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## **Decolonizing Javanese-Islamic Identity in the Discourses of Contemporary Indonesian Islamic Studies**

**M. Mushthafa**

Universitas Annuqayah

**Correspondence Author**

musthov@gmail.com

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## Abstract

This article discusses the phenomenon of decolonization of Islamic studies as a continuation of postcolonial critical projects that are widespread in various areas of study. In particular, this paper wants to answer two main questions: (1) the background and foundations of decolonization of Islamic studies and (2) its struggle in Indonesian Islamic discourse by focusing on the issue of Javanese-Islamic identity. By analyzing relevant data, this paper concludes that decolonization was motivated by scientists' anxiety over the impact of colonialism in the academic-scientific area, which formed an oppressive cultural construction. Decolonization seeks to go beyond the postcolonial project, which, at a certain point, is still shadowed by the ideas of Western figures. The epistemological basis of decolonization is a critical approach in the study of religion in general, and it also involves political factors of knowledge in one of its dimensions. In Javanese-Islamic identity, decolonization emphasizes the close intertwining between Javanese-ness and Islam, which tend to be separated in colonial studies.

Keywords: decolonization of islamic studies, javanese-islamic identity, epistemic disobedience



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### **Abstrak**

Artikel ini membahas fenomena dekolonisasi studi Islam sebagai kelanjutan dari proyek kritik postkolonial yang marak di berbagai wilayah kajian. Secara khusus, tulisan ini ingin menjawab dua persoalan pokok, yakni tentang latar dan landasan dekolonisasi studi Islam serta pergulatannya dalam diskursus Islam Indonesia dengan mengambil fokus pada isu identitas Islam-Jawa. Dengan menganalisis data-data yang relevan, tulisan ini menyimpulkan bahwa dekolonisasi dilatarbelakangi oleh keresahan para ilmuwan atas dampak kolonialisme di wilayah akademik-ilmiah yang membentuk konstruksi budaya yang menindas. Dekolonisasi berusaha melampaui proyek postkolonial yang pada titik tertentu masih dibayang-bayangi oleh gagasan-gagasan tokoh Barat. Landasan epistemologis dekolonisasi berupa pendekatan kritis dalam studi agama pada umumnya yang juga melibatkan faktor politik pengetahuan pada salah satu dimensinya. Dalam konteks identitas Islam-Jawa, dekolonisasi berusaha menegaskan jalinan erat antara kejawaan dan keislaman yang cenderung dipisahkan oleh jejak kajian kolonial.

Kata kunci: dekolonisasi studi islam; identitas islam-jawa; pembangkangan epistemik

## **INTRODUCTION**

Islamic studies is a relatively new field of academic study that was born both because of the internal conditions of Muslims and their dynamics in facing the new world order and their interactions with the Western world. The process of colonization of the Western world, which, among other things, targeted areas inhabited by Muslims, was the beginning of interest among Westerners in general in Islamic studies, so Islamic studies then developed among Muslims.

Internally, Muslims face challenges and dynamics of development, which, on the one hand, require Muslims to reflect on the scientific treasures that have been developing, including those related to scientific study centers in the Islamic world, which are felt to be stagnant and require new methodological breakthroughs such as those offered in perspective of religious studies or Islamic studies. The situation of Muslims in various parts of the world, most of whom are pretty backward socially, politically, economically, and culturally, has given rise to such reflective calls.

One of the critical points related to the recent rise in Islamic studies, including among Muslims, is holding an international symposium scientific forum on “Islam and the History of Religions” organized by the Department of Religious Studies at Arizona State University in 1980, which discussed several things. Fundamentally related to the possibility of Islam being studied scientifically in the same way as Christianity or Judaism. The recording of this activity was later published in the form of a collection of writings edited by Richard C. Martin, which later became a classic reference in Islamic studies.

In the introduction to the Indonesian translation version, M. Amin Abdullah emphasizes the importance of Islamic studies by placing it in two other models of approach to religion. Abdullah mentions three scientific domains in the field of religion, namely *ulum al-din* (religious knowledge), *al-fikr al-Islami* (Islamic thought), and *dirasat Islamiyyah* (Islamic studies), which, according to him, must be connected and reconciled with dichotomous and sectoral perceptions, including by strengthening the last domain as a relatively new domain

(Amin Abdullah in Martin 2010). It is essential based on the assumption that the potential and hope for the vital role of religion in delivering a better human life also depends on how Muslims correctly process scientific and religious treasures so that they can ultimately provide real transformative power.

