Raden Syarif Abdullah Assegaff: His Role in the Arab Rebellion in Palembang and His Exile to Minahasa

Roger Allan Christian Kembuan
Universitas Sam Ratulangi, Indonesia, Kampus Unsrat Bahu, Kec. Malalayang, Kota Manado, 95115
E-mail: rogerkembuan@unsrat.ac.id

Ivan Robert Bernadus Kaunang
Universitas Sam Ratulangi, Indonesia, Kampus Unsrat Bahu, Kec. Malalayang, Kota Manado, 95115
E-mail: ivankaunang@unsrat.ac.id

ABSTRACT

The emergence of a small Arab community in the interior of Minahasa during the colonial period began with the arrival of an important figure named Raden Syarif Abdullah Assegaff who was involved in an event known as the Arab Revolt in Palembang in 1881. The purpose of this research is to reveal the role of Raden Syarif Abdullah Assegaff in the 1881 Arab uprising in Palembang and his exile in Tondano, Minahasa. This research uses several data sources from the colonial period, travel reports, and interviews with Arab descendants living in Minahasa. This research uses the critical historical method to conduct phased research and detailed analysis. The results of this study are the role of an Arab descent figure named Raden Syarif Abdullah Assegaff in the Arab uprising in Palembang in 1881 as the leader of the rebellion movement, from the event then he was exiled to Minahasa along with his family by the colonial government and when he was in exile Tondano, became a religious leader for the Jaton community by bringing some changes such as Hadrah; and from the aspect of family relations from marriage in Minahasa gave birth to several figures who were quite important in the propagation of Islam in North Sulawesi.

Keywords: Arab rebellion; exile; Minahasa.
INTRODUCTION

If we visit Tondano in the Kiai Modjo burial complex, there is a section that serves as the burial ground for the Assegaff family and their descendants (Sumampouw, 2018). From a historical perspective, there is likely an important figure named Raden Syarif Abdullah Assegaff who is not well known to the general public. This research will discuss this forgotten historical figure.

Raden Syarif Abdullah Assegaff was an important figure from a prominent family in Palembang. His father, Syarif Umar Assegaff, was also known as an important figure who helped Sultan Mahmud Badarudin II fight the Dutch during the 1824 Menteng War in Palembang (Arbie & Mantau, 2012). Raden Syarif Abdullah Assegaff himself was also involved in that struggle. However, in 1881, Raden Syarif Abdullah Assegaff met a different fate (Sumampouw, 2018). He was exiled by the Dutch through an event known as the Arab Rebellion in Palembang. This was likely because Raden Syarif Abdullah Assegaff was part of the Arab group that rebelled against Dutch colonial policy in Palembang (Purwanti, 2017).

After his exile, Raden Syarif Abdullah Assegaff went to Tondano, Minahasa and died there. His grave can still be found in Tondano today (Hutagalung, 2015). Although he may not be well known by many, the role and sacrifices made by Raden Syarif Abdullah Assegaff and his family in the struggle against the Dutch in Palembang cannot be downplayed (Karundeng et al., 2023). His family played an important role in helping Sultan Mahmud Badaruddin II during the 1824 Menteng War, becoming an integral part of the history of the Palembang Sultanate. His very important role in the 1881 Arab rebellion in Palembang also should not be forgotten (Arbie & Mantau, 2012).

This research will discuss this Arab descendant whose grave lies in Tondano, Minahasa. There are many aspects that have not been examined regarding this figure in the context of his family's relationship with the Palembang Sultanate, their role in politics and governance of the sultanate in the early 19th century, the exile of his parents in Ternate, his return to Palembang and subsequent role as a key figure in the “Arab Rebellion” event in Palembang in 1881 which led to his own exile to Minahasa with his family. There are still many things that have not been discussed about this figure’s influence on the Muslim exile community in Tondano known as the Jaton people.

