

# BRITISH HISTORIANS' PERCEPTION OF INDONESIAN ISLAMIC HISTORICAL DISCOURSE : Digging Discourses on Colonialism, Capitalism, And Orientalism



Abdurrahman Mas'ud  
Nur Said  
Sus Eko Ernada



PUSTAKA  
RADJA

**BRITISH HISTORIANS' PERCEPTION OF INDONESIAN  
ISLAMIC HISTORICAL DISCOURSE :**

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**Abdurrahman Mas'ud, Nur Said, & Sus Eko Ernada**

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**(Digging The Discourses on Colonialism, Capitalism, And Orientalism)**

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I. Judul II. Penulis

**I.BRITISH HISTORIAN PERCEPTION TOWARDS INDONESIAN ISLAMIC  
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II. Abdurrahman Mas'ud, Nur Said, & Sus Eko Ernada

## FOREWARD

In the name of Allah, the Most Gracious, the Most Merciful, we extend our sincerest gratitude for the divine blessings bestowed upon us, enabling us to undertake this scholarly endeavor. We offer our heartfelt prayers and salutations upon the beloved Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him), whose guidance illuminates our path through the noble teachings of Islam.

This book, "British Historians' Perception of Indonesian Islamic Historical Discourse: Digging Discourses on Colonialism, Capitalism, and Orientalism," emerges not merely as a research report or study but as a profound exploration into the complex dynamics of colonialism, capitalism, and orientalism, particularly within the context of Indonesia, as viewed through the lens of British historians.

The term "colonialism" evokes the establishment of European dominion in distant lands characterized by diverse traditions, languages, and cultures. Often met with resistance from indigenous populations, European powers asserted political control through military conquest and diplomatic maneuvers, laying the foundation for colonial systems across Asia, Africa, South America, Australia, and various island nations, including Micronesia. Central to colonial ideology was the notion of modernization and civilization, with indigenous peoples urged to assimilate culturally while Europeans assumed positions of leadership. This ideology permeated the writings and discourses of scientists, writers, and officials who documented their perceptions and assessments of local communities, shaping historical narratives for generations to come. Indonesia, with its

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enduring history of European incursion, serves as a poignant case study in the complexities of colonial encounters.

The duration of Dutch colonial rule in Indonesia remains a subject of historical debate, with differing interpretations among scholars. While some contend that Dutch colonialism endured for approximately 350 years, tracing its origins to Cornelis de Houtman's arrival on the shores of Aceh and Banten in the late 16th century, others argue for a shorter period of around 140 years, beginning with the establishment of the Batavian Republic and culminating in the Dutch East Indies' governance under the Kingdom of the Netherlands in the early 19th century.

In presenting this book to the world, we recognize the imperative for collective input and guidance. We earnestly hope this work will inspire scholarly discourse, foster more profound understanding, and contribute to the ongoing dialogue surrounding Indonesian Islamic history and its intersections with colonialism, capitalism, and orientalism.

May Allah's blessings and guidance continue to accompany us on this intellectual journey.

March 2024

Abdurrahman Masud,

Nur said and

Sus Eko Zuhri Ernada

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## CHAPTER I INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Background

This study examines British scholars' views of Indonesian Islamic historical discourse by digging into the discourse on colonialism, capitalism, and Orientalism. The memory of the past occupies a vital place in the universe of science. In the science system, history is studied, discussed, and even refuted in an ecosystem called historical science. Although historical science supposedly supports an objective outlook as a scientific product, subjectivity biases are often shown in reality. This can be seen in a country's colonial period history.

This study contains five chapters, which are divided as follows: The first chapter contains essential instruments that will form the analytical space in this study. Several critical discussions related to the entire research are presented in this chapter, including background sections, problem formulation, literature review of the concepts and theories used, and research methodology.

The second chapter presents an overview of the British Colonial Period in Indonesia from 1811 to 1816. It is divided into three sub-chapters. First, it examines the initial British interest in the archipelago. Second, it explores the glorious era of Raffles' leadership. The third is about the British economic interests in the archipelago.

The third chapter deals with the main topics of Colonialism, Capitalism, and Orientalism. In contrast, the fourth chapter discusses the reconstruction of decolonialisation ideas, including Colonialism versus decolonization, Capitalism and its connection with feudalism, Orientalism versus Occidentalism, and rebuilding

civilisational dialogues. The fifth chapter offers a conclusion and suggestions.

