

Framing of Humanitarian Mission of Zending and Freemasonry in Sumatra in *De Sumatra Post* and *Het Nieuwsblad voor Sumatra* (1940-1949)

Rianti Manullang^{1,*} Christina T. Suprihatin²

^{1,2}Literature Department, Faculty of Humanities, Universitas Indonesia

*Corresponding author. Email: riantimanullang@ui.ac.id

ABSTRACT

The Dutch colonial rulers assigned the Missionary (*zending/missie*) in Sumatra to spread religious belief and accomplish civilization missions. The financial support for the Missionary quest in the Karo and Batak from a tobacco company in North Sumatra, Deli Maatschappij, emphasizes the concept of 'two pioneers of civilization', namely trade and Christianity. On the other hand, another mission striving for humanism in colonial Dutch East Indies, i.e., Freemasonry. Stevens found that colonial Freemasonry as a humanitarian movement had to stand against Missionary for centuries. What has been achieved by Freemasonry in the fields of education and emancipation is often impressive despite all the opposition from the colonial rulers. This article investigates how Missionary and Freemasonry's works were framed in the Dutch newspaper *De Sumatra Post* and *Het Nieuwsblad voor Sumatra* in 1940-1949. In taking its focus on the operation of specific news frames, this article identifies a range of factors that shaped the initial terms of the subsequent mission from two Dutch newspapers during this period. The analysis suggests that both Missionary and Freemasonry in colonial Sumatra portray the colonial discourse and ideological contestation.

Keywords: Framing, Dutch Newspaper, Zending, Vrijmetselarij, Sumatra

1. INTRODUCTION

"A missionary teaching the boys how to eat proper soup" was the headline of Dutch newspaper *Nederlands dagblad* (10th August 1991) that captivated us while we were going through *Delpher*, Dutch-language digitized historical newspapers. It was a 'clickbait' headlines because the article was criticizing the naïve missionary that enforced Western culture to the indigenous people in Uganda. Despite that, the headline clearly reflects the colonial discourse and binary opposition between the Western and the indigenous. The Western ulterior motive of civilizing the indigenous is the center of the problem that we would like to scrutinize, especially in the Dutch case towards the indigenous people in Sumatra in the colonial period. In the Dutch travel writing, the indigenous people in Sumatra, i.e., the Bataks, were represented as a cannibal. That image also mediates in Dutch literature. Ida Pfeiffer [1] wrote her adventure with "the Bataks in Sumatra, the people that so little known by Europeans". Justus van Maurik [2] wrote about the Bataks, in his word, "the emeritus man-eaters", "the uncivilized". Couperus [3] also wrote about the Bataks that they were cannibals and were very hostile to the European element. There are similar patterns in these travel stories, namely that the Bataks, the indigenous were represented negatively. Colonial travel writing is an important tool that shows how the people or the landscape of the colony are represented in literature [4].

They generate meanings and think in binary oppositions or dichotomy (civilized - uncivilized). In this case, the travel writing is a product of how the colonial ruler creates a "domestic subject" of their empire. Much of the work undertaken on the representation of others in travel writing and other texts has analyzed and critiqued the imagined representation produced through structures of Orientalism in the colonial past and present. One of the missionaries in Sumatra, Meint Joustra, also wrote a travel journal on his mission. Upon arrival in Sumatra, Joustra had to report himself to a Dutch-owned tobacco company, Deli Maatschappij [5]. This company financially supported the missionary in Karo-Batak. The European missionary in the Sumatra was seen not only to spread faith but also to conduct civilization that apparently was supported by trading companies. That is in line with David Livingstone, a Western missionary to Africa who saw his work in Africa in the light of the concept of "two pioneers of civilization", i.e., trade and Christianity [6].

The Dutch presence in the former Dutch East Indies was to convey the *zending* (Christian mission) and another influence in cultural aspects. Contrary to Christianity's ideology, some of the Dutch also initiated the Freemasonry's lodges (*vrijmetselarij*) in Semarang, Surabaya, Rembang, Magelang, Salatiga, Batavia, and even in Sumatra [7]. Terminologically, Freemasonry comes from two words, namely 'Free' (*vrij*), which means free-not bound and 'Masonry' (*metselaar*), which