The research questions in this article are: what was the role of Raden Syarif Abdullah Assegaff in the Arab Rebellion of 1881 in Palembang? and what was Raden Syarif Abdullah Assegaff's influence during his exile by the colonial government in Tondano? The purpose of this research is to explain the role of the figure named Raden Syarif Abdullah Assegaff in the Arab Rebellion of 1881 in Palembang and his exile in Minahasa. The expected result is that the research will be able to contribute to history in the form of a scholarly article explaining the role of this 19th century Arab descendant named Raden Syarif Abdullah Assegaff,
whose grave and descendants are in Tondano, Minahasa, as well as his role and influence in spreading Islam in Minahasa.

METHODS

This research will use the methods and techniques of historical research. This method essentially classifies study activities into four stages of research activity that have specific historical dimensions (Creswell, 2014).

Heuristics, which are activities aimed at gathering traces of history. The intended traces consist of selected assemblies of information and data obtained verbally (interview research), in writing or literature (library research), and objects or field observations (field research). In this study, documents and colonial archives were used discussing reports on the “Arab Rebellion” event in Palembang in 1881, namely mail report 7980/1881, N.A, mr 720/81. Geheim verbaal 22 November 1881 K1 collection of the Algemeen Rijksarchief, followed by reports in the Kolonial Verslag, 1882, 1883. Then Governor-General of the Dutch East Indies Frederiks’ Decrees No. 19 and 45, dated October 31, 1881 were referred to. The author refers to copies of the decrees kept by the Assegaff family as well as an archive in the form of copies of the names of twenty-three exiled Palembang princes in 1881. Next are documents from the ANRI, namely the 1837 Political Report (Sumampouw, 2018).

Criticism/Analysis, which is a critical step as a way for historians to work, which through their criticism and analysis will be able to sort selected data to determine which facts are factual, or at least close to facts; placing facts as primary benchmarks, while other supporting data is placed as secondary or tertiary sources. The criticism/analysis step will always be carried out before carrying out the interpretation stage (Phillipov, 2012).

Interpretation, which is essentially an activity that focuses on connecting facts or a number of historical facts in order to obtain a complete picture of the sequence of events or momentum that occurred in the past. Meanwhile, information and data whose truth is doubted will be placed as material to assist the interpretation process. In addition to being able to provide reconstruction, this interpretation stage is also expected to have a relatively ability to see developments based on trend analysis. The level of criticality at this stage is emphasized on avoiding subjective ways of thinking, but instead emphasizes objective thinking and interpretation - without being intervened either from the outside (external) or from the inside (internal).

Historiography. This stage is none other than the writing activity in the form of delivering a synthesis in the form of a story. Historiography, which means presentation, is the end result of a series of historical research activities, which in this case is a critical historical work concerning the formation of the Muslim
community in the Minahasa Highlands originating from Arab descendants, namely the Assegaff family.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Raden Syarif Abdullah bin Umar Assegaff

The presence of Arabs in the Minahasa highlands, especially in Kampung Jawa Tondano, is inseparable from the role of a man named Raden Syarif Abdullah bin Umar Assegaff who arrived in Tondano in 1881 from Palembang. He was exiled to Tondano for resisting the Dutch in Palembang. His father, Syarief Umar bin Muhammad Assegaff, married Raden Ayu Azima, daughter of Sultan Mahmud Badaruddin II (Karundeng et al., 2023). From this marriage they had a son named Syarif Abdullah Assegaff. Because he opposed the Dutch in the Palembang War (also called the Menteng War) which ended in defeat, on July 6, 1821 Sultan Mahmud Badaruddin II along with Syarif Umar Assegaff and his family were exiled by the Dutch colonial government to Batavia. After spending 9 months in Batavia, they were then exiled to the eastern part of the Dutch East Indies in March 1822, namely in Ternate. During his exile in Ternate, Syarif Umar, his father, then became a religious teacher for the small community in a special location west of the city of Ternate called the Palembang village. The figure named Abdullah bin Umar Assegaff was then born here around the 1830s (Sumampouw, 2018).