In historical terms, a period in which foreign nations, especially Europeans, invaded an area under their welfare and lasted from the XVIII to XX centuries is called the colonial period. The term refers to building European colonies in a new country with traditions, languages, and cultures different from those of European society. Generally, there was resistance by the local community, but because of their defeat in war and diplomacy, the local political leadership was held by Europeans. Since then, the colony system has been established.

European colonial countries are generally spread across Asia, Africa, South America, Australia and other island countries (such as Micronesia). The Europeans spread the idea of modernising and civilising the local communities of the mentioned countries so that they could be at a level close to Europeans culturally but still allowed Europeans to become their leaders. This idea can be found in several works by scientists, writers, and officials who wrote down their impressions and assessments of the local indigenous people. Indonesia has quite a long experience of European invasion.

The perceptions regarding the period of European Colonialism, specifically Dutch colonialism, are still debated among historians. Some of them presume that the period of Dutch Colonialism in Indonesia was 350 years. This rests on two grounds. First, one of Soekarno's speeches was alluded to this. Second, it started with Cornelis de Houtman arriving on the coast of Aceh and Banten at the end of the XVI century. Other historians presume that this colonialism period lasted only about 140 years, and it started with the establishment of the *Bataaf Republic*, which later became the Government of



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the Dutch East Indies under the jurisdiction of the Kingdom of the Netherlands, which settled their invasion around 1816 or 1817 (Van Klinken & Gerry, 2006).

However, the difference between the above period does not affect the birth of several writings on Indonesian history by Dutch writers and historians. They felt they needed to feel more about the country of Eastern Indies, which since the East Indies Trade Congregation, better known as VOC (*Vereenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie, i.e.*) was a paradise for a variety of spices, which had supported the Kingdom of Netherlands for a long time ago. Entering the XIX century, a tremendous intellectual enthusiasm arose in line with applying ethical policy to study the local community's past, which later brought up several works that became essential contributions to the writing of Indonesian history in the future (Touwen, 2000).

C. Snouck Hugronje, an Indology scholar who later served as head of the *Het Kantoor voor Inlandcsh en Arabische Zaken* (Department of Indigenous and Arabian Affair), became an important figure who contributed to the scientific work of Indonesian society. When producing his writing, Snouck had no idea that his work would be a historical reference. As time went on, especially since the independence of Indonesia, his name became increasingly popular due to his works, which significantly contributed to the Dutch colonisation of Indonesia (C. Snouck Hurgronje, 1893).<sup>i</sup>

*De Atjehers*, which Snouck wrote in two volumes, became an essential formula for the success of Dutch East Indies' Marsose (soldier of fortune) in subduing Acehnese's resistance from 1873 to 1910. One of the crucial phrases that Snouck alluded to was that if you wanted to soften the heart of the Acehnese, you had to pay attention to public facilities,

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which has been done by renovating the Baiturrahim Mosque and never interfering them in matters of worship. At first, Snouck's opinion was regarded as nonsense. Still, it differed from Van Heutsz, who saw this as a significant cultural strategy to upturn thee in Aceh. Due to *the divide at impera method*, the formula from Snouck, Aceh became part of the Dutch East Indies.

Several works related to land management also prove the superiority of the Dutch in Indonesia. Through his book *Mobilizing Labor for the Global Coffee Market: Profits from an Unfree Work Regime in Colonial Java*, Jan Bremen presents an economic perspective on the economic modernisation attempt introduced by the Dutch in Priangan, specifically in developing coffee plants. This book narrates the hard work of the colonial government in convincing the Sundanese noble to accept the proposal to open a coffee plantation in Priangan. The story about the hardship of opening up to managing coffee, which benefited private business actors and the colonial government, is presented here (Jan Bremen, 2015)<sup>ii</sup>.

Using a different model, Geert Mak wrote about his memories of living in Indonesia during the Japanese invasion through his book, *De Eeuw van Mijn Vader*. Mak is not a historian, but he wrote like one, depicting details of his and his father's life in difficult times when Japan was trying to make Indonesia the capital of the Greater East Asia War. Since Mak is a journalist, emotional expressions about indigenous people and Japanese are firmly shown. This is not an objective historical work because he placed the Dutch as a suffering nation in the East Indies in some of his explanations (Mak, 2012)<sup>iii</sup>.

The three works above are sufficient to obtain a conception of the Dutch East Indies Government's Dutch

history was considered significant to become an ongoing discussion for the Netherland. The Dutch displayed a special emotional bond to make Indonesia a historical backbone for their country's long journey as a sovereign kingdom.

The diverse reflections of the Dutch's perceptions of Indonesia also show a great interest from the Dutch in discussing their ancestral past in Indonesia. However, according to historical memory, this did not happen in England colonised Indonesia, even for only a brief period (1811-1816).

