyah has already started this movement even before independence, along with the reason, vision and purpose for which this organization was established. The purpose of this article is to further investigate how 'Aisyiyah expressed gender equality discourse through the 'lens' of the organization, Suara 'Aisyiyah, particularly in the pre-independence period (1926-1945) to see how women (Muslims) defined and fought for themselves amid the reality of a patriarchal era and the grip of colonialism. Using textual analysis and a historiographical approach, this study found that the discourse developed by Suara 'Aisyiyah during that period had at least three categories: searching for identity related to how Muslim women's status was perceived and defines the meaning of progress, promoting gender equality in the study and righteous deeds, and affirming women's place in the home and society as sites of struggle. This discourse of equality has allowed Suara 'Aisyiyah to consistently develop and grow to this day. At the same time, these reflect how 'Aisyiyah members interpret equality and progress without departing from the religious teachings and noble values of the Indonesian nation.

Keywords: *Suara 'Aisyiyah, Discourse, Equality, Pre-independence*

Abstrak

Wacana kesetaraan gender sesungguhnya bukan hal yang baru dalam produksi pengetahuan di Indonesia. Meski belum terumuskan secara sistematis dan komprehensif, *Suara 'Aisyiyah*, majalah organisasi 'Aisyiyah, sudah memulai gerakan ini sejak sebelum kemerdekaan, seiring dengan visi dan tujuan mengapa organisasi ini hadir di masyarakat. Artikel ini bertujuan untuk menelisik lebih jauh bagaimana wacana kesetaraan gender disuarakan oleh Aisyiyah melalui lensa organisasi, *Suara 'Aiyiyah* utamanya pada periode pra-kemerdekaan (1926-1945) untuk melihat bagaimana perempuan (Muslim) mendefinisikan dan memperjuangkan dirinya di tengah realitas zaman yang sangat patriarki dan cengkeraman kolonialisme. Dengan menggunakan analisis teks dan pendekatan historiografi, penelitian ini menemukan bahwa setidaknya ada 3 (tiga) kategori wacana yang dikembangkan oleh *Suara 'Aisyiyah* pada masa itu, yakni wacana pencarian identitas yang terkait dengan bagaimana perempuan muslim mendefinisikan status dan makna kemajuan, mendorong kesamaan hak perempuan dengan laki-laki dalam menuntut ilmu dan beramal saleh, serta menegaskan ruang gerak perempuan yakni menempatkan rumah tangga dan masyarakat sebagai medan perjuangan. Dengan wacana kesetaraan ini, *Suara 'Aisyiyah* secara konsisten terus berproses dan bertumbuh hingga saat ini yang sekaligus juga merefleksikan bagaimana warga 'Aisyiyah, memaknai kesetaraan dan kemajuan tanpa harus meninggalkan ajaran agama dan nilai luhur bangsa Indonesia.

Kata Kunci: *Suara 'Aisyiyah, Wacana, Kesetaraan, Pra kemerdekaan*

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Introduction

The rapid growth of mass media in the Dutch East Indies in the early 20th century was one of the hallmarks of the era of social movements.¹ In addition to serving as a tool for the struggle, the mass media also became a means of disseminating ideas and information. This growth in the mass media rapidly transformed people's mindsets, behaviors, and social relationships.² History shows that the driving forces behind mass media publishing in the country at that time were not only men, but also women. Amid the Dutch East Indies government's lack of concern for women's education,³ the publication of magazines was the result of a long struggle by indigenous women to gain and expand their access to education, social opportunities, healthcare, and political participation. *Poetri Hindia (1908)*, *Soenting Melajoe (1912)*, *Poetri Mardika (1912)*, *Soeara 'Aisjijah (1926)*, *Isteri (1929)*, and *Soeara Iboe (1932)* are some of the mass media outlets that were aimed at and/or published by women during the pre-independence era.

From those names, only *Suara 'Aisyiyah* still exists today. First published in October 1926, *Suara 'Aisyiyah* is a monthly magazine. The precursor to *Suara 'Aisyiyah* was the "Isteri-Islam" section in the *Soeara Moehammadijah* magazine in 1925. One year after being incorporated into *Soeara Moehammadijah*, in line with the development and expansion of 'Aisyiyah's Islamic propagation (*da'wah*) activities, *Suara 'Aisyiyah* began publishing independently under the leadership of Siti Djoehainah.⁴ As the organization's official magazine, *Suara 'Aisyiyah* is published to empower women, deepen understanding of Islam, and build a wider network of friends.⁵

This study will focus on how *Suara 'Aisyiyah* developed the discourse on gender equality during its early years, specifically in the pre-independence period (1926–1945). This period was chosen to examine how (Muslim) women defined and fought for their place in a world dominated by patriarchal thinking and the grip of colonialism. In its early years, *Suara 'Aisyiyah* frequently published articles on the

¹ Takashi Shiraiishi, *Zaman Bergerak: Radikalisme Rakyat di Jawa 1912-1926*, trans. oleh Hilmar Farid (Tangerang Selatan: Marjin Kiri, 2023), ix.

² Mu'arif, *Covering Muhammadiyah* (Yogyakarta: IRCiSoD, 2020), 91.

³ M. C. Ricklefs, *Sejarah Indonesia Modern 1200-2004*, trans. oleh Satrio Wahono dkk., Cetakan III (Jakarta: Serambi, 2007), 330–31.

⁴ Mu'arif and Hajar Nur Setyowati, *Covering Aisyiyah* (Yogyakarta: IRCiSoD, 2020), 144–45.

⁵ Siti Wasilah Wasool and Siti Hajinah Mawardi, *15 Tahunan Soeara 'Aisjijah* (Yogyakarta: Hoofbestuur Muhammadiyah Madjlis 'Aisyiyah, 1940), 12/512.

themes of women and religion. There have not been many studies of this magazine that comprehensively focus on the early period, particularly regarding the discourse on gender equality. In this regard, Yuanda Zara suggests that *Suara 'Aisyiyah* may have been viewed merely as an organizational publication media that addressed women's issues, and thus not compelling enough to be the subject of academic study—even though the printed publication should have been seen as evidence of women's progress at that time.⁶

Adib Sofia's article, titled "*Konsep Awal Pemberdayaan Masyarakat oleh 'Aisyiyah: Kajian Media terhadap Suara 'Aisyiyah Edisi Pra-Kemerdekaan*" (The Early Concept of Community Empowerment by 'Aisyiyah: A Media Study of the Pre-Independence Editions of *Suara 'Aisyiyah*) is one of several studies that trace the discussion about *Suara 'Aisyiyah* during the pre-independence period in Indonesia. Sofia noted that there were at least four key topics of discussion for *Suara 'Aisyiyah* at that time: gender equality, expanding women's knowledge, concern for health and the environment, and reporting 'Aisyiyah's

charitable works.⁷ Through this research, Sofia demonstrated that even in the pre-independence era, Indonesian women had already formulated an empowerment framework.