After Sultan Mahmud Badarudin II died in exile in 1852, his exiled family then appealed to the Resident of Ternate to be allowed to return to Palembang. Initially this request was rejected, but they were allowed to leave Ternate and then settled in Banyuwangi. Eleven years later, in 1863, they were permitted to return to Palembang again (Purwanti, 2017). The returning royal family then tried to regain all their possessions such as houses, land and jewelry that they had left behind when they were sent into exile. However, this request did not receive a good response from their relatives who remained in Palembang during the 1821 exile. This caused conflict among the former royal family to heat up. In addition, the family of Sultan Mahmud Badaruddin II (his wife and children and grandchildren) who returned from Banyuwangi only received an allowance from the Dutch government as a consequence of their exile, so the royal family became poor and no longer had authority among their followers in Palembang.

Because of this, his family then sent Syarif Abdullah bin Umar Assegaff to Hadramaut (Yemen) to study religion. His education in the Middle East ended with paramilitary training in the Ottoman Turkish army. Upon his return to Mecca, he then settled in Singapore and pioneered a business there. He married one of the descendants of the Alawiyin from Malacca (Syukri, 2016). When the economic situation was unfavorable, he returned to Palembang and then on the initiative of his mother Raden Ayu Azima he then took over the leadership of the noble faction. To clarify his ties to the Palembang royal family, on the advice of his ambitious mother, he used the title Raden. As a Sayyid, the use of this double title caused him to be disliked among other nobles who were unwilling to recognize him as Raden.
Reports on this matter are contained in Resident of Palembang Leging Tobias’ letter dated August 20, 1881 (mr 7980/1881: 2. ARA).

**Role in the 1881 Arab Rebellion in Palembang**

In 1824, there was the event of the banishment of the Palembang Sultan Mahmud Badaruddin II which was followed by the abolition of the Palembang Sultanate, making it a Residency area. The political and cultural implications of this event were felt profoundly by the Priyayi class, the group most affected. The palace was turned into a fortress, and villages were built around the palace for the Palembang aristocracy. Privileges remained in place until 1823, when they were replaced by a pension and compensation system.

When Sultan Mahmud Baduruddin died in 1852, his family’s request from Ternate to return to Palembang was rejected, and some of them settled in Banyuwangi before being allowed to return in 1863. In Palembang tensions began to emerge between the Priyayi families of Sultan Mahmud Badaruddin II and the families who remained in Palembang. This started when their other families who stayed in Palembang during the 1824 exile did not welcome them warmly upon their return. There were family issues when they were sent into exile in Ternate they entrusted valuable possessions and family land to their relatives. While in exile they tried to get them back but failed. Tensions arose between factions within the Priyayi families of Sultan Mahmud Badaruddin II and other families in Palembang.

The situation heated up further in the late 1870s. Many Priyayi lost their wealth and lived on small allowances from the colonial government. In 1880, their privileges were abolished, followed by the decision to include Priyayi on the Tax Register. This policy was seen as an insult to their social standing; in previous times, Priyayi and Arab communities in Palembang, on the other hand, enjoyed privileges in trade and religion (Azis et al., 2022).

The climax of these tensions occurred in 1881, giving birth to the Palembang Arab Rebellion event. In reconstructing this event, colonial sources such as Resident Laging Tobias’ Report and the Colonial Report were used. However, these documents are subjective with descriptions supporting the actions and policies of colonial officials and tend to vilify the image of the suspects involved in the incident. Therefore, an interpretation is needed that does not only look at what is stated in the report, but also explores the implied meaning in the text (Karundeng et al., 2023).

The involvement of Raden Syarif Abdullah Assegaff in the August 1881 Arab rebellion incident in Palembang began with a series of related events, especially the tense political atmosphere that occurred when two sheikhs from Mecca arrived in Palembang at the beginning of 1881. The first was a Turk who claimed to be named Abdul Malik alias Mustafa from Mecca. This brief visit was followed by someone named Abdul Wahid who claimed to have served in the Ottoman army with various military decorations for his services in the 1878-1879
Russo-Turkish war. When France occupied Turkey in 1881, these two men fled there to Singapore and then to Palembang.

