



The Concept of Abaongan Islam and Priyayi Islam in the Efforts to Conquer Aceh Analysis of Snouk Hurgronje's Thoughts

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Abstract: This article examines the influence of Christian Snouk Hurgronje's orientalist perspective on the formation of socio-religious classifications within Indonesian Islam, particularly the concepts of Abangan Islam and Priyayi Islam. Based on his deep study of Islam in the Middle East and his advisory role in the Dutch colonial administration, Snouk employed strategic policies that utilized education, cultural manipulation, and administrative inclusion to divide and control the indigenous Muslim population. By promoting limited religious practice among rural Muslims (Abangan) and integrating the educated elite (Priyayi) into colonial bureaucracy, he created a sociopolitical dichotomy that served colonial interests. The article argues that this classification was not neutral but rather a deliberate tactic to weaken Islamic unity and suppress resistance, especially in conflict-prone regions like Aceh. Furthermore, the study highlights how orientalism shaped colonial governance, producing long-term consequences for Islamic identity, authority, and cohesion in Indonesia. Understanding this colonial legacy is essential for interpreting the contemporary religious and political dynamics of Indonesian society.

Keywords: Abaongan; Conquer; Islam; Priyayi

Introduction

Orientalists are the term for people who research Eastern culture, especially regarding Arab countries and also Islam as a majority religion. Most of these researchers come from western countries, especially after their defeat in the Crusades which resulted in the western troops suffering many casualties. Their goals in researching vary depending on the intentions of the orientalist. Some research purely for knowledge and some research with the aim of belittling Islam by criticizing its teachings with the intention of weakening the beliefs of Muslims and destroying the laws in Islam so that Muslims can be divided or abandoned by their followers.

The Quran is a holy book that contains the teachings of Muslims which contain guidance, the essence of goodness and instructions that regulate good

human life. The Quran and the hadith are positioned as texts that can be fully explained through the socio-political context of 7th century Arabia. In the end, the Quran is seen not as a holy book but as a "cultural document". They did this as their response after the eternity in the Crusades which made them increasingly sink into darkness. The basic goal of Western figures is to undermine Islam in terms of ideology through studies on Islamic topics. The mission of the orientalist is to doubt the authenticity of the Qur'an and hadith to find their inauthenticity (Haqiqi & Manik, 2024).

Orientalism emerged in Europe at the end of the 18th century AD. It first appeared in England in 1779 AD, in France in 1799 and was included in the French Academy Dictionary in 1838. In that century, westerners dominated the Islamic world and controlled its kingdoms. Western thinkers began to spread orientalism through journals published throughout the western

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countries and kingdoms. They changed the original Arabic and Islamic literature and bought it from irresponsible individuals or even stole it from public libraries and moved it to libraries in their countries. If calculated, the number of rare Arabic literature that moved to European libraries until the early 19th century had reached 250,000 volumes and continues to increase to this day (Armeyanto et al., 2023).

One of the interesting studies on orientalist studies and orientalist discourse is the tracing of the activities of orientalists from the Netherlands. Since the founding of Leiden University in 1574 by Prince William of Orange who was known as the leader of the revolution, orientalism in the Netherlands began and developed, then followed by the establishment of other universities that carried the vision and mission of Dutch and world orientalists, such as the State University of Amsterdam, the Catholic University in Nijmegen and the University in Groningen. In addition to being motivated by the spirit of Christianization, because the Netherlands is within the scope of the Catholic papacy of the world, the movement of orientalism in the Netherlands was also driven by hatred of the medieval heritage, namely Islam and Muslims, and combined with a greedy desire to colonize other countries, in the sense of bringing a vision of colonialism and a mission of imperialism. Among the Dutch orientalists, several famous names are recorded such as Thomas Stamford Rafles, Wensinck, William Marsdendan and the most famous is Christian Snouck Hurgronje. Because, to collect in-depth and accurate information, he infiltrated the Muslim community in Aceh by pretending to convert to Islam. In addition, his role in providing political information and advice to the Dutch colonial government was very large (Armeyanto et al., 2023).