A study covering a longer time period was conducted by Muhammad Ichsan Budi Prabowo, titled "*Wacana Perempuan dalam Rasionalisasi Agama pada Majalah Suara 'Aisyiyah 1930-1970*" (Discourse on Women in the Rationalization of Religion in *Suara 'Aisyiyah Magazine, 1930–1970*). Using critical historical methods, Ichsan not only reveals the nuances of religious renewal in *Suara 'Aisyiyah*, but also examines the discourse on women's roles during the era of independence and the organization's responses to various national issues. Ichsan found that the shifting discourse *Suara 'Aisyiyah* from the pre-independence era (1930–1945) to the independence era (1945–1966) and then to the New Order era (1967–1970) cannot be separated from the sociopolitical situation in Indonesia throughout those periods.⁸ Although it underwent several periods of transition, Ichsan concluded that *Suara 'Aisyiyah* is the most persistent in its role as a magazine dedicated to the 'Aisyiyah struggles.

⁶ Muhammad Yuanda Zara, "Soeara 'Aisjijah, Hindia Belanda, dan Dunia pada Paruh Pertama Abad Ke-20," *Suara 'Aisyiyah*, October 2021, 38–39.

⁷ Adib Sofia, "Konsep Awal Pemberdayaan Masyarakat Oleh 'Aisyiyah" Kajian Media terhadap Suara 'Aisyiyah

Edisi Pra-Kemerdekaan," *Aplikasia: Jurnal Aplikasi Ilmu-Ilmu Agama* 21, no. 1 (2021): 55

⁸ Muhammad Ichsan Budi Prabowo, "Wacana Perempuan dalam Rasionalisasi Agama pada Majalah Suara 'Aisyiyah 1930-1970" (Graduate Thesis, Yogyakarta, UIN Sunan Kalijaga Yogyakarta, 2021).

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The primary sources for this study are pre-independence issues of *Suara 'Aisyiyah* magazine. These sources will be used to examine the discourses on gender equality developed by *Suara 'Aisyiyah*. Meanwhile, to examine the socio-historical context this study refers to some secondary sources, including: (a) internal sources, such as the book “*Aisyiyah dan Sejarah Pergerakan Perempuan Indonesia: Sebuah Tinjauan Awal*” (‘Aisyiyah and the History of the Indonesian Women’s Movement: An Initial Review) edited by Adaby Darban on 2010; Covering ‘Aisyiyah (2020), written by Mu’arif and Hajar Nur Setyowati; and the documents of *15 Tahun Soeara 'Aisijjah* (*Suara 'Aisyiyah* 15-year retrospective), written by Siti Wasilah Wasool and Siti Hayinah Mawardi on 1940; (b) external sources, such as Susan Blackburn’s book “Women and the State in Modern Indonesia” (2004) and “*Kongres Perempuan Pertama: Tinjauan Ulang*” (The First Women’s Congress: A Reassessment) (2007), the book “*Sejarah Indonesia Modern 1200-2004*” (A History of Modern Indonesia, 1200–2004) written by Merle Calvin Ricklefs on 2007, the article “Javanese Women and Islam: Identity Formation since the Twentieth Century” by Kurniawati Hastuti Dewi, and several books and articles that explore the

dynamics of the women’s press in the 20th century. This analysis of the socio-historical context is important for understanding that the discourse developed by *Suara 'Aisyiyah* does not stand alone, but is part of the *zeitgeist* of the women’s movement at that time, including the positioning of the mass media as a tool for the struggle.

Women and the Press in the Pre-Independence Era

In “*Jawa-Islam di Masa Kolonial: Suluk, Santri, dan Pujangga Jawa*” (Javanese Islam in the Colonial Era: *Suluk, Santri, and Javanese Poets*), Nancy K. Florida described how Javanese women in the 19th century became the objects of men’s wild fantasies. This was especially true for the non-elite rural women, who were often portrayed as “naive, unconscious beings or those full of lust—a vessel for carnal desire.”⁹ Not only in Java, the treatment of women as second-class citizens—who lacked the freedom to engage in activities in public domain and did not have the same access to education as men—also occurred in other parts of the Dutch East Indies. The early struggles—carried out individually and on a local level—by Raden Ajeng Kartini in Java, Rohanna Koedoes in Minangkabau, Cut Nyak

⁹ Nancy K. Florida, *Jawa-Islam di Masa Kolonial: Suluk, Santri, dan Pujangga Jawa*, translated by Irfan

Afifi and Nancy K. Florida (Yogyakarta: Buku Langgar, 2020), 115.

Dien in Aceh, and Maria Walanda Maramis in North Sulawesi were aimed at breaking down the patriarchal religious traditions that were deeply rooted in society.¹⁰

As the 20th century began, the ethical policy implemented by the Dutch East Indies government in 1901 led to the emergence and spread of the women's movement. This was a result of women gaining greater access to education, although facing operational struggles.¹¹ This expansion of educational opportunities for women subsequently paved the way for a broader and more organized women's movement. Initially, these educated women became involved in organizations led by men, such as *Budi Oetomo*, *Sarikat Islam*, and *Muhammadiyah*. *Putri Mardika* (1912), the women's organisational wing of the *Budi Oetomo* movement, was the first women's movement to be established,¹² followed by *'Aisyiyah* (1917), *Wanita Taman Siswa* (1922), *Wanita Katholik* (1924), *Wanita Kentjono* (1928), and others.

Amid the surge of nationalist movement at that time, Indonesian women's organizations held the First Indonesian

Women's Congress in December 1928. As Susan Blackburn notes, this congress did not fully represent all the women's organizations that already existed in Indonesia at the time. Some organizations were unable to attend due to financial constraints, while others were "not invited" for various reasons. Most of the participants were young women with a modern educational background and middle-to upper-class economic backgrounds.¹³ From the congress—particularly through the speeches—it is clear that women have been advocating for several issues, such as education for women, early marriage, women's suffrage, and polygamy. Fifteen women delivered speeches in front of the congress participants. They addressed a variety of topics in their speeches, each in their own unique style.¹⁴

In addition to the Women's Congress, women's issues can also be examined through mass media published by women. *Soenda Berita* (1903)—though not a publication run by women, but a man named Raden Mas Tirta Adhi Soerjo—was the first mass media outlet to gain significant attention to women's emancipation and progressiveness, including to provide a

¹⁰ A. Adaby Darban, ed., *'Aisyiyah dan Sejarah Pergerakan Perempuan Indonesia: Sebuah Tinjauan Awal* (Yogyakarta: History Major of FIB UGM, 2010), 20–40.

¹¹ Ricklefs, *Sejarah Indonesia Modern 1200-2004*, 330–31.

¹² Susan Blackburn, *Women and the State in Modern Indonesia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 18.

¹³ Susan Blackburn, *Kongres Perempuan Pertama: Tinjauan Ulang*, ed. by Monique Soesman, trans. by Koesalah Soebagyo Toer (Jakarta: Yayasan Obor Indonesia & KITLV-Jakarta, 2007), xxii–xxvii.

¹⁴ Blackburn, xxxv–xliii.

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platform for women in expressing their ideas. The weekly newspaper leads the women to become aware of the importance of the mass media in disseminating ideas, discussing issues, and exchanging information among women across the country.¹⁵ Mass media publications run by women—whether newspapers or magazines—are therefore “not based solely on the demands and needs of the times, but also aim to empower women so they can achieve a better life in the future and break free from the shackles of outdated traditions.”¹⁶

Meanwhile, the first Malay-language women’s magazine was *Poetri Hindia* (1908). The magazine’s launch was warmly received by female readers, particularly because it served as a platform for women to come to show up, marking a new chapter in women’s rights and serving as tangible evidence of women’s progress.¹⁷ In Minangkabau, Zoebaidah Ratna Djuita and Rohanna Koedoes published *Soenting Melajoe* (1912) as a tool for women’s struggle to achieve freedom and progress.¹⁸ In the same year, the magazines *Wanita Swara* and *Poetri Mardika* were published. These were

followed by *Soeara 'Aisjijah* (1926), *Isteri* (1929), *Soeara Iboe* (1932), and some other names. However, of the publications listed above, only *Soeara 'Aisjijah* remains in its existence today.