The visit of these two sheikhs was related to Turkish Sultan Abdulhamid II's efforts to strengthen his status as caliph of all Muslims since 1864. This caliphate was propagated with full awareness as a tool to unite all Muslims against advancing Western imperialism. To spread this idea throughout the Islamic world, Sultan Abdul Hamid II sought ties with Sufi networks in Southeast Asia (Karundeng et al., 2023).

The propaganda of the Turkish Sultan received a great response from the descendants of the Palembang Sultan who took advantage of connections with the Ottoman Turkish kingdom to improve their fading prominent position. Raden Syarif Abdullah Assegaff got to know these two Turkish sheikhs through Sayyid Juned Aljuneid in Singapore, who served unofficially as the Turkish Sultan's consul in Palembang. This relationship became close when Aljuneid married Abdullah Assegaff's sister, making him an intermediary for the Turkish Sultan in Palembang.

Raden Syarif Abdullah Assegaff and the two Turkish sheikhs began secretly mobilizing the descendants of Sultan Mahmud Badaruddin II. Meetings were held outside the city in Talang Semut to prepare for a rebellion during the fasting month of 1881. However, these meetings could not be concealed from other nobles outside the grandsons of Sultan Mahmud Badaruddin II. Internal rivalry among the nobility caused this plan to be uncovered, so the personal enemies of Raden Syarif Abdullah Assegaff seized this opportunity (Triyuly, 2013). In June, a prosecutor reported that he received information from a nobleman named Ali who said that there was a secret meeting outside the city with the aim of planning an attack to seize the Dutch fort which would take place during the fasting month. This information was reinforced by the departure of the two Turkish sheikhs to Lahat and Singapore in May and their plan to return during the fasting month (Colonial Report, 1882).

Palembang Resident Leging Tobias interpreted these two trips as an effort to seek assistance domestically and abroad. In Lahat people could get highlanders to rebel while Singapore was the ideal place to make contact with Sultan Taha in the Jambi Kingdom and buy weapons to support the rebellion effort. This news frightened the colonial government in Palembang, especially Resident Palembang Laging Tobias. The Resident then asked Batavia for help in bringing in the Borneo warship to reassure the European residents in Palembang. Direct action to make massive arrests of all suspects was very risky, because their number was quite large. In Palembang there were 400 registered male nobles living near the palace, in Kampung 27 and 28 Ilir. Given the new tax policy and the abolition of living allowances, home arrests would be risky (Arafat, 2019).

To avoid armed confrontation, another plan was devised. The Resident wanted them to be lured out of their village and come into the fortress. To facilitate this plan, Resident ordered his clerk Raden Bakhtiar to summon the nobles to come
to the country court to eliminate misunderstandings by swearing that the rebellion plan was not true.

The next day Raden Bahtiar as promised came to report to the resident that all the nobles had gathered. But he found that Resident Tobias was in his chair suffering from illness. Pretending, the Resident told how he had fallen ill the night before and his head was wrapped in cloth and as proof on the small table next to him lay several bottles of medicine. So, the meeting could not take place.

When Raden Bahtiar was about to leave, the Resident had an idea and invited the nobles to his house. With a calm heart, Raden Bahtiar left to summon the others (Woodward, 2004). As soon as the envoy left, the Resident changed clothes and joined the military commander to await the nobles who would pass through the fortress on the way to the Resident's house. At the entrance to the fortress, an armed unit was stationed, while the rest of the troops hid behind the fortress walls. When the group of nobles led by Raden Syarif Abdullah Assegaff approached the fortress towards the Resident's house, the way back was closed to them. The first order to surrender was ignored. Later when Resident Tobias appeared armed with a pistol, the chaos caused by this action was so great that the nobles were then arrested (Colonial Report, 1883).