Among several discussion points in this book is the importance of looking at Islam scientifically and objectively, not just using a theological and normative approach, likewise regarding the importance of expanding Islamic studies as part of regional studies or studies that are only textual and philological in orientation. This book also presents several examples of Islamic studies using a cultural anthropology approach, a sociological approach, a religious phenomenology approach, or a new perspective on the Koran. However, this book also records the concerns of several parties that Islamic studies carry bias or prejudice related to colonialism. Muhammad Abdul-Rauf, one of the contributors who at that time was the chancellor of the International Islamic University Kuala Lumpur, stated that there was a colonial push in the study of Islam in the West, including cultural prejudice against Muslims. There is a suspicion that Islamic studies were developed by the West so that Muslims could adapt their way of life to a Western perspective (Martin 2010).

Abdul-Rauf's points of thought continue to resonate today and are not only voiced themselves. Such ideas appear in the realm of Islamic studies and develop in other scientific disciplines. The concept of decolonizing knowledge has evolved in this way. It is being studied not only among Muslim scientists or scientists from regions of the world that have been targets of Western colonialism, but Western scientists themselves have also put it forward.

This article tries to raise this issue by focusing on two main questions, namely (1) what is the background and basis for the decolonization of Islamic studies? and (2) how does the discourse of decolonization relate to Islam in Indonesia, especially about Javanese Islamic identity?

This research uses a qualitative-descriptive method. The primary data for this research were obtained from books that raised relevant themes, especially by focusing on two authors who paid particular attention to the central issue in this research, namely Javanese Islamic identity. The two authors are Irfan Afifi and Nur Khalik Ridwan. Secondary data was collected from supporting references relevant to the theme of decolonization, including a more global discussion scope.

The data is sorted and then analyzed using a descriptive analysis approach and presented in such a way as to build both deductive and inductive arguments. These data are also seen implicitly within the framework of the sociology of knowledge, namely that specific knowledge constructions are formed through sociological processes in certain historical landscapes. In Karl Mannheim's perspective, the sociology of knowledge works like a socially applied psychoanalysis by tracing the subjectivity, social context, and value construction that give rise to specific knowledge items. The sociology of knowledge works to help achieve objectivity by revealing what lies behind such scenes (Kleden 1988).

## RESEARCH SETTINGS

The study is set within the broader context of post-colonial discourse in Islamic studies, particularly within Indonesia. It explores how colonial legacies have influenced the understanding and practice of Islam in Java, the most populous and culturally influential island in Indonesia. The research focuses on the intersection of Islamic and Javanese identities, examining how these identities have been shaped, contested, and redefined in the post-colonial period.

## DISCUSSION AND RESEARCH RESULTS

### **Colonialism and the Emergence of Decolonizing Knowledge**

The Europeans' exploration of various corners of the world from the fourteenth to the seventeenth century triggered the emergence of colonization in several geographical areas. This exploration was based on developing extraordinary seagoing skills and the discovery of the compass to facilitate the technical exploration of new areas (Ansary, 2010).

Furthermore, in general, related to the socio-political and cultural impacts of exploration and colonization, Tamim Ansary then mapped three patterns of European colonization. First, Europeans replaced the native population almost entirely with European immigrants. It is what happened in North America and Australia. Second, indigenous people remain the majority but have yet to have an important role. Europeans held control. It is what happens in South America and sub-Saharan Africa. Third, Europeans faced a sufficiently organized society and advanced enough in civilization to have equal interactions and become what happened in the Eastern Islamic world. Europeans came first as traders, although later battles marked this encounter (Ansary, 2010).

However, trade and economic aspects can be the key to breaking down the foundations of Islamic society, as later happened to the Ottoman Empire, which Europeans weakened by also destroying the foundations of their economy. (Ansary 2010). In the archipelago region, the Dutch colonialists divided various political forces and damaged strong maritime-based trade ties. According to Furnivall, as quoted by Dhofier, trade activities and relations between islands in the archipelago were destroyed, so traders and shipbuilders lost their jobs. The people of the archipelago, who previously were traders and maritime explorers, have since become farmers, and economic growth has stalled (Dhofier, 2011).