Soeara 'Aisjijah as the Organization's Broadcasting Media

In 2021, on its 95th anniversary, *Suara 'Aisyiyah* was designated as the “Oldest Continuously Published Women’s Magazine” by the Indonesian World Records Museum (MURI). This recognition was well-deserved, as *Suara 'Aisyiyah* has borne witness to ‘Aisyiyah’s journey through the ages: the colonial era, the national movement, the Japanese occupation, the struggle to defend independence, the Old Order, the New Order, the Reformation era, and continues to this day. During the award ceremony, Muhammadiyah General Chairman Haedar Nashir stated that the publication of *Suara 'Aisyiyah* is a manifestation of ‘Aisyiyah’s efforts to elevate the status and dignity of women.¹⁹

¹⁵ Maman S. Mahayana, “Majalah Wanita Awal Abad ke-20: Corong Ide Emansipasi,” *Wacana* 5, no. 1 (April 2003): 48–50.

¹⁶ Mahayana, 50.

¹⁷ Mahayana, 56; Miftahul Habib Fachrurozi, “Politik Etis dan Bangkitnya Kesadaran Baru Pers Bumiputra,” *Bihari: Pendidikan Sejarah dan Ilmu Sejarah* 2, no. 1 (2019): 22–23.

¹⁸ Sastri Sunarti, *Kajian Lintas Media: Kelisanan dan Keberaksaraan dalam Surat Kabar Terbitan Awal di Minangkabau (1859-1940-an)* (Jakarta: Gramedia, 2013), 80–82.

¹⁹ Suara 'Aisyiyah, “Suara Aisyiyah Raih Rekor MURI Majalah Perempuan Tertua yang Berkesinambungan Terbit,” *Majalah Suara 'Aisyiyah*, October 30 2021, <https://suaraaisyiyah.id/suara-aisyiyah-raih-rekor-muri-majalah-perempuan-tertua-yang-berkesinambungan-terbit/>.

Suara 'Aisyiyah (formerly: *Soeara 'Aisjijah*) was first published in October 1926 CE, coinciding with Rabi' al-Awwal 1345 AH. As mentioned earlier, the emergence of this monthly magazine did not occur in a blank space, but was a convergence of the spirit of the times (*zeitgeist*), an awareness of the importance of advancing women's rights, and the vital role of the media for women. The precursor to *Suara 'Aisyiyah* was the "Isteri-Islam" column published in *Soeara Moehammadijah*—an official magazine of Muhammadiyah Central Board—in 1925. A year after being "affiliated", *Suara 'Aisyiyah* began publishing independently under the leadership of Siti Djoehainah. *Suara 'Aisyiyah* served as 'Aisyiyah's broadcasting media and/or 'radio'²⁰ to disseminate organizational information and ideas about the dignity of women to distant places, especially, some 'Aisyiyah branches had already been established in various regions across the country at that time.²¹ Furthermore, in the *15 Tahoenan Soeara 'Aisjijah* book, it is stated that,

Tidak oesah kami katakan kebesaran hati kami, serenta mendengar 'Aisjijah akan mengeloearkan „Madjallah.” Memang

²⁰ When *Suara 'Aisyiyah* was first published, 'Aisyiyah had not yet become an autonomous organization (ortom) of Muhammadiyah. This Muslim women's organization, founded on 27 Rajab 1335 H/May 19, 1917, was designated as an autonomous organization of Muhammadiyah in October 1966, when Siti Baroroh Baried served as Chairperson. For more details, read *Suara 'Aisyiyah*, "The 37th Congress in Yogyakarta: 'Aisyiyah's First Congress as an Autonomous

*persjarikatan kita 'Aisjijah boleh dikatakan soedah memenoehi Indonesia. Maka perloe sekali mengadakan soerat chabar, jang mendjadi trompet 'Aisjijah dan djoega jang memperhoeboengkan dan mengenalkan Tjabang dan Groep Bg. 'Aisjijah seoemoemnja. Maka Moedah-moedahan terbitnja madjallah ini, jang dinamakan „Soeara 'Aisjijah,” dapat menambah kemadjoean doenia Islam.*²² (Needless to speak of our profound pride upon hearing that 'Aisyiyah would publish a 'Magazine'. Indeed, our organization, 'Aisyiyah, has already spanned the entirety of Indonesia. Thus, it is highly urged to establish a newspaper that serves as the herald of 'Aisyiyah, as well as a medium to connect and introduce the branches and communities of 'Aisyiyah at large. May the publication of this magazine, named 'Soeara 'Aisyiyah,' further support the progress of the Islamic world).

In its first year, *Soeara 'Aisjijah* adopted the motto "*Madjallah Woelanan Kawedalaken Dening: Moehammadijah Bg. 'Aisjijah Djokjakarta.*" The editors were Siti Djoehainah, Siti 'Aisjah, Siti Badilah, and Siti Djalalah. Some of the information published in the magazine included: (a) a *verslag* (reports) on 'Aisyiyah meetings from the branch and chapter leader boards, as well as from the *Siswa Praja Wanita* (Muhammadiyah young women's association—Nasyiatul 'Aisyiyah); (b) religious guidance for the women as the response for the

Organization of Muhammadiyah," *Suara 'Aisyiyah* magazine, August 12 2022, <https://suaraaisyiyah.id/muktamar-ke-37-yogyakarta-muktamar-pertama-aisyiyah-sebagai-organisasi-otonom-muhammadiyah/>.

²¹ Mu'arif and Setyowati, *Covering Aisyiyah*, 145.

²² Wasool and Mawardi, *15 Tahoenan Soeara 'Aisjijah*, 65/565.

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issues currently developing within society.²³ *Suara 'Aisyiyah* was published in nine issues with a regular circulation of between 600 and 900 copies. Initially, the magazine was distributed for free or relied on donations from readers, but as the rise of operational needs, the cost of publication was then passed on to the readers.²⁴ During the Japanese occupation, for example, the subscription fee charged to readers “*oentoek setengah tahoen 1942*” (for the first half of 1942) was f0.60.²⁵ It was in this way that *Suara 'Aisyiyah* managed to survive the vicissitudes of the times.

Since its first publication, *Suara 'Aisyiyah* magazine has used the Latin alphabet. Initially, the languages used were Malay (Indonesian) and Javanese; then, as the magazine spread to various regions, *Suara 'Aisyiyah* adopted Indonesian as its official language.²⁶ Regarding page numbering, *Suara 'Aisyiyah* does not start a new page number for each issue but continues the numbering through the end of the year. According to information

provided in the January 1940 issue, the total number of pages printed in 1938 was 530, rising to 658 pages in 1939, with a monthly circulation of around 3,000 copies.²⁷

For a certain period of time, due to the leadership's busy schedules, limited funds, a shortage of manuscripts, and the Japanese invasion, *Suara 'Aisyiyah* ceased publication on several occasions.²⁸ There were also times when *Suara 'Aisyiyah* found itself in what is described as a “*hidup tak subur, mati tak suka*” (state of stagnation, neither thriving nor dying). In response to this situation, at the 21st 'Aisyiyah Congress in Medan (1938), Siti Hayinah stated firmly, “*Marilah Soeara 'Aisjijah itu kita hidupi betul-betul... Kalau tidak, baiklah kita bunuh saja mati-mati dan kita tanam dalam-dalam*” (We have to truly breathe life into *Suara 'Aisyiyah*... Otherwise, just put it to rest once and bury it deep).²⁹ That bold and provocative statement was, in fact, able to inspire the members of 'Aisyiyah to continue supporting *Suara 'Aisyiyah*. A similar statement was issued

²³ Wasool and Mawardi, 14/514.