The 1881 Arab Rebellion was a turning point in the image of the nobility and Arabs in the eyes of the colonial government. Prior to that incident they were not considered a threat, but after 1881 Palembang was seen as a den of crime where there were "fanatical hajj" and Arabs (Subchi, 2020). The arrest of Raden Syarif Abdullah Assegaff, Musthafa and Abdul Wahid was seen as proof of Arab involvement in Pan-Islamic propaganda. The government in Batavia interpreted that "the existence of an Arab leadership plot in Palembang" would endanger tranquility and order (Colonial Report 1882).

The 1881 Arab Rebellion in Palembang had two determining factors, including class conflict and disappointment with the Dutch colonial government. Class conflict occurred because the Dutch colonial government implemented policies that increasingly limited the rights and privileges of the Arab nobility. This caused many Arab nobles to lose their wealth and have to live on small allowances from the colonial government. Disappointment with the Dutch colonial government occurred because the Dutch colonial government had violated its promises to the Arab nobility. The colonial government began to curtail the privileges of the Arab nobility and implemented policies that harmed them.

Exile in Tondano

Raden Syarief Abdullah Assegaff was exiled to Tondano, Minahasa based on Dutch East Indies Governor General Frederiks' Decree No. 19 and 45, dated October 31, 1881. Copies of the decree kept by the Assegaff family and an archive containing copies of the names of twenty-three exiled Palembang princes in 1881 were used. It is stated there that before going to Manado he was said to have been
detained in the Batavia prison then Makassar and then sent to Manado. Raden Syarif Abdullah Assegaff arrived in Tondano at the end of 1881 along with his wife and children, also joining was his sister Syarifah Aisyah and a follower named Abdullah Said.

What is interesting about Assegaff is that he had a European (Dutch) wife named Nelly Meijer, who according to his descendants was the widow of Prince Tjokrodiningrat. Prince Tjokrodiningrat was the son of Sultan Palembang Mahmud Badaruddin II, younger brother of the last Sultan of Palembang, Sultan Najamuddin III. Tjokjodiningrat was exiled to Banda (Maluku); then moved to Manado, precisely in Airmadidi where he died in 1844 (Triyuly, 2013).

Nelly Meijer had a son from her marriage to Tjokrodiningrat named Raden Nguren. After her first husband died, Nelly Meijer then married Raden Syarief Abdullah Assegaff (her late husband’s nephew). Nelly Meijer changed her name when she converted to Islam to Salma Meijer, her descendants who now live in Tondano call her “Nene Blanda” (Dutch grandmother) (Woodward, 2004). It is not known when and where the marriage took place, most likely when they were still in Palembang. From this marriage Assegaff had four children including one of his most well-known children among the residents of Kampung Islam and Kampung Arab in Manado named Raden Syarif Sayid Muhammad bin Abdullah Assegaff.

Raden Syarif Abdullah Assegaff was one of the most respected figures by the people of Kampung Jawa Tondano in his time, so the people there called him “Mina Tuang” which means "The Master who is exemplary" or "The Master who becomes a role model for the community". Upon arrival in Tondano, Assegaff married again with Rolia Suratinoyo. Rolia was the granddaughter of Suratinoyo, a follower of Kiai Mojo (Babcock, 1981; Peeters, 1997).

There is an interesting description when an English naturalist named Sydney Hickson visited the Minahasa highlands in November 1885. On his journey into the Minahasan interior, he was escorted by an Arab named Omar or Umar (There are two possibilities, that the Omar/Umar referred to is either Assegaff/Mina Tuang or his fifth son named Syarif Umar Assegaff) (Azis, 2020). According to the author, the likelihood is Mina Tuang because in that meeting, Hickson (1889) referred to him as an Arab who had connections with Chinese traders in Manado, and was friends with Mr. Rijksroeff who lived in Langoan and had close relationships with other Europeans in Manado. The tour of Minahasa made by the two that was described by Hickson stated that a lot of the descriptions he made were based on information from Omar, for example when on their way home they met a crowd of people in Kakas who were gathered for a mapalus ceremony, through Omar’s information Hickson was then able to explain the procession in detail. Therefore it can be said that the Arab had knowledge about the population and territory in the Minahasa highlands.