One of the essential impacts of colonialism stated here on the third model described by Ansary is the emergence of knowledge production by Western society in the eastern Islamic world and other world regions. In the context of Indonesian studies, for example, we know names such as Snouck Hurgronje (1857-1936), who is known to have encouraged the Dutch colonial government to become "acquainted with a knowledge of the elementary principles of this world religion and its history" (having knowledge of the principles of the basis of this world religion and also its history) understand more about religious understanding and the history of the Indies or the Archipelago. From this encouragement, Dutch colonial policies

were born to explore knowledge about the people of the archipelago and then use it for their colonial interests (Laffan, 2011).

The studies that emerged later, born from suggestions and views like this, became known as Orientalism. In his book, which has become a classic, Edward Said explains three basic understandings of orientalism:

1. An Orientalist teaches, writes, or researches about the East, whether done by an anthropologist, sociologist, historian, or philologist.
2. Orientalism is a style of thinking based on the ontological and epistemological distinction between the West and the East, namely that the West is rational and the East is irrational (mythical).
3. Orientalism is related to institutions that create images and statements, teach about the East, and legitimize various assumptions or views.

In short, according to Said, orientalism is the West's style of dominating, restructuring, and authorizing the East (Said 1994). From the picture above, we can understand that the West's interest in the East is not purely driven by scientific and academic curiosity. It cannot be denied that this interest also goes hand in hand with colonial interests. Awareness of the existence of colonial interests behind the process of knowledge production is the most fundamental background for the emergence of the idea or movement for the decolonization of knowledge.

The study of decolonization of knowledge is closely related to orientalism, which also gave rise to the study of accidentalism, followed by postcolonial studies. Among the pioneers of Occidentalism studies, we know the name of an Egyptian intellectual, Hassan Hanafi, who wrote *Muqaddimah fi Ilm al-Istighrab* (1991). Postcolonial studies developed as a critique of colonialism, which influenced or impacted the colonized and their culture and communities. Among postcolonial theorists, there is Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, who, in her writing "Can the Subaltern Speak," introduced the idea of the subaltern, namely a term that refers to groups or individuals who are at the bottom of the social, political, and economic hierarchy. These people are under epistemic violence, which stifles their voices (Spivak in Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg (ed.) 1988).

The decolonial project continues postcolonial ideas by drawing on a broader scope. A criticism of postcolonial ideas is that they are still overshadowed by postmodernist European thinkers such as Foucault, Derrida, and Gramsci. Grosfoguel put forward the idea that by decolonizing postcolonial thought, three points are aimed at, namely a decolonial epistemic perspective that uses a broader canon of thought, critical dialogue between various epistemic/ethical/political projects that move towards a universal (not universal) world, and adaptation to the epistemic perspectives of global South thought (Grosfoguel, 2011).

Going further, Frantz Fanon (1925-1961) described the steps of the decolonization project as an intellectual in three stages. First, the phase of proving that the intellectual has

been assimilated into the culture of power that controls him. Second, the stage of upheaval encourages the intellectual to look again at his identity, including by reading his past. Third, this intellectual arrives at the stage when he tries to arouse and build awareness among the people around him so that they can try to build revolutionary literature together (Smith, 2005).

Meanwhile, Smith offers twenty-five Indigenous research programs or agendas within the framework of the decolonization project, which includes rereading, rewriting, reframing, restoration, naming, and sharing views (Smith, 2005).

### **Decolonizing Islamic Studies: Foundations and Practice**

As a relatively new study, Islamic studies is also not accessible from the burden of problems related to the impact of colonialism, as explained above, so calls for decolonization of Islamic studies are also intense.

It needs to be reiterated that the emergence of Islamic studies cannot be separated from the development of religious studies in the Christian world, so several groups are trying to examine the roots of the development of religious studies as an introduction to the decolonization project of Islamic studies. According to Tayob, the development of religious studies was linked to the European Enlightenment project, with a particular focus on renewing and reinventing the liberal theology of Protestant Christianity. From a secular approach, the study of religion in Europe is close to the thinking of Kant and Hegel. Quoting Capps, Tayob explained that Kant distinguished between natural religion and revealed religion. Revealed religion is represented in the Bible and other similar world religions, while natural religion is an ideal religion rooted in morality (Tayob, 2018).