²⁴ Darban, *'Aisyiyah dan Sejarah Pergerakan Perempuan Indonesia: Sebuah Tinjauan Awal*, 61–76.

²⁵ Although a subscription price was set, the magazine cover included the note “*lengganan dengan derma*” (subscription and donation).” At least during the pre-independence era, the donations from these subscriptions were always reported in the magazine.

²⁶ According to Shiraishi's notes, the word “Indonesia” began to be used by intellectuals and activists as early as 1912. The word served as a symbol of solidarity among the indigenous people. For more details, read

Shiraishi, *Zaman Bergerak: Radikalisme Rakyat di Jawa 1912-1926*, 357–58.

²⁷ “Mentjegah Naiknja Harga”, *Soeara 'Aisjijah*, No. 1 January, 1940, 4.

²⁸ Darban, *'Aisyiyah dan Sejarah Pergerakan Perempuan Indonesia: Sebuah Tinjauan Awal*, 61–76; Sofia, “Konsep Awal Pemberdayaan Masyarakat Oleh 'Aisyiyah” *Kajian Media terhadap Suara 'Aisyiyah Edisi Pra-Kemerdekaan*,” 51; Prabowo, “Wacana Perempuan dalam Rasionalisasi Agama pada Majalah Suara 'Aisyiyah 1930-1970,” 53–55.

²⁹ Mu'arif and Setyowati, *Covering Aisyiyah*, 147.

by the editorial board in *Suara 'Aisyiyah* No. 1, dated January 30, 1942 CE—coinciding with 12 Muharram 1361 AH—as follows:

*Akan tetapi mengingat kepentingan: „sebagaimana peroet haroes diberi makanan, maka otak-poen haroes ditejerdaskan dengan pembatjaan, seperti S.A. ini”, maka walau-poen bagaimana djoega dan semahal berapa poela, S.A. tetap dioesahkan terbitnja, lebih baik terbit tipis dari pada tidak sama sekali. Sebagaimana djoega dagblad2 jang besar sekarang ini dibatas (dipertipis) lembarannja.³⁰ (However, keeping in mind its sheer importance—that 'just as the body needs food, the mind must also be fed with reading, sami goes with *Soeara 'Aisyiyah*'—every effort will be made to keep publishing *Soeara 'Aisyiyah*' no matter what the circumstances or how high the cost. It is better to print a thin issue than none at all, just as the large daily newspapers today are forced to limit and thin out their pages.)*

In addition to not being published for several issues, *Suara 'Aisyiyah* also reduced its page count on several occasions. There were several reasons behind this decision, such as preparations for the publication of the *15 Tahoenan Soeara 'Aisjijah* book and the rise of printing costs caused by the socio-political-economic conditions at the time. This reduction in page count was a decision that saved the

magazine from ceasing publication. *Suara 'Aisyiyah*'s funding actually came not only from subscription fees, but also from the sale of products (such as books and stamps) and from advertisers. In 1939, the price for a full-page ad was 2 f, for a half-page ad it was 1.25 f, and for a quarter-page ad it was 0.75 f (discounts were available for regular advertisers).³¹ Advertisements for items such as jewelry, books, batik, headscarves, cosmetics, Dutch and English language courses, and others frequently appeared in the magazine.³² In addition, *Suara 'Aisyiyah* also provided space for other magazines to advertise. Throughout 1940, for example, advertisements from other magazines and newspapers were found, such as the magazines *Soeara Moehammadijah*, *Moetiara*, and *'Adil*, as well as the Islamic decadal newspaper *Raja*. These magazines collaborated by exchanging advertising space through a mechanism involving three consecutive placements.³³

The editorial team at *Suara 'Aisyiyah* continues to strive to provide reading material and knowledge for its readers, although it is not

³⁰ “Langsoenglah Terbitnja S.A!”, *Soeara 'Aisjijah*, No. 1, January 1942, 5.

³¹ “Advertentie dalam Soeara 'Aisjijah”, *Soeara 'Aisjijah*, No. 1, January 1939.

³² Between 1926 and 1933, several magazines and newspapers that advertised in *Suara 'Aisyiyah* included *Berantas*, *Sahabat*, *Siaran*, *Al Mahdi*, *Pembela Islam*, *Penganjur*, *'Adil*, *Medan Muslimin*, *Keisyafan*, and *Kobaran*. These magazines and newspapers came from

various regions across Indonesia and had diverse affiliations; they were not only from within Muhammadiyah or other Islamic organizations, but also from nationalist circles, and even Christian and Catholic groups. Read more in Prabowo, “Wacana Perempuan dalam Rasionalisasi Agama pada Majalah *Suara 'Aisyiyah* 1930-1970,” 66.

³³ “Ruiladvertentie”, *Soeara 'Aisjijah*, No. 12 December 1940, 889.

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easy. *Suara 'Aisyiyah* not only features the articles on women's issues, religion, and organizational news, but also addresses educational issues through short stories, food recipes, responses to current events, and more.³⁴ Every Eid al-Fitr, the magazine also features a special section called *Taman Perkenalan* or "The Greeting Park", designed as a space for socializing. In this section, subscribers and readers can introduce themselves by providing their names and addresses. Not only that, but another initiative undertaken by *Suara 'Aisyiyah* was to provide a special section for children. From May 1939 through September 1941, *Suara 'Aisyiyah* included a special children's magazine supplement titled "*Taman Nasjiah*." This magazine featured short stories, puzzles, songs, and more.³⁵

Suara 'Aisyiyah has indeed managed to survive while many other mass media outlets have fallen by the wayside. Nevertheless, Abdul Munir Mul Khan noted that *Suara 'Aisyiyah* is actually better known within 'Aisyiyah itself. He said, "*Saya kira benar Suara 'Aisyiyah menjadi cermin bagi avantgarde 'Aisyiyah, tetapi lebih ke dalam. Orang luar tidak membaca itu*" (I think it's true that *Suara 'Aisyiyah* serves as a mirror for 'Aisyiyah but it's limited to the internal part of the organisation. Outsiders don't read it).³⁶ Regardless, from a historical perspective, *Suara 'Aisyiyah* should be viewed as evidence of the progress and struggles of women, particularly members of 'Aisyiyah.³⁷ The fact that *Suara 'Aisyiyah* has endured over the years also demonstrates the existence of a strong system