means mason or builder. In terms, Freemasonry is the organization of the Freemasons and their beliefs and practices. Most of the rituals of Freemasonry are based on anecdotes and moral teachings found in the *Old Testament* which are illustrated or symbolized by a set of tools used by masons or builders, namely squares (the square) and the compasses. Nonetheless, Artawijaya agrees with the statement of Garraghan that the Freemasonry is considered as irreligion [8]. Following that, Stevens [7] found that colonial Freemasonry as a humanitarian movement had to stand against Missionary for centuries. What has been achieved by Freemasonry in the fields of education and emancipation is often impressive despite all the opposition from the colonial rulers. Although both have different ideologies, both Freemasons and Missionaries celebrate their jubilee in the Dutch Indies, which appears in two Dutch Newspapers *De Sumatra Post* and *Het Nieuwsblad voor Sumatra*. The news articles are written to highlight their 'humanitarian mission' in Sumatra that led us to analyze these news articles' framing. The research about framing in the news article was usually conducted to examine political issues, but we have found limited research on comparative media framing in the postcolonial perspective.

Bernhart and Wolf [9], in an intermediality study, coined the frame's concept as an exchange of meaning discursively produced in the reception of a literary work or other media. The framing process is abstractions that appear or are formed within the frame or within the frame boundaries or directly in the context of a situation or phenomenon. Newspaper as an ideological state apparatus [10] shapes opinions through employing ideology, which tacitly interpellates individuals in a particular way. The recent research on news framing in the communication study published by Walcott [11] investigates the Guyanese newspaper that represents the contested patrimony on oil discoveries. Framing on Dutch newspaper is also being done by Jawara and Suprihatin [12] that examine the representation of Dutch-Indo rock band the Tielman Brothers. Research on *zending* dan Freemasonry has been done by dr. Th. Stevens [7] from a historical perspective in 1764-1962. Kamphuis [13] also proposes to look at philanthropic initiatives as integral parts of a larger colonial civilizing mission by comparing two Protestant schools for elite indigenous girls in the Dutch East Indies. We have found limited research on comparative media framing in the postcolonial perspective; furthermore, the image of missionary works and freemasonry in the Dutch East Indies media are hardly being compared. This research aims to expose the framing of two contesting ideas of two humanitarian movements in colonial Sumatra. The news articles that we used are narrowed to a certain period, i.e., 1940-1949. This time frame can be considered the time of crisis for the Dutch since there was political unrest in the Netherlands and the colony Dutch East Indies. In 1940-1942 the Netherlands began to be occupied by Germany. In 1942-1945 Japan entered the Dutch East Indies, and the Dutch also experienced a difficult

situation. After the Japanese withdrew, the local people in Dutch East Indies began to release themselves as a Dutch colony, and in 1945 the Dutch East Indies declared their independence as the Indonesian State. The Netherlands, which still had not given up on the Dutch East Indies' independence, recognized Indonesia's independence and handed over the sovereignty in 1949. During 1945-1949 there was a battle that is still a controversial history until the present time. That was really challenging for the Dutch to conduct their 'humanitarian mission' in time of crisis.

2. METHOD

The news article was analyzed using a qualitative methodology. First, fourteen articles were selected from *De Sumatra Post* and *Het Nieuwsblad voor Sumatra* based on the criterion that each article should represent Missionary and Freemasonry's works in Sumatra. The article's title, choice of words, contents and context of the article was analyzed through the idea of frames that label "schemata of interpretation" that allow people to locate, perceive, identify, and label occurrences events.

In taking as its focus the operation of specific news frames, this paper identifies a range of factors that shaped the initial terms of the subsequent mission from two Dutch newspapers. In particular, the choice of words and occurrences emphasized in selected articles was examined in terms of its connection with colonial discourse and ideology contestation. The study hypothesized the media framing of Missionary and Freemasonry as the humanitarian mission that envisions the colony's civilization, especially in Sumatra. Reid [14] describes the dark and creepy image of the island of Sumatra in detail; he even quotes the description from Marco Polo that describes the Batak tribe as a tribe of cannibals who seem to have no mercy on newcomers: "The people who live in the mountains live like stars. I can swear, they eat human flesh and other kinds of meat, whether clean or dirty". Cannibalism in colonial imaginary has been explored by Sewlall [15] through close-reading of Conrad's book "Falk". He is focusing on the fraught relationship between anthropophagy and the discourses surrounding the topic of cannibalism. Apparently, certain stereotypes about Sumatran people have been around for a long time. We don't even know whether the stereotype is true or the spice of sensation that turns the truth. However, right or wrong is not an issue here. What needs to be examined is how it all blends into myths [16] and obscures one's ability to judge more objectively.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1. Jubilee: Gratitude and Solitude