Thus, religious studies, including later Islamic studies, can be vaguely or based on enlightenment ideas. Thus, this is the problem point and the focus of attention of the decolonization project in Islamic studies. Samira Haj, for example, describes that the idea of modernity shows a progressive emancipatory historical development, and tradition - which includes revealed religions - is synonymous with political tyranny and is stagnant. Likewise, the framework of universal humanism and post-Enlightenment rationality assumes that only autonomous subjects can think using reason, so religious groups based on divine sources are seen as having flaws and backward views (Haj, 2009).

In the field of anthropology, Talal Asad entered the discourse of decolonization by offering a new concept in the field of Islamic anthropology. One of the concepts put forward in the study of anthropological religion is the terms orthodox and non-orthodox. According to Asad, this term, often used by Western circles, was born from power discipline in Christian history. Asad explains that the West's interest in other religious practices, including Islam, is not related to any particular cultural motif but is rooted in the structure of disciplinary practices where the church had detailed records of pagan and heretical practices for new

Christian converts (Asad, 2009).

When terms like this infiltrate Islamic anthropological studies, according to Asad, this will produce a different perspective. For this reason, Asad offered a concept that became known in Islamic studies, especially in anthropology, to see Islam as a discursive tradition. With this concept, the diversity of religious views and practices in Islam is not seen with orthodoxy and non-orthodoxy. However, it is seen from the discursive lens of how Muslims read their “traditions” from the past. Tradition is not understood as something that is essentially homogeneous. The diverse traditional practices of Muslims in different times, places, and communities indicate differences in reasoning according to their respective socio-historical conditions. Therefore, according to Asad, Islamic anthropology seeks to understand the historical conditions that allowed the production and efforts to maintain certain discursive traditions, including how the transformation process occurred and the efforts made (Asad, 2009).

Samira Haj puts Asad’s offer into practice in her study of two important figures in contemporary Islamic history: Muhammad ibn ‘Abdul Wahhab (1703-1787) and Muhammad ‘Abduh (1849-1905). In conventional readings, which tend to be essentialist and vaguely follow Western epistemology, ibn ‘Abdul Wahhab is often associated with “fundamentalists,” “ultra-right,” and political movements that use “violence.” Meanwhile, ‘Abduh is seen as a liberal humanist figure (Haj, 2009).

In Haj’s study, the thoughts and movements of Muhammad ibn ‘Abdul Wahhab in the Arabian Peninsula and Muhammad ‘Abduh in Egypt were similar to the responses of previous figures in their vision of interpreting, maintaining, and developing traditions. To make it more straightforward, Samira Haj explains the background and struggles of the two characters and the situations they face. Ibn ‘Abdul Wahhab lived in a world defined primarily by Islamic religion and knowledge, whereas Muhammad ‘Abduh lived in Egypt’s new, scientifically oriented setting.

The main things that the two figures are fighting for are also different. Ibn ‘Abdul Wahhab faced the challenge of saving his society from the authority of ignorant and unenlightened people. This vision emerged when he first made a pilgrimage to the tomb of the Prophet Muhammad in Medina and witnessed excessive worship practices. Meanwhile, Muhammad ‘Abduh faced secular European aggression and expansion. ‘Abduh was challenged to develop Islamic traditions to remain relevant to the secular-modern world he faced but with solid Islamic roots. Both used authoritative Islamic discursive sources to explore their thoughts and develop their movements.

The study conducted by Abdulkader Tayob is also similar to that conducted by Samira Haj. Tayob examines the Islamic reforms by two modern figures, Muhammad ‘Abduh and Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd. In his review, Tayob shows that these two intellectuals struggled to interpret Islamic teachings and traditions in the past to answer the challenges of the times. It is done not by basing it on Western thought categories as a basis but still based on searching

for the authenticity of traditional meaning. It also broadly involves discussions with the humanistic tradition and Western social sciences. Abu Zayd, for example, developed a model of reading the Koran by showing that religion as a discourse demands to be read with great care and by examining the situation of its first appearance without meaning to ignore the deep values contained in it (Tayob, 2018).

Another interesting example to be presented here is Nkululeko Majozi's study of the Islamic State that stretches across Iraq and Syria known as ISIS (Islamic State of Iraq and Syria). In discussions about the Islamic State, the dominant Western view states that the Islamic State is a terrorist organization and is a product of Islamic "backwardness." Majozi shows that this view is rooted in a racist and Islamophobic Western epistemological narrative that wants to create a "natural" relationship between terrorism and Islam (Majozi, 2018). Furthermore, Majozi reverses this by stating that Westerners ignore the roots of European terrorism, which lie in the foundations of Western modernity.