³⁴ One event that drew a response from the editorial board of *Suara 'Aisyiyah* was Ir. Soekarno's walkout from a Muhammadiyah meeting in Bengkulu. This action stemmed from Soekarno's disappointment upon learning that the meeting used a partition to separate male and female attendees and leaders. For Soekarno, the use of such a partition was inconsistent with the spirit of Islamic reform as championed by Kiai Ahmad Dahlan. In response to Soekarno's actions, the editorial board wrote a response article titled "Ir. Soekarno and the Veil." The editorial board of *Suara 'Aisyiyah* noted that the use of veils during meetings held by Muslim organizations—such as Muhammadiyah, Nahdlatul Ulama, Al-Irsyad, Ar-Rabithah, Al-Khairiyah, and others—was a common practice. Rather than being a symbol of women's subjugation, the use of a veil serves to maintain calm and ensure order in meeting settings by preventing men and women from making direct eye contact—a practice rooted in the Islamic teaching of "*ghaddul bashar*". In this context, the emphasis is not on whether or not a veil is worn, but rather on safety and the common good. It was stated, "*boeat kami, bertabir atau tidak dengan ditempatkan bersampingan atau*

dibelakang zonder tabir, tidak adalah penghinaan atau koerang penghargaan, „terserah!"; jang perloe kemaslahatan dan faedahnja, dengan tidak menjalahi Agama Islam" (For us, whether there is a screen or not—whether placed side by side or behind without a screen—is not an insult or a lack of respect... 'It's up to you!; what matters is the benefit and usefulness, without violating the teachings of Islam). For the full story, read "Ir. Soekarno dengan Tabir", *Soeara 'Aisjijah*, No. 1 Januari Tahun 1939, 55-56.

³⁵ Sirajuddin Bariqi, "Mengenal Taman Nasjiah: Majalah Khusus Anak yang Lahir dari Rahim Suara 'Aisyiyah," *Rahma.id* (blog), October 27 2023, <https://rahma.id/mengenal-taman-nasjiah-majalah-khusus-dari-rahim-suara-aisyiyah/>.

³⁶ Sirajuddin Bariqi, "Mengeja Perjalanan Majalah Suara 'Aisyiyah: Dulu, Kini, dan Nanti," *Suara 'Aisyiyah*, Oktober 2021, 13.

³⁷ Zara, "Soeara 'Aisjijah, Hindia Belanda, dan Dunia pada Paruh Pertama Abad Ke-20," 38–39. 'Aisyiyah's decision to publish *Suara 'Aisyiyah* magazine reflects its concern for the plight of the Indonesian people—

that supports and drives its continued existence.³⁸

For nearly a century, *Suara 'Aisyiyah* has served as a beacon of literacy—promoting literacy in reading and writing, women's empowerment, a knowledge in loving the homeland, Islamic and Indonesian identity, critical thinking, responsiveness to contemporary issues, and digital literacy—for Indonesian women.³⁹ During the colonial era, this magazine also fueled the resistance movement against colonial rule, both through physical resistance and through the *bedhil* (power) of knowledge.⁴⁰ These various efforts become a foundational framework in Islamic values that honor women.

The Discourse on Gender Equality in *Suara 'Aisyiyah*

The arrival and spread of Islam in Indonesia did not automatically liberate the women from male domination. On the contrary,

some groups even view Islam as a religion that hinders women's progress.⁴¹ From the very beginning, *Suara 'Aisyiyah*—as the voice of 'Aisyiyah—has firmly rejected this view, asserting that Islam exists to elevate the status and dignity of women. This rejection is reflected in the discourse on gender equality promoted by the *Suara 'Aisyiyah* magazine during the pre-independence period. As a mass media outlet published by a Muslim women's organization, *Suara 'Aisyiyah* developed a discourse that addressed both women's issues and Islam simultaneously.

There were at least three categories of discourse discovered by *Suara 'Aisyiyah* during that period, those were including the search for identity, gender issues, and field of struggle.⁴² The first category encompassed the discourse on women's identity. This was characterized by articles that examined the status and position of women in Islam. In addition, many writers for *Suara 'Aisyiyah* emphasize the importance of a

particularly women—who, in the pre-independence era, had limited access to public spheres such as education, healthcare, and employment. Read more by Siti Syamsiyatun, "Rowing Between the Currents: 'Aisyiyah Strategies for Middle Path Feminism," *Musāwa Jurnal Studi Gender Dan Islam* 22, no. 1 (11 Juli 2023): 44.

³⁸ Hajar NS, "Riwayat Suara 'Aisyiyah: Jejak Langkah 95 Tahun," *Suara 'Aisyiyah*, October 2021, 6.

³⁹ Adib Sofia, "7 Jenis Jihad Literasi Suara 'Aisyiyah," *Suara 'Aisyiyah*, October 2021, 8–10.

⁴⁰ *Suara 'Aisyiyah*, "Suara Aisyiyah Raih Rekor MURI Majalah Perempuan Tertua yang Berkesinambungan Terbit."

⁴¹ Kurniawati Hastuti Dewi, "Javanese Women and Islam: Identity Formation since the Twentieth Century," *Southeast Asian Studies* 1, no. 1 (April 2012): 120.

⁴² This categorization of discourse more or less adopts the framework for the development of gender discourse used by Siti Syamsiyatun. Differences in the objects of study (*Nasyiatul 'Aisyiyah* as an orthodox organization and *Suara 'Aisyiyah* as a mass media outlet) and the temporal contexts of the study (1965–2005 and the pre-independence period) required the author to create a slightly different classification by adapting the available data. For more details, see Siti Syamsiyatun, *Pergolakan Putri Islam: Perkembangan Wacana Gender dalam Nasyiatul 'Aisyiyah 1965-2005* (Yogyakarta: Suara Muhammadiyah, 2016).

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balance between progressiveness and faith. The second category includes discussions about what women can and should do. Two points emphasized in this second category are the importance of women having equal access to education and the opportunity to perform the good deeds, just as men do. The third category covers various discourses and manifestations of women. In this final category, the author focuses on discourses that position the domestic area and society as arenas of struggle for women.

A. Category I: Defining the Status and Meaning of Women's Progressiveness

In its fourth issue of 1927, *Suara 'Aisyiyah* published a Javanese-language article written by one of the instructors at *Tajmilul Akhlak* titled “*Deradjading Tijang Estri Wonten Ing Agami Islam.*” The article asserted that Islam is a religion that highly values women. This argument was reinforced by referencing the views of Annie Besant—a British women's rights activist—who stated that Islam places women in a position of equality, as well as the

sayings of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) that the best of men are those who treat their women the best. Islamic teachings, therefore, do not seek to demean women, but rather to elevate them.⁴³ In the Indonesian context, As Hadisiswaja explains that what keeps women in a low social status are the shackles of customary laws and patriarchal religious interpretations. These shackles hold women back and keep them from progressing.⁴⁴ One of the ways Islam puts honor on women is by requiring them to wear the *hijab*. Unlike some people who claim that the *hijab* is a symbol of backwardness and/or a shackle that prevents women from advancing,⁴⁵ in the article “*Koedoeng Oetawi Machromah,*” *Suara 'Aisyiyah* argues that the requirement for women to wear a headscarf or *noetoepe rikmanipoen* (cover their hair) is an effort to protect women from unwanted situations.⁴⁶ Regarding the method and style, ‘Aisyiyah grants freedom to wear a headscarf (and dress) in accordance with the customs of their

⁴³ “Deradjading Tijang Estri Wonten Ing Agami Islam”, *Soeara 'Aisjijah*, No. 4 Tahun 1927, 52.

⁴⁴ “Kebangoenan Poeteri Timoer”, *Soeara 'Aisjijah*, No. 2 Februari Tahun 1940, 97.