In this article, the author tries to explain the activities of Christian Snouck Hurgronje's thinking as an orientalist who was quite tendentious towards Islam, even having a hypocritical mentality so that he became an enemy in disguise who clearly deviated and damaged the beliefs of Muslims in the world through his works during his lifetime and will continue to have a negative impact on Muslims now and in the future if not corrected.

Method

This study employs a qualitative historical approach, focusing on textual analysis of primary and secondary sources related to Christian Snouck Hurgronje's writings, colonial policy documents, and scholarly interpretations of Indonesian Islamic history. The research uses a critical discourse analysis framework to examine how Snouck's orientalist views were embedded in colonial strategies and how these

strategies influenced the socio-religious categorization of Muslims into Abangan and Priyayi groups. By contextualizing Snouck's thoughts within the broader narrative of Dutch colonialism and Islamic resistance—particularly in Aceh—the study aims to uncover the ideological underpinnings and political motivations behind the manipulation of Islamic identities. Archival materials, historical correspondence, and contemporary academic commentaries are utilized to trace the continuity and impact of these classifications on Indonesia's religious and political landscape.

Result and Discussion

Getting to Know Snouck Hurgronje; A Controversial Orientalist

Snouck Hurgronje's full name is Willian Cristian Snouck Hurgronje. He was born in Oosterhoud, Netherlands on February 8, 1857 and was the fourth child from the marriage of Pastor JJ. Snouck Hurgronje and Annamaria, who was also the daughter of a pastor. It is said that the marriage of Snouck's parents was preceded by an affair scandal, so that in 1989 they were fired from the Herford Church in Zeeland, a province in the west of the Netherlands. This unpleasant story apparently encouraged Snouck's parents to prepare their son to become a pastor. This is believed to be atonement for the past sins committed by his parents. However, the brilliant young Snouck was more interested in studying Semitic literature until he finally entered Leiden University in 1875 at the age of 18. It was at this university that Snouck's interest in studying Eastern Religion (Islam) emerged. His knowledge was further honed and he successfully completed his studies with a thesis on the City of Mecca (Ernas, 2019).

For his extraordinary achievements, he was appointed as a lecturer at Leiden University. His duties as a lecturer were quite serious and greatly determined the continuation of the power he used to perpetuate colonialism in the archipelago. In his education, he received a cum laude degree, his intelligence led him to deepen his knowledge of Islam in his home country, so he decided to study directly at the source, namely the city of Mecca. In 1884, Hurgronje left for Mecca to deepen his knowledge of Arabic literature and Islam (Hendriani, 2020).

As a scientist, Snouck understood very well that it was not easy for everyone to enter the holy city of Mecca, especially for a Christian like him. The easiest way was to formally embrace Islam. So on January 16, 1885, Snouck Hurgronje officially converted to Islam in front of Qadhi Jedah and used the Islamic name Abdul Gaffar. This new status gave Snouck the freedom to freely enter the city of Mecca and gain access to study Islam from a number of Muftis in the city of Mecca. He also took the

opportunity to learn Arabic which later greatly helped him in understanding various aspects of Islamic teachings (Ernas, 2019).

He is often admired as a great scholar of Islamic politics in the Dutch East Indies, but also hated for being hypocritical and pretending to be a Muslim. As a productive writer, Snouck continues to be remembered. His work is a reference for Islamic researchers in Indonesia. His name is always mentioned when discussing the success of his native students, including Hoessein Djajadiningrat, the first native doctor in the Netherlands (Rohmana, 2024).

Hurgronje's study of Islamic sciences aims to investigate the influence of Islam on human and social development in the pure socio-economic, religious, cultural, and political realities of Mecca. His unique anthropological and ethnographic approach is driven by the perception of the flaws in the methods of European orientalists whose knowledge comes entirely from books and several other secondary sources. Hurgronje believes that no one can do this except by empirically visiting Mecca, as the spiritual center of Islam and the entire Muslim world). And also this opportunity was taken to get as much information as possible about the Aceh war with the Dutch in the archipelago. Snouck also argued that European civilization was better and higher compared to Eastern civilization (Omer, 2022).