Majozi's first criticism relates to the biased concept of terrorism. In the study literature related to terrorism, it is concluded that terrorism is understood as the use of violent acts to create fear or terror for political, religious, or ideological reasons by targeting civilians or iconic symbols. Majozi's criticism is that the definition of terrorism ignores state actors. It means that, in the popular understanding in the West, a state cannot be accused of being a perpetrator of terrorism. Majozi took the example of the description put forward by Boaz Ganor, an Israeli who serves as dean at the Lauder School of Government and Diplomacy at the Interdisciplinary Center, Herzliya, Tel Aviv. According to Ganor, the state cannot be prosecuted for acts of terrorism because there is an international convention that prohibits the use of violence by the state against civilians intentionally, which is contrary to the law in both war and peace situations. The definition put forward by Ganor then emphasizes a definition based on the perpetrator, not the action, even though the substance of terrorism is action.

According to Majozi, this thinking shows a Eurocentric bias. The nation-state is an invention of the European nation, which, in its initial formation, also had traces that could be associated with terrorism. There are traces of violence in the history of the formation of nation-states in Europe, including violence committed in colonialism and imperialism against other nations (Majozi, 2018).

Furthermore, Majozi reframes the debate about the Islamic State by stating that the Islamic State (ISIS) phenomenon is the dark side of Western modernity. If we look more closely, the formation of the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria is more similar to the process of forming nation-states in Europe than to the experience of forming an Islamic "state" in the history of Muslim civilization. Quoting al-Turabi, Majozi explained that several fundamental points were not found in the formation of an Islamic State that was found in countries in the history of previous Muslims. For example, the Islamic State (ISIS) does



not have the support of the wider Muslim community (ummah). Moreover, the seizure of territory based on acts of violence is not by Islamic norms. Apart from that, Islamic countries in history were not built with a closed and sectarian point of view in defining their citizens, whereas the Islamic State (ISIS) is not like that. Furthermore, Majozi pointed out that the way the Islamic State (ISIS) works is more like a modern company that makes massive use of information technology for the spread of its propaganda, recruitment of members, and other political activities, including in the documentation of its activities in its annual reports and field operations (Majozi, 2018).

Majozi's review of the Islamic State case is harsh enough to reverse the accusation that the Western perspective is steeped in traces of colonial prejudice by stating that terrorism is not a natural product of Islam but a modern creation. This kind of thing can be understood if you look at colonization's impact, which is not only related to territory or material things. Colonization is also the colonization of the imagination, which contains repressive elements by producing knowledge, producing perspectives, images, symbols, marking modes, and even forming certain stigmas.

Another response within the framework of decolonization could be a methodological offer, as proposed by Talal Asad, which then gave rise to various practical responses. The response to decolonization took place widely, including in Indonesia, in various forms.

#### Decolonization of Islamic Studies and Javanese Islamic Identity

The importance of a perspective that does not depend on Western views in Islamic studies and discourse in Indonesia emerged quite early. Deliar Noer stated some of these in a forum facilitated by the Religious Research and Development Agency of the Indonesian Ministry of Religion in the mid-1970s. Deliar Noer voiced the need for a non-Western approach to studying Indonesian society. Among the causes, according to Deliar Noer, research conducted by Westerners "relies more on approaches that are often accompanied by prejudice; or accompanied by comparisons to countries or peoples that are completely irrelevant" (Noer 1982). In another passage, Deliar Noer wrote:

"Clifford Geertz saw everything mysterious and mystical among the people of Java as religion or part of religion, even the activities and "skills" of medicine sellers and sorcerers. And all kinds of superstition and superstition. As long as there are still strange phenomena that are more spiritual, he puts them in the category called religion, at least "Javanese religion" (the religion of Java). This scholar, someone who does not believe in religion, tends to see things that do not make sense as religion. If so, for him, religion is the remainder of all aspects of life that no longer fall into other categories. A waste basket? (Noer 1982)."

In a broader scope, the disappointment of some Indonesian scholars towards Western researchers is also visible in more specific areas of study, for example, the history of the arrival and development of Islam in the archipelago.

Hasan Basri Marwah noted several points regarding the colonial construction of the

history of the arrival of Islam in the archipelago, such as that Muslim society during the period of the century of Islamization (namely the thirteenth to sixteenth centuries) did not have a significant political and economic role and influence, that Islam only took advantage of political disruption, which occurred among the Hindu rulers at that time and seized Hindu power by “playing wood,” that Muslims had no contribution in the development of Indonesian culture in that period, including by presenting Islam in that period as immigrants with the same status as European colonialists (Marwah, 2022).