In the two newspapers, out of all our research data, we found two comparable articles, namely those carrying the Jubilee titles of the Missionary and Freemasonry. The first was published on April 18th, 1940, from *De Sumatra*

Post entitled “*Zending viert haar 50-jarig feest: Hoe de arbeid uit het kleine groeide*” (the missionary celebrate 50 years’ mission: how the little labor grew). The word ‘celebrate’ collocates with the ‘growth’ they are referring to. From this specific choice of words, we clearly see how they highlight the mission ‘from nothing to something’, from ‘small to grow’, and it led to the binary oppositions or dichotomy of less civilized or uncivilized versus civilized. While the missionary in Uganda taught the boys to eat proper soup, the missionary successfully succeeded in Sumatra’s civilization mission by exposing Christian believers’ progressive statistics in Sumatra after the mission started.

Furthermore, the first article also emphasizes their gratitude towards God, the Dutch missionary association Nederlands Zendeling Genootschap, and the pioneer of the mission, J.H.Cremer. Despite all the struggles along their way, they could continue their work and accomplish many tasks. One of the struggles they faced is financial. Financial support is also mentioned as the starting point of the mission. As mentioned before, the mission in Sumatra was funded by Deli Maatschappij, a tobacco company. The article stated that the funding was gradually diminishing until it was no longer received. This article was published when there was political unrest in Europe due to the NAZI occupation. It might cause hardship to the Netherlands’ finances since the budget might be prioritized for defense and security affairs. The chosen word ‘crisis’ in the article from De Sumatra Post highlighted the missionary’s struggle to survive.

The hardship and struggle being emphasized in *Nieuwsblad voor Sumatra*’s article, published on October 22nd, 1948, entitled “*De Loge Deli bestaat 60 jaar*” (The lodge Deli exists for 60 years). Freemasonry has to fight against opposition from various parties, from the NAZI era to the Japanese occupation, until it was banned in Indonesia. The article also highlights the core value of Freemasonry as the ‘highest art of living’ and linked in spirit to all Freemason movements throughout the world. The essence of Freemasonry is difficult to describe in a short formula because it does not imply a particular doctrine of the faith or a world view laid down in fixed, dogmatic propositions, but rather is a signpost to a particular attitude to life; in other words, a practice of ‘art of living’. Given its objectives, the idea of Freemasonry is best approached by calling it a humanist organization, whose adherents present themselves through their own practice in the ‘highest art of living’ inwardly, according to the standard of high general ethical principles) to cooperate in “the building of the Temple of Humanity”, on the principle of world peace and brotherhood, without making any distinction between race or faith. The Masonic “Constitution” says: “Freemasonry is the owl’s inner urge born spirit direction which manifests itself in constant pursuit of the development of all those qualities of mind and spirit which can raise humanity to a higher spiritual and moral level. It finds its application in the practice of the highest art of living. The order is based on the versatile and harmonious development of man and

humankind. It assumes as a basis: the high value of the human personality; everyone’s right to independently search for the truth; man’s moral responsibility for his actions; the essential equality of all people; the universal brotherhood of men; everyone’s duty to work diligently for the good of the community” [17].

Like in general, Freemasonry was fiercely and heavily fought by the Nazis, because the humanist philosophy of life was difficult to fit within the framework of the National Socialist doctrine. The Japanese also fought Freemasonry. The Masonic Lodge’s was thoroughly searched, the archive seized, the other belongings are stolen or scattered, while several Dutch and Indonesians were arrested and put in trouble based on of their Freemasonry. Freemasonry was officially banned. Along with the changing socio-political conditions in the world at the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century, the organization of Freemasonry began to create other forms of its original form. Such as the emergence of the Theosophy Movement, Lions Club, and Rotary Club in America, which later spread to Indonesia. The emergence of variants of Freemasonry aims to create a positive image in the general public who began to be suspicious of the Freemasonry organization. The history of Freemasonry in the Dutch East Indies (Indonesia) began with establishing the Freemasonry lodge with Lodge La Choise in Batavia in 1762 [7]. The person who first founded the Freemasonry lodge in Indonesia was a VOC employee named Jacobus Cornelis Matthieu Radermacher. The building used to belong to a Freemasonry organization is now used as the Jakarta National Museum building. In the Dutch East Indies, *Loge* (in Dutch) or *Loji* in Indonesian, which means the meeting house of the Freemasons or Vrijmetselari j (in Dutch), is often referred to as “Satan’s House”.