⁴⁵ A more detailed discussion of the headscarf/hijab as a symbol of backwardness can be found in Nilufer Gole, *Islam and Secularity: The Future of Europe's Public Sphere* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2015). According to Muhammad Ridha Basri, this encouragement to wear the headscarf represents an expression of Muhammadiyah and ‘Aisyiyah’s efforts

to liberate women from the various shackles that bind them. Muhammadiyah and ‘Aisyiyah put Islamic teachings into practice, while at the same time rejecting the notion that the headscarf is a symbol of oppression that haunts women. See Muhammad Ridha Basri, “Kerudung Aisyiyah sebagai Ekspresi Baru Pembebasan Perempuan,” *Media Indonesia*, 28 December 2022, 6.

⁴⁶ “Koedoeng Oetawi Machromah”, *Soeara 'Aisjijah*, No. 4 Tahun 1927, 59-62.

respective communities, provided that their *aurat* is covered.

By publishing an article on the requirement to wear a headscarf, it appears that *Suara 'Aisyiyah* wishes to emphasize that in order to achieve progressivity, women do not have to abandon the value of religion. Islam not only encourages women to move forward, but also protects them from “*segala pekerjaan jang dipandang hina dan meroesak moreel manoesia atau lagi menjakitkan hati perempoean jang dimilikinja*” (any work that is considered as degrading and corrupts on morality or causes pain to a woman’s heart).⁴⁷

The discourse on progressivity led by *Suara 'Aisyiyah* underpinned by a discourse on piety and morality. AR Fachruddin, for example, criticized the women who, in their eagerness to advance and occupy positions equal to those of men, then forgetting their status as women and servants of God. AR Fachruddin refers to this phenomenon as “*kemadjoean jang serba melompat*” (leapfrogging progress) or “*kemadjoean dan kemodernan jang keliwatan*”⁴⁸ (excessive progress and modernity).⁴⁹ For him, the desire to achieve

progressivity must be accompanied by the awareness that women are God's creatures of faith.

Fatmah Monoaria, in “*Fadjar Menjingsih*”, also expresses a similar view. She acknowledges that many women now have greater access to education and the public area compared to previous eras, but these achievements are often imbalanced with moral integrity and strong Islamic values.⁵⁰ Indonesian women need to emulate the spirit of struggle shown by women in various parts of the world to lead their nation toward progressivity. However, we must also recognize that there are differences in culture, traditions, and religious values that underpin the spirit of women in the Western and in Indonesia.⁵¹ We must not allow the progressivity and emancipation of women to be interpreted merely in superficial terms—that is, women imitating men’s dress codes and the freedom for women to mingle without restrictions with the opposite sex.⁵²

Islam does not restrict women’s progressivity, but in fact, it encourages women to appear publicly and join the struggle to

⁴⁷ “Dapatkah Islam Mendjoendjoeng Derajat Kaoem Poetri?”, *Soeara 'Aisjijah*, No. 12, December 1932, 313.

⁴⁸ “Perempoean Berboedi, Perempoean Salih”, *Soeara 'Aisjijah*, No. 7-9 July-September 1939, 446.

⁴⁹ “Perempoean Berboedi, Perempoean Salih”, *Soeara 'Aisjijah*, No. 7-9 July-September 1939, 447.

⁵⁰ “Fadjar Menjingsing”, *Soeara 'Aisjijah*, No. 10 Oktober Tahun 1939, 500-502.

⁵¹ “Perbandingan Pendidikan Perempoean-perempoean Barat dan Kewadjiban Poeteri Indonesia”, *Soeara 'Aisjijah*, No. 12, December 1939, 620-621.

⁵² “Kebangoenan Poteri Timoer”, *Soeara 'Aisjijah*, No. 3, March 1940, 155-156.

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defend and fight for their rights that have been taken away. Nevertheless, St. Z. Badroni stated,

*Ketahoeilah olehmoe! Bahwa pada masa jang achir-achir ini, telah banjaklah kaoem kita, poetri-poetri Indonesia jang terperosok dalam djoerang ketaklidan (memboeta-toeli) dan kefanatiekkan jang ta' terhingga. Sehingga mereka terlepas dari toentoenan agama Islam jang soetji dan maha tinggi ini. Bahkan mereka berani poela menentang, mentjatji maki, mentjela dan memandang rendah terhadap peratoeran-peratoeran Islam.*⁵³

(Be it known to you! That in recent times, many among our people—the daughters of Indonesia—have fallen into the abyss of blind imitation (taqlid) and boundless fanaticism. Consequently, they have drifted away from the guidance of Islam, a religion that is pure and most sublime. They have even dared to oppose, revile, criticize, and look down upon Islamic ordinances)

As AR Fachruddin's statement, *Suara 'Aisyiyah* sought to remind its readers that progressivity should be achieved without abandoning Islamic values, so that it would not result in “*kemadjoean jang serba melompat*” (leapfrogging progress). The editorial board of *Suara 'Aisyiyah* has also published a special article on the status and standing of women in Islam. “*Kita kaoem Moeslimat memintak dan beroesaha meninggikan deradajat kaoem iboe setjara Islam, walau didalam beberapa hal tidak bersamaan dengan laki-laki*” (We, as

Muslim women, demand and strive to elevate the status of women to be accordance with Islam, even though in some aspects it is not equal to the men).”⁵⁴ In recent academic discourse, this distinction has been referred to as biological classification (sex) and cultural construct (gender). Biologically, *Suara 'Aisyiyah* places men and women in different classifications, but in terms of gender, both have an equal obligation to seek knowledge and perform righteous deeds.

B. Category II: Advancing Equal Access to Education and Righteous Deed

Fathimah-Latif from Pasar Gedang, Padang, at the beginning of her essay said, “*Ingatlah wahai bangsakoe perempoean!*” (Remember, O women of my nation!), “*Selama kita dalam kedjahilan dan kelalaian tidaklah akan sempoerna kemadjoean jang telah ditjita-tjitakan itoe*”⁵⁵ (As long as we remain in ignorance and negligence, the progress we have long envisioned will never be fully realized). Ignorance and negligence are two key words in Fathimah-Latif's “*Seroean*”. She observed that the root cause of the ignorance and negligence experienced by many Indonesian women is that they have not yet gained access to a good

⁵³ “Oh... Poetrikoe!”, *Soeara 'Aisjijah*, No. 4, April 1940, 217.

⁵⁴ The following editorial note appears below St. Arifah article entitled “Kedoedoekan Kaoem Iboe”, *Soeara 'Aisjijah*, No. 7, July 1940, 413.

⁵⁵ “Seroean”, *Soeara 'Aisjijah*, No. 12, December 1932, 309.

education. In addition to the fact that educational opportunities have not yet been widely made available, another reason why there are still so few educated women is that the number of female teachers remains low. Educational settings, both formal and informal, are generally dominated by men.⁵⁶ These conditions have hindered the emergence of female scholars and intellectuals. Given this situation, women's efforts to pursue knowledge by establishing schools, training centers, places of worship, and newspapers are of great significance to the endeavor to raise the level of women's education.