Meanwhile, Azyumardi Azra stated that the discussion about the early history of Islam in the archipelago seemed problematic and complicated because of the lack of reliable data as a basis for historical reconstruction and how Islam is defined. Azra stated that this complexity was also due to the frame of reference used by Western researchers. Furthermore, Azra quotes William R. Roff, who states that “there has been a great desire among Western scholars since the colonial period until now to conceptually reduce the place and role of Islam - together with its socio-cultural manifestations - among the Muslim communities of the Malay Archipelago -Indonesia.” Western researchers “tend to view Islam only as a peripheral phenomenon or not fully rooted in this region”(Azra, 2002).

Azra took the example of Snouck Hurgronje’s research in the book *The Achehnese*, which, according to him, “reduces Islam by making a very strict distinction between Islam and custom even though in reality many parts of custom are not always incompatible with Islam.”(Azra, 2002; Noer, 1982). This separation of customs and Islam, according to Zulfikar RH Pohan, in turn, became a way for the Dutch colonial government to conquer Aceh. Hurgronje pushed for custom to be positioned as superior to Islam, which also happened in West Sumatra when the colonial government exploited custom for colonial purposes (Zulfikar RH, 2020).

Apart from Hurgronje, Azyumardi Azra also raised the example of Clifford Geertz (1926-2006):

“The most recent example of this conceptual reduction is perfectly described by Geertz who coined the term “Javanese religion” as a substitute for Islam to analyze the phenomenon of Islam among Javanese society. The term itself reflects his refusal to recognize Islam - whatever its translation and actualization among Javanese society. He made very popular sociological divisions, such as *santri*, *abangan*, and *priyayi*, which conceptually are not always valid to explain the religious and cultural life of Javanese society (Azra 2002).”

Geertz’s research, later published in the book *The Religion of Java*, became a very influential reference in describing Islam in Indonesia so that we know the trichotomy of *santri*, *priyayi*, and *abangan*. From this research, the term “syncretism” became popular to describe “Javanese religion” or the style of Islam in Java so that the term entered the subconscious of most Indonesian people without realizing the consequences of its meaning (Fawaid in Irfan Afifi (ed) et al. 2021). Ulil Abshar-Abdalla, for example, argued that syncretism contains

a kind of ridicule: “that Islam no longer appears in its original form, but has been mixed with external elements,” a form of religion that is far from its “pure” nature as it was born. Moreover, thrives in its place of origin (Ulil Abshar in Kristanto and Nirwan Ahmad Arsuka, 2002).

Hurgronje and Geertz appeared as researchers-as-participants in the Kim Knott category (Knott, 2005). Practicing methodological agnosticism, they may tend to be neutral. However, from a postcolonial and decolonial perspective, we can see the hidden epistemic background of their research construction. In the next turn, the knowledge construction that was built had a significant influence on the construction of the identity of the Muslim community in Indonesia—including personally.

This significant influence can be seen in the essays written by Irfan Afifi, who wrote the book *Saya, Java, and Islam* (2022) and several other freelance writings. The strong autobiographical nuance in Irfan Afifi’s writings shows that the impact of colonial construction extends to various generations. In the opening essay in his book, Irfan, who studied undergraduate at the Faculty of Philosophy, Gadjah Mada University, Yogyakarta, now manages *langgar.co* (an online cultural institution and media) expresses his anxiety over his Islamic and Javanese identity after reading the syncretic construction of Javanese Islam with pejorative content. what it contains, “namely a religion that was accepted reluctantly, and then with acute frustration mixed it up in an unclear mixture.” He also found similar constructions not only from Western researchers, such as Raffles, who described Javanese Islam as “superficial Muslims,” aka “Muslims who are only on the surface,” and Crawford, who described Javanese Islam as “a kind of modified Islam, a mixture of native customs with Islamic and Hindu laws.” In his dissertation, Harun Hadiwijono, former rector of Duta Wacana Yogyakarta Theological College, who researched Javanese mysticism at the Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam (1967) also voiced the same thing: that Islam is only a “thin layer” that covers Javanese society as a whole. HM Rasyidi, who once served as Minister of Religion of the Republic of Indonesia, stated in his dissertation research on *Serat Centhini* at the French Sorbonne that “wirid” as a teaching of Javanese Sufism is contrary to Islamic teachings (Irfan Afifi, 2022).