Despite the brief invasion of Indonesia, British Colonialism in Indonesia left no fewer deep wounds. However, their action responded to the British Empire's protection of the Dutch Royal family, which provided proper refuge in England since, at the end of the XVII century, the Netherlands was invaded by Napoleon Bonaparte.

In a relatively short period, Thomas Stamford Raffles, governor-general of the British Indies (r. 1811-1816), compiled a book on Javanese history and culture entitled *The History of Java* (Raffles, 1830). Just like Snouck, during his writing period, he never imagined that his work would later become a reference in the academic world, especially in writing Javanese history. As time passed, scientists cited his job to discover the Javanese people's social and cultural life during his reign and the legend and mythology that lived in their midst.

After Raffles's work, it is rare to find a British writer who has a keen interest in Indonesian history research. Peter Carey<sup>iv</sup> is undoubtedly an exception who lived at a different time than Raffles. His study of Prince Diponegoro and the Java War (Carey, 1981, 2007), which he initiated, amazed several Indonesian historians and made him a role model in writing local Javanese history, especially regarding the post-

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Java War Period. Some local historians of Madiun and its surroundings, many of whom have discussions with him, either in the format of seminars, webinars, or just specific topical talks.

The rarity of English writers who specifically focus on Indonesian, with in-depth analysis, as was found in the previous Dutch case, aroused the writer's interest in exploring the extent of British historians' perception of past events in Indonesia. Thus, this study will collect references from British writers on Indonesian history and measure the urgency of discussing Indonesian history, including responding to various cases of British Colonialism in Indonesia, which still need to be studied. Moreover, re-thinking the themes of colonialism, capitalism, and Orientalism has become a trend in recent years in British research institutions and universities, including SOAS University of London, Oxford University and Birmingham University. This trend needs to be considered as the source of studies about the history of colonisation in Indonesia.

## **1.2 Research Questions**

Considering the background described above, two main questions need to be considered in this research: (1) What are the views of British scholars on the discourse of Indonesian Islamic history? (2) What is the perception of British scholars about British Indonesian Colonialism? (3) The last relates to the question of to what extent the discourse of colonialism, capitalism and Orientalism among the scholars.

## **1.3 Research Objectives**

Meanwhile, the aims of this research include (1) Identifying the various forms of British scholars' perceptions of Indonesian history, (2) Understanding the urgency of

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markets in Banten and Aceh to access highly desirable spices, such as cloves, pepper, cinnamon and other spices. In exchange, they traded these commodities using merchandise such as cloth, metals, weapons, and other manufactured goods.

The markets in Banten and Aceh at the time were essential trading centres as both regions were rich in natural resources, especially spices, which were in high demand in European markets. British travellers used to explore these regions with their trading ships, interacting with local traders and observing the customs, culture and trading systems in these markets.

However, the relationship between British and local merchants did not always run smoothly. Conflicts sometimes arose due to competition between European trading powers to monopolise the spice trade. This sometimes led to confrontations between European traders, including British traders, with the local government or traders from other trading powers (Besset, 1963)

Overall, the visits of British traders to markets in the Nusantara in the 17th century were part of their efforts to access the abundant spice resources and expand their trading dominance in the Southeast Asian region. This reflects the complex dynamics of the period of colonialism and global trade.

British traders played an essential role in acquiring valuable spices, such as pepper and cloves, which were in high demand in European markets. They operated in an environment fraught with fierce competition between European trading powers, especially the Dutch, who also sought to control the spice market. In the Nusantara's harbours, British traders sought ways to get the most out of these commodities and outperform their competitors.

influence on the Malay Peninsula. Meanwhile, in North Borneo, especially Brunei, the British were increasingly able to establish their influence through favourable political and trade deals, which helped to salvage or at least patch up their depressed position in Bengkulu.

With its strategic location, Singapore became a major trading centre in the region. The British could utilise their position in Singapore to control the trade traffic flowing through the Straits of Malacca. The British presence in Singapore gave them control over a crucial trade route and allowed them to establish strong trade relations with neighbouring territories, such as the Malay Peninsula (Wake, 1975).

In the Malay Peninsula, the British presence was strengthened as Singapore became a strong base for their expansion. They established good relations with local rulers and capitalised on the region's political interests and natural wealth. With a strategy of diplomacy and mutually beneficial trade deals, the British strengthened their position and expanded their influence in the Malay Peninsula (Tarling, 1957).