Just as men do, women have the same right to pursue knowledge; it is through knowledge that women can realize their aspirations for progressivity. Without knowledge, they would not even be able to have lofty aspirations. They view the darkness, ignorance, backwardness, humiliation, and misery experienced by the Indonesian people—especially women—as God's will, that must be accepted with patience.⁵⁷ Education can also save a person from the hardships of navigating

life during the colonial era according to Mej. Rahma from the *'Aisjijah Tanjung Balai Group*, *Ilmoe pengetahoean; ta' dapat ditjeraikan dari rangkaian hati oemmat (poeteri) jang insjaf, malahan mendjadi tjita-tjita jang tinggi, beloem ada sedjarah doenia memberi boekti bahwa tertjapai kemoeliam satoe-satoe bangsa dan negeri dengan tidak berpedoman kepada 'ilmoe pengetahoean.*⁵⁸

(Knowledge cannot be separated from the hearts of an enlightened generation of women; rather, it has become a noble dream. The history of the world has not yet provided evidence of any nation or country achieving greatness without being guided by knowledge.)

Within the organization, the awareness of the importance of knowledge and education as tools for achieving 'Aisyiyah's grand visions deeply ingrained.⁵⁹ This encouragement to pursue knowledge is directed not only for the adult women but also for the children. According to *Suara 'Aisyiyah*, the encouragement is expressed through the inclusion of "*Taman Nasjiah*," a magazine that is specifically published for children. The purpose of this magazine is to provide a space for children to broaden their knowledge

⁵⁶ "Pemandangan Singkat di Celebes Oetara", *Soeara 'Aisjijah*, No. 12, December 1932, 328-331.

⁵⁷ "O, Nasib Bangsakoe", *Soeara 'Aisjijah*, No. 1, January 1939, 25.

⁵⁸ "Islam terhadap Pengetahoean", *Soeara 'Aisjijah*, No. 2, February 1939, 75.

⁵⁹ This awareness did not come about by itself. As the women's wing of the Muhammadiyah organization, 'Aisyiyah has inherited ideas born from the minds of the

organization's leaders, including the reformist ideas of Kiai Ahmad Dahlan. Like its parent organization, 'Aisyiyah views education as a vital tool for elevating the status and advancing the lives of the Muslim community and the Indonesian people. For more, read Muhammad Fuad, "Islam, Modernity and Muhammadiyah's Educational Programme," *Inter-Asia Cultural Studies* 5, no. 3 (December 2004); Mutiah Amini, "Aisyiyah and The Problem of Women's Social Movement in Indonesia: A Historical Perspective," *Journal of Aisyiyah Studies* 1, no. 1 (June 30, 2021).

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horizons and to express themselves.⁶⁰ In addition to publishing a magazine specifically for children, 'Aisyiyah is also working to establish a library dedicated to women. At the 28th public congress of *Moehammadijah* in Medan, Siti Dauchlah, as the Vice Chair of 'Aisyiyah, presented several intellectual initiatives that 'Aisyiyah has undertaken. In an effort to eradicate illiteracy, for example, 'Aisyiyah provides free educational services to neglected children. Siti Dauchlah is convinced that if these poor and neglected children are given a proper education, they will one day become a generation with sound minds and sharp intellects.⁶¹

For 'Aisyiyah, the drive to seek knowledge is not to stand alone but must be accompanied by righteous deeds. Establishing schools, libraries, and publishing magazines are some of the ways 'Aisyiyah institutionalizes righteous deeds. As more women become educated, their awareness of the need to realize their potential in the public area—and their opportunities to join men in the struggle for progressivity—also continue to expand. Although each women's movement has its own

distinct character, it cannot be denied the awareness that women have the same rights as men to pursue knowledge and perform righteous deeds is spreading like mushrooms in the rainy season, "*terserak tersiar sehingga memenoehi segala pelosok pendjoeroenja tanah air kita Indonesia jang loeas ini*" (scatter far and wide, fill every corner of our vast homeland, Indonesia).⁶² There are at least three indicators of this progressivity framework: the flourishing of women's associations and movements, the publication of women's newspapers, and the increasing number of office occupations held by women.⁶³ According to *Suara 'Aisyiyah*, these three indicators of progress were indeed the focus of women's struggles during the pre-independence era. However, as Siti Ruhaini Dzuhayatin found, in the context of that time, the ideal image of a woman or wife was that of someone who was well-informed and skilled in household matters.⁶⁴ Therefore, it is not surprising that *Suara 'Aisyiyah* regarded both household and community affairs as the targets for the efforts.

⁶⁰ "Tjerita Apa Dongeng?", *Soeara 'Aisjijah*, No. 5 Mei Tahun 1939, 6-7.

⁶¹ "Pemandangan 'Aisjijah Tahoen 1938/1939", *Soeara 'Aisjijah*, No. 7-9 July-September 1939, 348.

⁶² "Kaoem Moeslimaat disamping Poeteri Indonesia: Satoe Toedjoean Lain Asasnja", *Soeara 'Aisjijah*, No. 11 November 1941, 585.

⁶³ "Setelah Saja Dewasa (Kenangan Seorang Poeteri)", *Soeara 'Aisjijah*, No. 1, January 1940, 36-37.

⁶⁴ This ideal image emerged because indigenous women at that time looked up to Dutch women as role models. For more, read Siti Ruhaini Dzuhayatin, *Rezim Gender Muhammadiyah: Kontestasi Gender, Identitas, dan Eksistensi* (Yogyakarta: Suka Press, 2015), 121-22.

C. Category III: Positioning the Domestic and the Community Affair as the Arena of Struggle

Under the leadership of Siti ‘Aisyah as Chairwoman of the *Hoofdbestuur Moehammadijah Madjlis ‘Aisijah*, Muhammadiyah secondary schools—both those exclusively for female students (such as *Mu’allimat*, *Za’imat*, etc.) and those for both male and female students (such as Mulo [Indigenous Junior High School], HIK [Hollandsch Inlandsche Kweekschool/teacher training school], AMS [Algemeene Middelbare School/high school], etc.) were encouraged to offer household classes, such as sewing, cooking, and how to be a good wife. This recommendation is also intended for secondary schools not affiliated with Muhammadiyah.⁶⁵ The reasoning behind this recommendation can be found in an article by Muhammadiyah Secretary *Soelit Air*, Mandah ‘Alie, in the same issue. According to him, the quality of family life reflects the quality of community life. Rather than focusing solely on community affairs, Muslims also have to pay attention to the family matters—from the issues related to marriage and marital harmony to the importance of raising children well and with love and compassion.⁶⁶

One example of *Suara ‘Aisyiyah’s* concern for domestic (and community) affairs is reflected in its engagement with a hotly debated topic in national newspapers. On one occasion, the Padang-based newspaper *Persamaan* published a report on the proceedings of the “*Kongres Kaum Adat*” (Indigenous Peoples’ Congress). One of the topics discussed at the congress was the phenomenon of the large number of young widows in Minangkabau and the reluctance of educated young women to marry. According to *Persamaan*, this phenomenon cannot be separated from local customs that prevent men and women from daring or being willing to express their feelings; on the one hand, educated women are reluctant to express their feelings to men, and on the other hand, the men are intimidated about proposing to women. In response to this phenomenon, the newspaper *Tjaja Timoer* stated that this situation must not be allowed to drag deeper. The reason is, if this issue continues to be ignored and does not get attention, it will gradually become a “disease” within Minangkabau society. After including *Tjaja Timoer’s* response, the editorial board of *Suara ‘Aisyiyah* then stated its view that “*segala hal memberatkan, menghalangi, menimboelkan rasa takoet, menjebabkan segan dsb. akan perkawinan itoe, moestilah*

⁶⁵ This recommendation was presented in the Pergerakan-Ke’Aisijahan section, *Soeara ‘Aisijah*, No. 1, January 1939, 47-48.

