

Islam and Colonialism: Keys to Consolidating Indonesian Modernity

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The spread of Islam as well as Dutch colonization made Indonesia into what it is today. Islam was responsible for Indonesia's transition to modernity and Dutch colonization unified the vast archipelago into a nation. Well known South East Asian historians, Jeffery Hadler and M.C. Ricklefs have both argued that Islam is one of the main consolidating factors in modern Indonesia. On the other hand, during the 1600s and beyond, Indonesia was occupied by the Dutch. The Dutch played an important role in the consolidation of modern day Indonesia. The Dutch unified Indonesia by creating and stimulating an economy, fighting and facilitating wars, establishing a government, and instituting reparations for harsh treatment in the past. The "idea" of Indonesia started to form through the Dutch occupation, yet Islam was more of a conduit for consolidation, as opposed to the Dutch who were the glue and architects of modern day Indonesia.

Indonesia lies on the Arabian Peninsula and during the 1300s this gave Arab traders access to its ports.¹ In consequence, Indonesia was exposed to Islam which placed it on a path to modernity. In order to discuss how the Dutch were the main consolidating factor in Indonesia, a history of Islam in Indonesia as well as its effects on Indonesia need to be addressed. To start, Islam was theorized to have arrived in Java and Sumatra during the 1300s. M.C Ricklefs made this determination in his works through examining grave stones that had Islamic names on them. These gravestones tell many a story of how Indonesia became Islamized. For example, one of the gravestones was one of the very first Sultans in Indonesia's history while others were foreign Muslims who migrated, and some were natives who were converted to Islam. In Brunei or East Java, there is a stone that pays homage to said first Sultan, Malik as Salih.² One of the first signs of Islam was in reports from Marco Polo's exhibition from China. He reported that the town of Perlak was Islamic.³ Ricklefs likes to believe that Indonesia's first

¹ M.C. Ricklefs, *A History of Modern Indonesia Since c.1300* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1993), 9.

² *Ibid.*, 3-4.

³ *Ibid.*, 3-5.

encounters with Islam began in the Hindu Buddhist court of Majapahit. This claim can be proved because Majapahit's grave yards displayed Muslim inscriptions on the stones. Since merchants were not allowed there or to communicate with people inside the court due to the Hindu cast system, Islamic preachers or wise men would find themselves in these courts and spread the word of Islam.⁴ In the 14th Century a Chinese Muslim by the name Ma Huan visited the coast of East Java to document the spread of Islam. Due to the presence of Islamic gravestones in the court of Majapahit, he also concluded that the spread of Islam began in the interior before the exterior coastline.⁵ It would make more sense that it would spread on the coastline because the Islamic traders would be found there and spread it to whoever stumbled upon them. This is not the case though.

Islam began to spread through the centuries to the point where islands such as Sulawesi and Aceh had Sultans or Islamic Kings. These Islamic kings would try to expand their empires and war with each other. There is one really good example of this and it would be a Sultan from Mataram by the name of Amangkurat I. This King's goal was to expand his empire to the coastline and use the Dutch VOC to take it. With efforts of political monopolization in Mataram and intentions to expand his empire, he created tension between the coastline and the interior.⁶ This tension caused Islam to spread as well the interior and the coastline to assimilate with one another. In general, this was being done in all of modern Indonesia for the same purposes. This warfare further consolidated Indonesia as a single nation. Other examples of this would be Johor's reign in Eastern Indonesia. They tried to overthrow kingdoms such as Ache who were also powerful at the time. These wars led to the spread of Islam as well as the production of an economy.

Wars generate a lot of economic activity such as the production of weapons, armies, and devices of warfare. This is apparent with European assistance as well, due to the fact that a lot of Indonesian natives were fighting on Dutch ships as well as using Dutch and Portuguese weapons in their quarrels. These steps led Sultans to acquire and spread more wealth. Islam also spread in different types of war or conflict such as the Islamic Jihad. This is evident in the conflict between traditionalists, and Islamic reformers in Indonesia. The

⁴ *Ibid*, 6.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 33.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 36.

reformists were led by a neo-Wahhabist movement. This came in the form of the Padri war. This Jihad first started when an extremist reformist by the name of Tuanku nan Rencha murdered his maternal aunt and the reformists started lighting matriarchal longhouses on fire.⁷ These squabbles continued on for twenty years. The reformists were defeated by the Javanese/Dutch troops, but this did not mean the reformists did not accomplish their goal of indoctrinating a stricter interpretation of the Quran in West Sumatra