Irfan’s anxiety, born in Ngawi before college, was raised in the madrasa and Islamic boarding school traditions in his village, then continued with his strenuous efforts to explore Islamic and Javanese treasures until finally, Irfan met Western research works that were critical of the construction of Javanese Islamic knowledge that had been established for a long time, an attempt at decolonization. The research of Nancy Florida, an Indonesian researcher from America, opened Irfan’s awareness of the construction of colonial interests over Javanese Islam. According to Nancy, the colonial government did not want to see the single identity of Java and Islam because it had proven to be an extraordinary resistance force, as depicted in the Java War (1825-1830) (Irfan Afifi, 2023).

For this reason, the Dutch colonial government then developed what is now known as “Javanology” in the Institute of Javanese Culture and Language (Her Instituut voor de Javaansche Taal), which was founded in 1832, whose direction seemed to want Javanese and Islamic identities not to merge (Irfan Afifi, 2022). Ricklefs confirms that after the Java War, the pillars of “mystical synthesis” (identification of Javanese as Muslims, widespread implementation of the five pillars of Islam, and acceptance of the reality of local spiritual powers) in Java began to face challenges, namely from new formations of knowledge construction about Islam and Java (M.C. Ricklefs, 2013).

One example put forward by Irfan is the construction that the arrival of Islam in Java interrupted Java’s glorious period in the Javanese Hindu-Buddhist Majapahit era. By examining Javanese literary works, Pigeaud states that Islam came to interrupt the sophistication of pre-Islamic Javanese literature with strange and foreign passion literature, and a revival of Javanese literature emerged in the 18th-19th century Surakarta with prominent figures Yasadipura and Ranggawarsita. The Renaissance comprised kakawin compositions with ‘Indian’ themes in *serat*, *suluk*, *babad*, and *wirid*.

However, finally, Nancy Florida began her extraordinary research by studying almost three-quarters of a million pages of ancient Javanese manuscripts in the Surakarta Kasunanan Palace, Mangkunegaran Palace, and the Radya Pustaka Library. Nancy’s findings strongly refute Pigeaud’s claims. According to Nancy, of the 1450 titles in the collection she researched, there are only 17 works of composition, which Pigeaud claims are works of the Javanese literary Renaissance, while there are almost 500 titles of works that are included in the Islamic literary genre (Irfan Afifi, 2022).

In Irfan Afifi’s reading above, we see pretty solid and thick personal anxiety, which from one side can also be seen as the impact of colonial construction that gripped in such a way through the production of knowledge, stigma, and cultural images regarding the relationship between Islam and Java. Moreover, we know that Irfan Afifi is not alone.

Another figure who has similar concerns is Nur Khalik Ridwan. In one of his early works, Nur Khalik criticized the categorization of “traditional” and “modern,” which came from the West and was often used by Indonesian intellectuals. This categorization later gave rise to a certain stigma. After a reasonably thorough study, Nur Khalik, in his work, offers another category called Bourgeois Islam and Proletarian Islam (Ridwan, 2001).

In his recent works, Nur Khalik pays more particular attention to Javanese and Islamic identity issues. Nur Khalik commented that a new generation of Javanese are searching for their Javanese identity, which is related to Java and Islam, including among students and others. These search maps use a syncretic approach, according to Nur Khalik...

...oriented to produce fences and partitions that seem stable and unchanging; there is even a feeling of not being able to reconcile with Java’s past history in the face of its historical reality, due to the change to Islam; and the search for authenticity that has nuances of Javanese purification, which gives the impression

that others are not authentic, no more Javanese (Ridwan 2001).

Nur Khalik takes another path to answer the anxiety of Javanese and Islamic identity construction. The choice taken was the indigenization of Islam, an idea inspired, among other things, by Gus Dur's ideas. In the context of methodological decolonization, Smith also mentions indigenization as one of the steps that can be taken (Smith, 2005; Kleden, 1988).