Meanwhile, the British expanded their influence in North Borneo, especially in Brunei. They established favourable trade deals with local rulers, gained access to natural resources, and built political relationships that benefited both sides. These deals helped bolster the British position in the region and contributed to restoring or patching up their threatened position in Bengkulu (H. R. Hughes-Hallett, 1940).

By consolidating influence in Singapore and expanding influence in the Malay Peninsula and North Borneo, the British could reduce the impact of the threat they faced in Bengkulu. Singapore's strategic position as a major trading

Daendels at the beginning of the 19th century. Before the existence of this postal road, transportation in Java was limited and challenging, especially for transporting plantation commodities from the interior to the coast. The construction of this highway marked the beginning of better transportation infrastructure on the island.

One of the main benefits felt by British administrators was the reduction in travel time in transporting plantation commodities. Before the Postal Highway, travelling from the interior to the coast took a long time and was difficult to navigate because of the rugged terrain. With better and more organised postal roads, the time needed to send plantation products such as coffee, tea or spices from inland areas becomes shorter, more efficient and can be done more regularly.

The impact of this postal road is felt not only in terms of shorter travel times but also in terms of economic development. British administrators in Java saw tremendous potential in maximising production and trade in plantation commodities with better transportation infrastructure. This encouraged increased production and exports, providing more significant economic benefits for British colonists in the region.

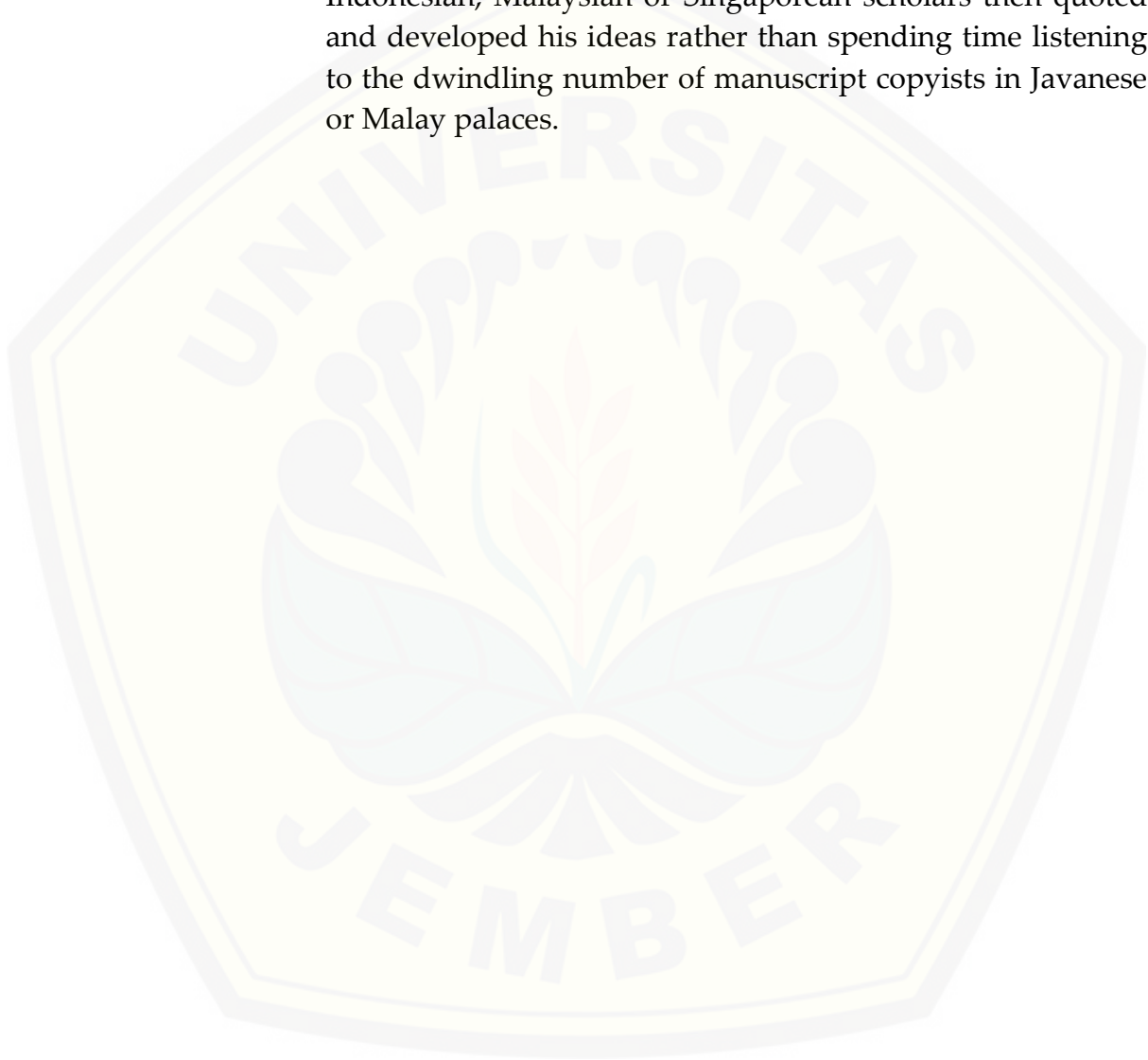
Apart from that, the existence of the Postal Highway (*Jalan Raya Pos*) opened more comprehensive access for British administrators to explore and manage the Java region. With better infrastructure, they had more access to various areas, allowing them to exercise surveillance and effectively organise their colonial administration. This strengthened their control over the region.