Snouck Hurgronje married a native woman from West Java and was blessed with a son named Yusuf. However, after getting married, Snouck Hurgronje was called back to the Netherlands. His wanderings ended and returning to the Netherlands on March 12 1906, he was appointed Professor of Arabic Language and Literature at Leiden University. In 1910. In the Netherlands, he married Ida Maria, the daughter of a retired priest in Zutphan, Dr AJ Gort. After being appointed as a professor at Leiden University in 1907 (three years after marrying), he pursued his profession as an advisor to the Minister of Colonial Affairs. Apart from that, he also taught Zending candidates at Oestgeest, this job he carried out until the end of his life. Snouck died on June 26, 1936, at the age of 81.

Snouck's greatness is always remembered. He was a scientist dubbed a "god" in the fields of Arabist-Islamology and Orientalism, one of the pioneers of research on Islam, its institutions, and its laws. He is credited with pointing out the shortcomings of the Islamic world and its development in Indonesia. In Rapenburg, the Netherlands, a monument to Snouck Hurgronjehuis was erected to commemorate his services and greatness (Ichwayudi, 2011).

A Collection of Snouck Hurgronje's Thoughts on Conquering Aceh

Snouck was one of the controversial orientalists of his time because of his courage to pronounce the two sentences of the shahada in order to enter the two holy cities of Mecca and Medina. Snouck converted to Islam not because there was a call of guidance or to strengthen his faith but instead to conduct his research. After he received his education in Saudi Arabia, he became one of the orientalists who actually understood the teachings of Islam, but of course like most other orientalists he tended to be skeptical of the text of the Qur'an & Hadith.

While in Mecca he also observed the hajj activities there. He had a controversial perception of the hajj. According to him, the hajj is a series of strange ceremonies originating from pagan Arabia that Muhammad has incorporated into his religion, a long-lasting survival that in Islam gives the same unique impression as the jumping procession in Christianity.

He added that the implementation of the hajj such as tawaf at the Kaaba and kissing the black stone was likened by Snouck to a ritual that smelled of shirk (associating partners with God). This kind of thinking is countered by the cleric Daud Rasyid who argued that the tawaf performed by the people of Jahiliyyah with Muslim rituals is very different. If the people of Jahiliyyah do it naked, in Islam it must be in a state of purity and cover the genitals. According to Daud, kissing the black stone and facing the Kaaba are not the two that are glorified and worshiped but the Great Being behind both is the one who is worshiped. Furthermore, Daud Rasyid said that the research conducted by Snouck was subjective and not in accordance with the principles of the scientific method (Mudhiiah, 2013).

Furthermore, in 1889 when he was in Aceh, he was trusted as an official advisor to the Dutch government to overthrow the power of Aceh which was known for its strength that never fell because of their steadfastness in religion led by clerics. Islam as a religion plays a very important role in encouraging the natives to resist the Dutch. This verse is a guide for the native Muslims of Indonesia in responding to the behavior of the Dutch colonialists (Irwan, 2018).

وَقَاتِلُوا فِي سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ الَّذِينَ يُقَاتِلُونَكُمْ وَلَا تَعْتَدُوا إِنَّ اللَّهَ لَا يُحِبُّ
الْمُعْتَدِينَ

"Fight in the way of Allah those who fight you, but do not exceed the limits, because indeed Allah does not like those who exceed the limits." (Q.S. Al Baqarah verse 190).

When in Mecca, Snouck received a lot of information about the Aceh war with the Netherlands, it can be seen how he was able to mix with Indonesian

pilgrims from Aceh when performing the Hajj. The information he obtained would become an important report to the Dutch kingdom (Sajid et al., 2015).