In consequence, intellectuals from Minangkabau decided to further justify and strengthen their matrilineal views. It is apparent that Islamic Jihad delegitimized animist Adat traditions in Sumatra, but at the same time strengthened traditionalist culture. In many ways, Islam found its way in the Minangkabau culture. For instance, there was inclusion of Islamic bathroom etiquette in the matrilineal longhouse. In addition, teenage boys are sent to communal houses where they live and learn the way of the Quran. While learning this, they learned an Islamic way of living. For example, they would go to school and educate themselves to the point where they were eligible for respectable occupations. Many wanted to be police officers or scribes to increase their chances of getting married to an ideal partner. So, in turn they furthered themselves in life for the purpose of being a good candidate for arranged marriage. Arranged marriage is a cornerstone in Islamic religion so it is apparent that animism and Hindu/Buddhist traditions were starting to dissolve within the community. Islam was taking such storm, that people were wearing Sarongs in the household.

With Islamic education of men in mind, Islam was also a modernizing factor in modern day Indonesia because the Quran helped spread literacy. Islam had a religious text called the Quran, this found its way into people's homes and increased their ability to read. In order to believe in Islam and be a part of the religion, one needs to read the Quran. Under this precipice, many people started to read the Quran. Consequently, Islam brought Arabic into Indonesia. This is evident in later grave markers due to the fact that some of them were actually in Arabic.⁸ To further exclaim the point, Malay and Javanese literature were stories about Islamic conversions. For example, one Javanese text discusses the spread of Islam through a very comical tale. To start, a man spit in a future Sultans mouth, and the next day he magically was able to read the Quran, and was circumcised as

⁷ Jeffrey Hadler, *Muslims and Matriarchs: Cultural Resilience in Indonesia through Jihad and Colonialism* (New York: Cornell University Press, 2013), 45.

⁸ *Ibid*, 3-5.

well as knowing certain Islamic rites of passage.⁹ Malay texts describe similar stories, but pertaining less to Sufism or a mystical interpretation of Islam.

As helpful as Islam was in modernizing day Indonesia, the Dutch did a much better job of consolidating it. They were able to do this because they took complete economic control of Indonesia in securing major ports as trading posts. During the 1600s people needed a means of preserving their meats, so the best way to do this was with the use of spices. Indonesia happened to have all of these spices that were needed and the Dutch saw the potential for commercialization in the Indonesian spice trade. The Dutch ended up dominating all of Indonesia and taking the economic power that the Portuguese, and the British secured. They were able to do this for a multitude of reasons, but the two biggest was their iron focus on commercialization and lack of focus in proselytization. The Dutch were mostly Calvinist and other forms of Protestant, these branches of Christianity were not interested in spreading their religion like Catholicism and Islam. At this point they ruthlessly pursued commercialization and exploitation of Indonesia's resources/people.

The Dutch first started commercializing Indonesia with the VOC or the Dutch East India Company. This company was issued a charter that gave them the capability to wage war, build fortresses, and conclude treaties in Asia. The VOC used this treaty to their advantage and started their conquest. They allied with the Hituese and conquered the Portuguese port at Anbon.¹⁰ They, in turn named this fort "Victoria." From then on the VOC began a campaign of total warfare. They knew they could not war without trade and vice versa. So they stuck with this policy throughout under the policy of Governor General. A good example of this would be their ruthlessness toward people who got in their way. When there was an anti-VOC threat, it was crushed. There was an emerging Sultan by the name of Kakaili, the VOC dealt with him by tricking him onto a boat and arresting him. His forces then retreated to their fort to start a war. In consequence, the Dutch fought and won the fortress back in Hitu. After that, Kakali promised to help with the trade monopoly and this led the Dutch to make a treaty with him that allowed their independence from another island.¹¹ In turn, he would stop smuggling

⁹ *Ibid*, 24.

¹⁰ *Ibid*, 56.

¹¹ *Ibid*, 62-70.

cloves. However, this did not work out and the VOC had him assassinated. This was their first major step in monopolizing the spice trade.