⁶⁶ “Pedoman Pergaoelan Roemah Tangga”, *Soeara ‘Aisijah*, No. 1, January 1939, 5.

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ditiadakan dan diberantas” (anything that burdens, hinders, instills fear, or causes reluctance, etc., regarding marriage must be eliminated and eradicated).⁶⁷ It was further stated that the call to eliminate and eradicate the factors that burden and hinder marriage does not only concern young widows and older unmarried women, but also unmarried young men and widowers who live alone.⁶⁸

This call to pay attention to domestic and community affairs was reinforced by Siti Dauchlah's remarks. Concluding her remarks at the 28th Moehammadijah (Aisjijah Branch) Open Congress in Medan, she exclaimed:

Wahai kaoem Poetri segenap dan seloeroehnja!
(O daughters of the nation, one and all!)

Bangsamoe, Roemah tanggamoe, Masyarakatmoe, Agamamoe, senantiasa menoenggoe dan merindoekan akan pertolonganmoe, keinsjafanmoe dan pembelaanmoe.

(Your people, your domestic affair, your community, and your religion constantly wait and long for your aid, your enlightenment, and your advocacy.)

Kemadjoean bangsamoe, kesempoernaan roemah tanggamoe, soesoenan masyarakatmoe, gilang gemilangnja Agamamoe, adalah tergantoeng atas ketjakapanmoe sendiri.

(The progress of your nation, the fulfillment of your domestic life, the structure of your society, and the glorious brilliance of your religion altogether depend upon your own capability)

Sebaliknya, bangsamoe akan tetap didalam kemoendoeran, roemah tanggamoe akan djoega tetap morat-marit tidak teratoer soesoenan masyarakatmoe akan tidak berarti, kemadjoean dan kesoetjian Agamamoe akan terpendam dan tertotoep, manakala kaoem Poeteri tidak insjaf, kaoem Poeteri tinggal bodoh, passief, pemalas dan tidak soeka kepada gerak jang menoedjoe kemadjoean ini.

(Conversely, your nation will remain in the back, your domestic affair will continue to be disorganized, the structure of your society will be meaningless, and the progress and purity of your religion will be buried and obscured, so long as women remain unawakened, ignorant, passive, indolent, and averse to this movement toward progress.)

Maka dari itoe, ikoetilah akan pimpinan Toehan, kedjarlah kemadjoean, penoehilah koewadjiban, toentoetlah pengetahoean dengan besarkanlah kemaoean dan keberanian kesoetjian oentoek menoedjoe kepada arah perbaikan.

(Therefore, follow the guidance of God, pursue progressivity, fulfill your duties, and seek knowledge with a great will, pure courage, and a dedication toward the reform.)

Maka 'Aisjijah itoe poela salah satoe pergerakan Poeteri jang akan menoedjoe kepada kesemoeanja itoe, moedah-moedahan semoea 'amal dan langkah 'Aisjijah itoe senantiasa diridlai oleh Toehan dan mendapat kemadjoean jang di-inginkan. Moedah-moedahan.⁶⁹

(Indeed, 'Aisyiyah is a women's movement striving toward all of these ideals; may the deeds and steps of 'Aisyiyah forever receive the blessing and pleasure of God, and attain the progress it desires. May it be so)

⁶⁷ "Djanda Moeda-Perawan Toea", *Soeara 'Aisjijah*, No. 6, June 1939, 323-324.

⁶⁸ In other issues, *Suara 'Aisyiyah* has also covered this topic, which often leads to debate and controversy.

⁶⁹ "Pemandangan 'Aisjijah Tahoen 1938/1939", *Soeara 'Aisjijah*, No. 7-9 July-September 1939, 381-382.

When it comes to social matters, Islam has never restricted women's liberation of action. Just like men, women also have obligations toward their communities. They are the pillars of society and not the less-rational human compared to men.⁷⁰ Therefore, St. Arifah emphasized that women should not be confined only to work in the kitchen, nor should they be known only for their ability to dress up or simply for raising children. She went on to say that laziness prevents women from getting involved in social and political spheres. Women must be willing to improve themselves so that they have the skills and capacity to play a role in the public area. "*Kita memekik kepada masjarakat, kita bergembor-gembor, berkaok-kaok minta persamaan, namoen harga kita poen masih tetap begini*" (We cry out to the public, we make a big fuss, we shout for equality, but our value remains the same), she exclaimed. In her speech, St. Arifah was not urging women to abandon their domestic responsibilities in order to play an active role in the public area, but rather to make both of these spheres a battlefield for their struggle.⁷¹

The call for women to participate in public affairs is not without any religious foundation. Several verses were cited to

encourage women's active participation in the public sphere include Surah As-Shura [42]:15, Surah An-Nahl [16]:97, Surah At-Tawbah [9]:105, Surah An-Nisa' [4]:124, and so on; as well as quotations from hadiths and the statements of early and later scholars. In addition, *Suara 'Aisyiyah* frequently features news about national and international women's movements—including covering and responding to issues that become the most discussed in other media—with the aim of enlightening readers about the outside world, raising awareness of Indonesia's lag behind compared to other nations, and encouraging them to work harder to advance the lives of women and the Indonesian nation.⁷²

The various arguments and intellectual work carried out by *Suara 'Aisyiyah*, as mentioned above, demonstrate that one of the key indicators behind the progress of women (and the Indonesian nation) is equal access to education, healthcare, employment, politics, and so on. In this regard, *Suara 'Aisyiyah* is actively involved in encouraging women to progress and disseminate the idea of gender equality, in line with Islamic values that put honor to women.

⁷⁰ "Sikap Perempoean dalam Zaman Perdjoengan", *Soeara 'Aisjijah*, June 6, Tahun 1939, 294.

⁷¹ "Kedoedoekan Kaoem Iboe", *Soeara 'Aisjijah*, No. 7, July 1940, 411-412.

⁷² "Perempoean Menghadapi Masjarakat", *Soeara 'Aisjijah*, No. 4 April 1940, 212-213; "Kaoem Iboe dengan Soerat Chabar", *Soeara 'Aisjijah*, No. 12, December 1940, 862-863.

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Conclusion

As the organization's broadcasting media, *Suara 'Aisyiyah* magazine has chronicled Aisyiyah's journey through ages, from the colonial era to the present day. Firstly published in October 1926, *Suara 'Aisyiyah* has had to confront the various challenges plaguing the Indonesian people: poverty, ignorance, and underdevelopment. For women, the burden of these issues is even heavier because they must also contend with traditions and patriarchal religious beliefs that are firmly rooted in society. Embracing the rapidly evolving spirit of the times (*zeitgeist*), *Suara 'Aisyiyah* strives to address and resolve the challenges faced by women by encouraging and empowering them to move forward.

Suara 'Aisyiyah's real efforts involve the fostering of gender equality discourse. This consists of three categories: defining the status and meaning of women's progressiveness; advancing equal access to education and righteous deeds; and emphasizing the important role of women in domestic and community affairs. Through these three developed discourse categories, *Suara 'Aisyiyah* aims to guide 'Aisyiyah members, women, and the Indonesian citizen toward progressivity framework without abandoning the religious and noble values of the Indonesian nation.

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