From the two articles, it is clear that missionaries and freemasonry have the same vision to promote the values of spiritual goodness, and they have to face difficulties in carrying out that mission. Although clearly supported by the Dutch colonial government, the missionary had to face financial difficulties due to the uncertain political situation in the Netherlands. It is inversely proportional to Freemasonry, which does not mention financial difficulties but rather hardly accepted by people because it was assumed to be dangerous. The article exposed their gratitude for the jubilee and their solitude crisis times and had to stand firm when there was no support financially and morally.

3.2. The New World Order versus The Christian’s New Life

The articles in *De Sumatra Post* reflect the notion of ideology contestation between the Freemasonry and Missionary. On November 19th, 1941, it was reported how Freemasonry had expanded its ideology by holding discussion events about the new world order. The concept of the ‘new world order’, often known as the conspiracy

theory, stems from the Latin term *Novus Ordo Seclorum*. The motto of *Novus Ordo Seclorum* means 'New Age Order', which means a new era after the 1776 independence of the United States. This motto appears on the 1-dollar bill with the pyramid symbol, and both are associated with the illuminati. Epperson [18] presumes the world order is being defined by certain power, and it worked against the best interest of the minorities. To this extent, there is a clear line that distinguishes Freemasonry and Missionary, i.e., the fact that the churches were mainly addressed to the Indonesian (the native brown), which emphasizes inequality issues in the colonial era, had driven Freemasonry to take care of the other group of underlying people in the colony, the Indo-Europeans, the people of mixed blood.

The Missionary in the articles of *De Sumatra Post* reiterates their mission in expanding the Church's apostles to other areas in Sumatra. As mentioned before, the focus was to reach as many Indonesian people as they could. On one side, the missionaries do not explicitly mention that the church is open to all people groups. On the other hand, the in-between entity like the Indo-Europeans was being marginalized, and they created their own community without any involvement from the missionary.

3.3. *The Orientalist Social Mission*

As the core value of humanist mission work, the two groups emphasized how their efforts were to develop the community in Deli so that they had the adequate infrastructure for their life. What is interesting about the news about Freemasonry is that they do not intend to publish it. As one of the relatively secret societies, this is considered normal, but it is very contradictory when the news of their jubilee appears in the media and seems to show their history and kaleidoscope of their works over the years. During the sixty years of its existence in Medan, the Lodge Deli, although it is customary not to publicize it, has carried out important social work to benefit the community in many areas. In all kinds of humanitarian and philanthropic institutions around here, Freemasons made a considerable contribution to the constructive work, such as in the promotion, establishment or support of neutral educational bodies, libraries, aid funds for the needy, institutions for neglected youth, the establishment of an Anti-Usury Association, etc.

The Missionary mission (*zending*) in the social sector is also quite commonly reported, one of which is the establishment of hospitals and an emphasis on modernization. Within the discourse of Orientalism [19], Europe constructed a coherent image of the Eastern. However, this image is a construction that is not based on reality but is constructed to demarcate the European identity against the Eastern or the other. The image of the other leads to stereotyping of the Eastern. This is used to emphasize Western superiority and to legitimize domination and intervention. As a result, the dichotomy of Western "we" and Eastern "other" is reflected in the

colonial texts. This strategy is called the "othering strategy"[20]. The process of "othering" is fundamental to colonization. Everything indigenous in the colony is seen as inferior, while the Western ruler is considered superior. Always referring to the superiority of an expanding Europe, colonized peoples are represented as less: less human, less civilized, as a child or wild, wild man, animal, or headless. In this case, they were represented as the one that needs superior Western to develop themselves. These articles about how the Missionary and Freemasonry build a hospital and other infrastructures to develop Sumatra people reflect the colonial vision of bringing civilization and developing economics.

4. CONCLUSION

The analysis suggests that either Missionary (*zending*) or Freemasonry were struggled in times of crisis, but they remain until reaching 50 to 60 years in Sumatra. The distribution of ideology is also conducted by doing activities or expansion to other regions. Both groups also express the social missions in Deli and how they had contributed to building local communities. In the postcolonialism perspective, this work is based on civilization mission, thinking that the indigenous people in Sumatra need superior Western to get involved in making their growth. From the news articles, there was not any explicit confrontation between them, but both seek to do ideological infiltration through social work and other public missions.

This paper contributes to the scholarly discourse about colonial discourse in the text produced by the Dutch colonial government, specifically in the media. The ideological contestation and orientalism analysis conclude that *Zending* and Freemasonry's mission was similar to the civilization mission. Future research can analyze the Indo-Europeans' perspectives, Europeans, and the indigenous people to the Missionary and Freemasonry.