Another step they took was securing Maluku. They were very close to monopolization of the spice trade, and the port was so secure that no form of resistance against the VOC was possible. This was why the VOC was so successful, because they were ruthless and calculating. They allied with people like the Javanese in and became completely involved in their affairs which only furthered their own agenda. The VOC was solely responsible for the restoration of Mataram.¹² They helped expand the empire, but in turn had access to the coastline as well as their resources. This allowed the Dutch to further monopolize. With access to the coastlines, they could build fortresses and control what came in and out of the coast line. This further allowed them to monopolize trade. One can see a pattern in what the Dutch were trying to do in Indonesia. They would take islands, control them and use other islands and nations to help them acquire more islands. Then they would have control over the spice trade in addition to the people because they would enslave them. The Dutch had the market cornered in every which way.

The Dutch further bolstered their monopolization with the acquisition of Batavia or modern day Jakarta.¹³ This allowed for many things. To start, it was a major trading port that the Dutch had control over. This meant that they not only could trade and make profit, but they created jobs for the Javanese and labor which allowed for an economy to start to flourish. Then the Javanese and Dutch would all convene in this port and form a city. The Dutch were enacting this process all over, in fact they had port cities in Maluku, and Malacca which they took from the Portuguese.¹⁴ These Port cities are important for many reasons. Maluku had a plethora of cloves and pepper that could be sold. In fact, the VOC had such a surplus of pepper, so people were paid in pepper for their work.¹⁵ The Dutch were able to do this because they had access to the best weaponry of the time.

When they made treaties and alliances with other islands to secure their self-interest, they would supply their allies with weapons. When these islands and different places were warring with each other, there was a Columbian exchange

¹² *Ibid*, 33-42.

¹³ *Ibid*, 30-33.

¹⁴ *Ibid*, 50-55.

¹⁵ *Ibid*, 65.

that occurred. An example would be how the boundaries between the interior and exterior of Java dissolved due to the Dutch providing support to expanding empires. This ended up being a common theme for the Dutch and this cycle created this effect on a mass scale. The process of war brought the islands closer to each other, and all of the islands that the Dutch allied with now had one thing in common being the Dutch. The Dutch, through warfare acquired many trading ports by securing Malacca and Maluku.¹⁶ These two ports are important because both are entry ways into Indonesia. By controlling these two points, they had control of everything in and out of Indonesia. Having this level of control gave the Dutch the power to consolidate Indonesia. The Dutch had established this level of control through their campaigns in the East. When they were in East Indonesia, they were taking islands left and right. By the end of the 1700's there was little to no resistance against them.

The Dutch were able to consolidate Indonesia with the amount of control they had. They were so influential and widespread, that no affair in Java did not have any Dutch involvement. Their control extended to all of the islands. An example being, they had control of Bali through the slave trade. The Slave trade helped Indonesia become a singular identity through the economy. With slave labor the Dutch were not spending as much money and maximizing their profit on spices. Plus, selling slaves also provided an income for them. The slave trade brought people from some islands to other islands which allowed for cultural exchange. This cultural exchange led to the overlap of languages and so on and so forth. The Dutch were even partially responsible for spreading the national language of Bahasa. On some rare occasions, the Dutch did spread Calvinism. In order to spread their form of Christianity, they needed a common language to unite the people, so they pushed for a national language.¹⁷ The Dutch helped even further consolidate Indonesia this way because it built the people up to a level where they could all communicate. This unified people from Java, Sumatra, and even small islands like present day Erenjaya.

During the latter 1700s, the Dutch were starting to lose military steam. There are many reasons for this due to inter-European turmoil, the strengthening of Yogyakarta, and corruption in the VOC. During the last decade of the 17th century, the Dutch had a total of 89 men in their garrison at Yogyakarta. Yogyakarta

¹⁶ *Ibid*, 70.

¹⁷ *Ibid*, 34.

itself had almost 100,000 troops led by the Sultan.¹⁸ This shows that the Dutch did not have a chance at having any kind of control in Yogyakarta and that their current colonial tactics were not working. In other parts of Indonesia, the Dutch were also suffering because of conflicts with the Netherlands. Because of their fourth war with the English, the Netherlands could not supply troops to the VOC, so the VOC was slowly deteriorating and losing its strength. The VOC also requested monetary loan as well as 2500 troops from the motherland.¹⁹ In response, the Dutch government investigated VOC affairs and found mass corruption, as well as bankruptcy. The crowning of Napoleon Bonaparte's brother as king of the Netherlands also contributed to the VOC's downfall.²⁰ Due to French occupation in the Netherlands, the VOC was dissolved. This meant that the VOC was not involved in Dutch Indonesian affairs, and the Dutch government had control of Indonesian affairs. Not too long after the Dutch lost Batavia to the British but gained control Yogyakarta with the natives.²¹ These historical events started to pave the way for a new form of colonialism. The Dutch would regain power and do so in a less ruthless fashion.