By looking at the development of Javanese Muslim society using an indigenization framework, Nur Khalik noted eight crucial points, namely that (1) indigenization of Islam is not Javanization-Syncretism; (2) indigenization of Islam is not abandoning Islamic norms for the sake of culture; (3) indigenization of Islam expands aspects of Islamic manifestation; (4) indigenization of Islam is not anti-Arab and foreign culture; (5) indigenization of Islam, not intermingling of Islam and culture; (6) indigenization of Islam does not mean avoiding local cultural resistance; (7) indigenization of Islam requires internal dynamics of Islam; and (8) Islamic indigenization sees cultural work as worship (Ridwan, 2021).

Using the framework of Islamic indigenization, Nur Khalik re-examines the vital period of Islamization and indigenization carried out by the saints in Java, including how the saints built movements for equality/equality of citizens, the use of literature as a medium for conveying da'wah messages, indigenization through architecture, and also in the political order. In this period, the foundation of the Islamic character that forms today's Javanese Islamic identity was formed, the main character of which was the indigenization of Javanese Islam (Ridwan, 2021).

In the previous section, Nur Khalik provided a rebuttal to colonial construction, which tended to state that Islam took advantage of the political disruption. It occurred among the Hindu rulers at that time by explaining the cultural work of the saints in responding to the religious and cultural crisis of Javanese society by offering a building of Javanese human identity based on Islamic teachings that have been indigenized through various channels, as explained above (Ridwan, 2021).

At this point, we can see that both Irfan Afifi and Nur Khalik Ridwan are subjects who have gone through the three stages of decolonization, as mentioned by Frantz Fanon above, namely a strong awareness of the existence of colonial epistemic power, a conscious effort to redefine an identity contaminated by construction. Colonialism and efforts to produce "rival" knowledge to the colonial legacy of knowledge also involve a more comprehensive range of parties. Let us read other works and the activities of these two figures who are also involved in similar projects (both are pretty active in scientific forums on this theme). We will find both have gone through the stages Fanon so intensely describes. (Irfan Afifi 2023; Nur Khalik Ridwan 2023). From a more "radical" perspective, it could perhaps be said that both of them are committing what Mignolo calls "epistemic disobedience" (Mignolo, 2009).

## **Reflective Notes**

The description in this article attempts to map the study of decolonization of Islamic studies by emphasizing the background, foundations, and practices included in Islamic studies in Indonesia. The context of Indonesian society as a nation that has experienced a long history of colonialism strengthens the urgency of studies from a decolonial perspective, including Islamic studies.

However, what must be anticipated from the decolonization project is the tendency to fall into an ideological model of decolonization in the sense of an attempt to build a counter-narrative to colonial constructions trapped in specific mythological constructions. In the study of history, for example, the trap of historical construction, which is religious-magical and cosmogonic, must be guarded against by maintaining a scientific empirical approach model (Kleden, 1988).

Another possibility is that counter-narratives to colonial discourse sometimes come in the form of apologetics with a basis that places more emphasis on normative or theological aspects. Apart from that, there is also a trend of thought that seeks to put forward an approach that is in line with the Islamization of science projects. For example, the idea that the construction of Muslim history must use a conceptual framework based on the Koran and Sunnah because the history of Muslim society is a multidimensional phenomenon with faith at its center, and in Islam, there is no distinction between the sacred and the secular (Kuntowijoyo, 1998).

Apart from these various tendencies, it must be underlined that the decolonization project of Islamic studies cannot be separated from its essential character of placing religion as an object of scientific study, which must also be approached with a scientific approach. The main thing needed is to dismantle colonial construction scientifically and objectively based on a new epistemic basis, including by rereading primary historical data as in the discourse on the history of Islam in the archipelago as discussed above.

## **CONCLUSION**

From the description above, this research concludes that the decolonization of Islamic studies was motivated by concerns among Muslim scientists, particularly over the impact of colonialism in the academic-scientific area, which formed a cultural construction that was no less oppressive than physical colonization. Decolonization seeks to go beyond the postcolonial project, which, at a certain point, is still shadowed by the ideas of Western figures. The epistemological basis of decolonization is a critical approach in the study of religion in general, and it also involves political factors of knowledge in one of its dimensions.

The discourse of decolonization about the struggle for Javanese Islamic identity in Indonesia becomes an accurate portrait of “epistemic disobedience” towards the impact of the colonization of consciousness and knowledge. It is done by critically dismantling the construction of colonial knowledge about Javanese identity, which was obscured and severed

from the ties of Islam as part of a historical identity with quite solid historical roots. Until now, efforts have been made to extract new data and perspectives to dismantle colonial knowledge constructions, including historical constructions, to form contemporary identity awareness.

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