This was done to find out the strengths and weaknesses of the Acehnese people. He understood that the resistance of the Acehnese people to the Dutch government was actually based on the paradigm of thought brought by the Ulama and Acehnese figures who returned from Mecca after performing the Hajj. The call for jihad came from the holy land of Mecca which at that time was under the rule of the Ottoman Caliphate. Shaykh Nawawî al-Bantânî, a cleric from Banten who settled in Mecca was one of the references for Hajj pilgrims from the archipelago. His fatwas and those of his successors, including Ahmad Zaini Dahlan, became the inspiration for the spirit of jihad and resistance to the power of the Dutch dictator (Ichwayudi, 2011).

From his observations he was of the opinion that Muslims, especially the Acehnese, were too fanatical in fighting the Dutch. Therefore, his intention to find out about the Dutch East Indies grew stronger. So Snouck took the initiative to offer assistance to the Dutch government to help kill the spirit of resistance of the Acehnese people. After conducting research on the Acehnese people, he found that the most fundamental thing that the Dutch always lost in battle was the rise of the ulama. Together with Muslims, Snouck was very ambitious so that Indonesian Muslims would gradually separate religion from social and political aspects. Snouck found the fact that Islam has the potential to control the entire life of its people, both in social and political aspects. So Snouck categorized Islamic problems into 3 aspects to be able to conquer Aceh, namely; the field of Pure Religion, the field of Social Society and the field of Politics.

Religion Deviation

The government took advantage of the customs prevailing in society by encouraging people to approach the Dutch, even helping people who would take that path. In this social community sector, the government took advantage of the customs that were in force and encouraged people to adhere to these customs, so that Islamic teachings were very limited so that they would not spread. To stem Islamic law, Snouck put forward the *Theori Reseptie* (Hendriani, 2020). namely the concept to stem and kill the growth of the influence of Islamic law. Snouck viewed that efforts to reduce the militancy and religious fanaticism of Muslims were by developing customs as an instrument of rivalry with Islamic law. In this way, Snouck directly created a divide between traditional figures and Muslims in Aceh. Where the traditional people were used by the Dutch as puppets to carry out their mission to echo existing customs and traditions so that they would not be eliminated by

Islamic teachings. Islamic law will be legitimized and its existence and legal force recognized if it has been adopted as customary law. This process pits Islamic law and customs against each other, which to a certain extent makes Islamic law a low law.

Politic Deviation

For Snouck Hurgronje, political Islam is something that needs to be avoided, restricted and even banned. Allowing political activities will only give birth to religious fanaticism that is very dangerous for colonial power. Various forms of Islamic political agitation will push the people towards fanaticism and Pan Islam. The government is allowed to crush political Islam, if necessary, with violence and force of arms. Snouck advised the Dutch East Indies (Indonesia) government to separate religion and politics, because if religion has been combined with politics or in the sense that Islam is combined with politics, it is feared that there will be a lot of militancy in religion that will have a bad impact on the Dutch government at that time.

Therefore, Islam and politics will never be allowed to unite because it threatens the Dutch government. In this political aspect, Snouck advised the Dutch government to carry out politics through Association Politics, namely by programming so that through western-style education and the use of European culture, natives who are more associated with European countries and cultures are created. Thus, the power of the "Pan Islam" ideals is lost and it will facilitate the spread of Christianity.

Hereby the author will reveal how Snouck played his role in colonial politics by implementing an education system in the indigenous community so that it became known as "priyayi Islam and abangan Islam" which was pioneered by Snouck Hurgronje the colonialist.

The Concept of Abangan Priyays Islam and its Impact on The People of Aceh

As we know, the Dutch divided three strategies in dealing with the Acehnese people, namely from a religious, social and political perspective. In terms of politics, the Dutch were very wary of Islam united with politics because it would threaten the Dutch government. Therefore, Snouck used an approach to society by providing education, this was done so that he gained the trust of the community. According to him, education is the main tool for bringing modernity to the elite, who will understand the virtue of separating religion and politics. Snouck Hurgronje also criticized traditional Islamic scholars, the ulama, who wanted to stick to the medieval mixture of religion and politics embodied by Islamic law.