As mentioned earlier, Assegaff married a Dutch woman named Nelly Meijer who bore him four children. His second child named Raden Syarif moved to
Manado and was a very respected figure in Kampung Islam and Kampung Arab in the 1900s. His third child named Machmud had a son named Fadlun who married Taha Albar, son of Hassan Albar whose grave is in the Mina Tuang burial complex. One of Hassan Albar's children named Umar Albar moved to Penang, Malaysia and settled there. (For information on the extended family tree of the Assegaff in Tondano, see appendix)

In addition to Hassan Albar, looking at the Assegaff family tree and a tombstone in the Assegaff family burial complex, there were siblings named Sayid Alwi bin Salim Al-Djufrie and Sayid Syech bin Salim Al-Djufrie. The two were brothers of Idrus bin Salim Al-Djufrie, founder of the Al-Khairaat Islamic School in Palu, Central Sulawesi. Known as a great scholar in the Islamization of the Kaili tribe in Central Sulawesi in the early 20th century. Sayid Alwi married the sixth child of Mina Tuang, Syarifah Alwiyah.

The respect for Assegaff and his family in Kampung Jawa Tondano in the past was very high, seen primarily in his burial complex located on a hill opposite the burial complex of Kiai Mojo and his followers (Sumampouw, 2018). An important influence from Abdullah Assegaff’s arrival in Tondano was that he was the figure who introduced Malay Praises (Hadrah and Rodatan) which are still preserved as a culture in Kampung Jawa Tondano to this day. This activity is carried out during the Mawlid of the Prophet Muhammad PBUH at the Mosque in Kampung Jawa Tondano called Meludan Tuang. Assegaff also introduced the Samrak Dance or Danadana for the people of Kampung Jawa Tondano. The role of Abdullah Assegaff in the religious and ethical aspects of his arrival in Tondano in local oral stories is said to be that he became a Quran recitation teacher in Kampung Jawa Tondano and as a religious reformer. Assegaff’s arrival in Tondano brought a different color by introducing several Sumatran Malay elements to the originally very Javanese culture of the village founders who came from Javanese exile figures.

CONCLUSION

Based on the research on the role of Raden Syarif Abdullah Assegaff in the 1881 Arab rebellion in Palembang and the impact of his exile in Tondano, it can be concluded that this figure played a key role in the political and social dynamics of that period. The Arab Rebellion in Palembang was not only a local phenomenon, but was also closely related to the historical, social and political factors that influenced the region. Raden Syarif Abdullah Assegaff’s role in the Arab Rebellion in Palembang demonstrates the complexity and significance of a local leader in driving historical events. An analysis of the factors that drove his involvement reveals that political, economic and social motivations played an important role in triggering his participation in the rebellion. Thus, further understanding of the internal dynamics of the Arab Rebellion can be obtained through a deeper understanding of individuals like Raden Syarif Abdullah Assegaff.

The exile of Raden Syarif Abdullah Assegaff by the colonial government in Tondano also had a significant impact. Although exiled, his influence on local
society and politics could still be felt. Identifying community reactions and responses to his presence highlights how a historical figure can influence social and political dynamics in a place of exile. Further research can be done to explore Raden Syarif Abdullah Assegaff’s contribution to shaping local and national historical narratives, as well as delving deeper into the social, economic and political factors that drove his participation in the Arab Rebellion.

The exile of Raden Syarif Abdullah Assegaff in Tondano can provide deeper insights into the interaction between historical figures and local communities during their exile. This can help improve understanding of the dynamics of the relationship between the colonial government and exiled local figures.

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