AUTHORS' CONTRIBUTIONS

All authors contributed to the study conception and design. Material preparation, data collection and analysis were performed by Rianti Manullang and Christina T. Suprihatin. The first draft of the manuscript was written by Rianti Manullang and all authors commented on previous versions of the manuscript. All authors read and approved the final manuscript.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I thank Dr. Christina Suprihatin for giving me the chance to collaborate in this research. This work was supported by Universitas Indonesia's Research Grant (Hibah PUTI Prosiding 2020) managed by DRPM UI.

REFERENCES

- [1] Pfeiffer, I. & Hazlitt, W. (1852). *A Lady's Travels Round the World: Travels from Vienna to Brazil, Chili, Otaheite, China, the East Indies, Persia, and Asia Minor*. London: G. Routledge.
- [2] van Maurik, J. (1897). *Indrukken van een Totok, Indische typen en schetsen (Impressions of a Totok, Indian Typing and Sketching)*. Amsterdam.
- [3] Couperus, L. (1924). *Oostwaarts (Eastward)*. Gravenhage.
- [4] Kozok, U. (2010). *Utusan damai di kemelut perang; Peran zending dalam perang Toba (Envoy of peace in the turmoil of war; The role of zending in the Toba war)*. Jakarta: Yayasan Pustaka Obor Indonesia.
- [5] Joustra, M. (1915). *Van Medan naar Padang en terug: [reisindrukken en- ervaringen] (From Medan to Padang and Back: [Travel Impressions and Experiences])*. Leiden: Van Doesburgh.
- [6] Boehmer, E. (2005). *Colonial and postcolonial literature*. Oxford University Press.
- [7] Stevens, Th. (1994). *Vrijmetselarij en samenleving in Nederlands-Indie en Indonesie 1764-1962 (Freemasonry and society in the Dutch East Indies and Indonesia 1764-1962)*. Hilversum: Verloren.
- [8] Artawijaya. (2010). *Gerakan teosofi di Indonesia: menelusuri jejak aliran kebatinan Yahudi sejak zaman Hindia Belanda hingga era reformasi (Theosophy movement in Indonesia: tracing the traces of Jewish mysticism from the Dutch East Indies to the reform era)*. Jakarta: Pustaka Al-Kautsar.
- [9] Bernhart, W., & Wolf, W. (2006). *Framing borders in literature and other media*. Amsterdam: Rodopi.
- [10] Althusser, L. (1971). *Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses*. In *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays*, pp. 127-186. New York: Monthly Review Press.
- [11] Walcott, C. B. (2020). *Contested Patrimony: A Thematic Analysis of Guyana's Newspaper Framing of Oil Discoveries, Journalistic Challenges Navigating the Sector and Stakeholders' Perspectives on Media Representation*. [Unpublished Dissertation]. Georgia State University.
- [12] Jawara, I., & Suprihatin, C. (2019). *Media Framing in Constructing the Identity of The Tielman Brothers*. [Conference presentation abstract]. International University Symposium of Humanities and ARTS 4.0, 23-24 July 2019. <https://inusharts2019.ui.ac.id/program-book/>
- [13] Kamphuis, K. (2018). *Giving for Girls: Reconsidering Colonial Civilizing Missions in the Dutch East Indies through Charitable Girls' Education*. *New Global Studies* 12(2), pp. 217–234. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1515/ngs-2018-0030>.
- [14] Reid, A. & Anggraeni, D. (2010). *Sumatera tempo doeloe: dari Marco Polo sampai Tan Malaka (Sumatra in the past: from Marco Polo to Tan Malaka)*. Depok: Komunitas Bambu.
- [15] Sewllall, H. (2006). *Cannibalism in the colonial imaginary: A reading of Joseph Conrad's "Falk"*. *Journal of Literary Studies*, 22(1-2), pp. 158-174, DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1080/02564710608530395>
- [16] Barthes, R. (1957). "Myth Today", in: *Mythologies*, pp. 106-126.
- [17] van der Veuer, P. W. (1976). *Freemasonry in Indonesia from Radermacher to Soekanto, 1762-1961. Papers in international studies: Southeast Asia series*. Athens: Ohio University Center for International Studies.
- [18] Epperson, A. R. (1990). *The New World Order*. Publius Pr.
- [19] Said, E. (1978). *Introduction*. In *Culture and Imperialism*, pp. iii-xxviii. Knopf.
- [20] Pratt, M. L. (2008). *Imperial eyes, Travel Writing and Transculturation (2nd edition)*. London: Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203932933>