The modern educated elite (*priyayi*) will replace them, and they will become loyal collaborators in the colonial project. This was their first step in colonizing the archipelago by the natives themselves, how the education they created was taught using the system they used. Islam *priyayi abangan* is a term for people who adhere to Islam formally, meaning they are Muslim but do not fully practice the teachings of Islam as a whole. The condition of society at that time paid more attention to the issue of Islam as a religion in its narrow form (such as marriage, family relationships, and regulations related to inheritance), while political and social aspects received less attention. Society also still believes in mystical things, belief in spirits and spirits for *abangan* occupies the underlying belief (Zubair, 2015).

The natives who had received Western education and had been associated with European culture, had to be given positions as managers of local political and administrative affairs. They would gradually become an extension of the colonial government in developing the political mandate of the association. The meaning of the association itself was the unification of European culture and the native culture of the Dutch East Indies. The association pioneered by the *Priyayi* and *Abangan* classes would guide the people to follow colonial patterns and culture. And the impact was that Indonesia would be ruled by natives who had been associated with European culture (Wertheim, 1972).

In launching the education association policy, the Dutch established schools for the native community. However, there was a lot of discrimination that was very visible in establishing schools. Starting from the curriculum taught and the grouping of schools based on skin color and race. Initially, only children of noble descent could enjoy school because that was indeed Snouck's initial mission, choosing the children of nobles to launch his mission to separate them from native culture, customs and religion so that they could adhere to western culture (Hendriani, 2020).

Sources show that the "Secular Education System" has indeed succeeded in producing a new generation of Indonesians who think secularly. They generally come from the children of the *Priyayi Abangan*. The children of the natives who continued their studies at STOVIA, such as dr. Wahidin Sudirohusodo, Sutomo, and Gunawan Mangunkusumo are the three early generations who were successfully trained by the Dutch with secularism. After graduating from STOVIA, they emerged as very influential young Javanese intellectuals.

And don't forget Hoesein Djajadiningrat, the nephew of his loyal friend Raden Aboe Bakar who once lived in the same house with him when he was in Mecca, he was the first Indonesian to obtain a doctorate at

Leiden University in 1913, under the direct guidance of Snouck Hurgronje (Buskens & Zürcher, 2016).

In one of his expressions, dr. Wahidin wrote: "Javanese society before the arrival of Islam was divided into three groups, namely: those who still adhered to animist beliefs, those who embraced Hinduism, and those who were interested in Buddhism. This classification of Javanese society was valid until the spread of Islam around 1500. Wahidin stated that the 16th century was a period of decline for the Javanese "nation" until the arrival of the Dutch." In his statement, he indirectly revealed that the arrival of Islam to the archipelago was a setback and an obstacle to progress, but on the other hand, the Dutch who came with the aim of colonizing were actually used as ideals for progress. He said: "The success of changing Javanese society quickly is closely related to their fluency in Dutch, "Those who cannot understand Dutch cannot stand on the shore of progress." And from this statement he revealed that if you want to progress, then master Dutch and its civilization if you do not want to experience decline (Abbas et al., 2018).

Conclusion

The Islamic world, especially in Aceh, was influenced by the thoughts of Christian Snouck Hurgronje as an orientalist. Snouck used clever colonial methods to separate religion and politics and use education to associate indigenous people with European culture. His theories on *Abangan Islam* and *Priyayi Islam* explained how Islam could be implemented simply without disturbing colonial power. Snouck became a controversial figure in the history of orientalism because this effort aimed to weaken the anti-colonial spirit of Muslims. Understanding this strategy is important to re-examine the social and political dynamics of Muslims in Indonesia, as well as the long-term impact of colonialism on religious identity and practice.

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The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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