The Postal Highway also provided benefits for British administrators in terms of connectivity with other regions in Java. Previously, isolation between regions was a significant



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complete failure. With ownership of Indonesian manuscripts, England built a sizeable philological research ecosystem about the Indonesian Nusantara. Experts such as Annabel Teh-Gallop, are one of the significant scholars who have succeeded in utilising the wealth of Indonesian manuscripts in England as the subject of their expertise. Ironically, many Indonesian, Malaysian or Singaporean scholars then quoted and developed his ideas rather than spending time listening to the dwindling number of manuscript copyists in Javanese or Malay palaces.



## CHAPTER IV

### **INTERROGATING BRITISH INTELLECTUAL PERSPECTIVES : AN EXAMINATION OF INDONESIAN ISLAMIC HISTORY AND COLONIAL DISCOURSES**

In Chapter IV, our exploration delves into a comprehensive analysis of the research findings and ensuing discussions, with a meticulous focus on unraveling the intricate tapestry of British scholarly perspectives. Central to our inquiry are three pivotal questions that navigate the contours of academic discourse within the realm of Indonesian Islamic history and British Indonesian Colonialism. Firstly, we endeavor to elucidate the prevailing viewpoints held by British scholars concerning the discourse surrounding Indonesian Islamic history. This entails a nuanced examination of interpretations, critiques, and engagements with historical narratives that intersect with the Islamic heritage of Indonesia.

Secondly, we embark on an interrogation of how British scholars conceptualize and evaluate British Indonesian Colonialism. This necessitates a critical appraisal of colonial legacies, power dynamics, and socio-political implications embedded within historical narratives of British colonial rule in Indonesia. Thirdly, we scrutinize the manifestation of discourses pertaining to Colonialism, Capitalism, and Orientalism among British scholars. This entails an exploration of underlying ideological frameworks, epistemological paradigms, and discursive practices that shape scholarly engagements with colonial histories and postcolonial realities.

going to start getting stronger because there are very intellectual people across the world that are working on these things.

- Countries

(Included Indonesia) find a way of making themselves more sustainable.

3. Mulaika Hijjaz  
SOAS,  
University  
of London

- The Politics of Archives in Colonial England is given great attention.

- Orientalism has a lot of problems. The making of science is related to power. Not only in the old times, but also in the modern times.

4. Kostas Retsikas  
SOAS,  
London  
University

- Colonialism and Capitalism are connected because capitalism came to Indonesia basically through the colonial state and the creation of a whole regime, economic regime, economic regime.

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# **BRITISH HISTORIANS' PERCEPTION OF INDONESIAN ISLAMIC HISTORICAL DISCOURSE :**

**Digging Discourses on Colonialism,  
Capitalism, And Orientalism**

Embark on a captivating journey through the annals of Indonesian Islamic History, as seen through the discerning eyes of British scholars. In this absorbing study penned by Abdurahaman Masud et al., readers are invited to explore the intricate dynamics of colonialism, capitalism, and orientalism and their profound impact on the narrative surrounding Indonesia's Islamic heritage.

Through meticulous research and thoughtful analysis, Abdurahaman Masud et al. unveil the layers of interpretation that have shaped historical discourse in Indonesia. From the enduring legacy of colonial rule to the complexities of cultural assimilation and resistance, this book delves deep into the heart of Indonesia's past, offering new perspectives and challenging conventional wisdom.

With a keen eye for detail and a commitment to scholarly rigour, Abdurahaman Masud et al. navigate the complexities of Indonesian History, shedding light on the intersections of power, ideology, and identity. Drawing upon a rich tapestry of primary sources and theoretical frameworks, this study expands our understanding of Indonesia's Islamic heritage. It prompts us to reconsider our assumptions about colonial encounters and their lasting effects.



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