This new colonialism was started with a man by the name of Raffles, and it was intended to take a more active approach in integrating the natives into monopolizing Indonesia. Stamford Raffles was a fantastic reformer and starting, "native welfare" and well as "land rent" which is a tax system that started a formal economy.²² This showed that the Dutch still wanted to commercialize Indonesia, but in a much more symbiotic fashion. At this point they still wanted to commercialize Indonesia, but it would be better for their self-interest to stop exploiting the people and to deliver reparations. They did this through multiple means and their new cooperative mentality started to consolidate Indonesia.

With the Dutch reconstruction headed by Raffles and Herman Willem Daendals, the Dutch started to regain control of their former ports. What these two are most famous for in their reforms was their policy of creating native institutions. As well as the new reforms, the Dutch also exercised a newly acquired judicial power. They often began exercising influence in court cases regarding who succeeded the past Sultan. This shows that their influence

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 60-65.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 61-63.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 86-88.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 54.

²² Hadler, *Muslims and Matriarchs*, 42-50.

penetrated the highest ranks of the natives. In 1830, they finally achieved political dominance in Java as well as the interior through the Java war.²³ For one of the first times in their history, the Dutch were able to have complete dominance and exploitation over Java. The Dutch consolidated Indonesia through this control. One example of this would be reforms to the tax system. Instead of having villages give the Dutch forty percent of their crops, the Dutch let the natives use separate land where they would plant crops exclusively sold to the Dutch colonial government.²⁴ This helped consolidate Indonesia, because the Javanese were allowed to fuel their economy with a tax system. Of course other islands had these tax systems in place, so in theory the whole of Indonesia was developing through unified tax system.²⁵ The Dutch were starting to form a colonial government which the separate peoples could identify with. These developments created an environment that allowed the people of Sumatra, Java, and the rest of the islands to identify as a nation. The Dutch were beginning to create a national identity through their new government systems.

These efforts helped bring Indonesia closer. One of the more interesting ways they provided public assistance was thorough smallpox inoculations. The Dutch government actually made an effort to reduce these infections and prevent them from happening to the Javanese. They would do this by lacerating the arm and inserting the medication inside the slits.²⁶ This form of public assistance further consolidated Indonesia, because the mass inoculations were a sign of public assistance. The practice unified the natives as it gave them a nationwide healthcare. The government felt responsible towards the citizen and the public convened to receive these inoculations. In order to practice this, there needs to be an economy and the Dutch government supported mass inoculations through taxes.

In turn, Indonesia was slowly starting to consolidate into a nation. The Dutch also provided educational programs for the Minangkabau. They also legalized and provided abortion services, but advocated against it. Some government officials thought it was unsanitary and dangerous for the community, so they tried to put a stop to it. An example of this would be, "Ludeking described native abortion techniques, both medicinal and magical. He saw this practice as

²³ *Ibid*, 15-20.

²⁴ *Ibid*, 22-30.

²⁵ *Ibid*, 40.

²⁶ *Ibid*, 45-50.

most damaging to the health of a community that had, he sniffed, no indigenous word for hygiene. In an attempt to introduce European notions of health and sanitation. Ludeking coordinated an effort to control the spread of dysentery”.²⁷ This shows that the Dutch government had an interest in making the native people safe. Ludeking, noticed that the community would be ravaged by their unsanitary practices, and did everything he could to fix it.

The Dutch government was bringing the people of Indonesia together by educating them on safe medical practices. The indoctrination of safe medical practices further consolidated Indonesia as nation by allowing the natives to focus on building society as opposed to surviving. Medicine is necessary in building a nation because it creates a safe environment for the people which in turn instills a productive moral amongst the masses.

The Dutch involvement in Indonesia brought the nation together through the drafting of laws. Laws provide a code of conduct for the masses to abide by which in consequence creates order. To start, the Dutch government put domestic laws in place which implemented fines up to fifteen rupia. An example of these kinds of fines would be “wrongful movement.”²⁸ These same fines would be given to women who committed adultery or slept away from their house for more than one night. There were also other laws that had heftier fines such as the manufacture of gunpowder and firearms. Surprisingly, the highest fines were given out for crimes such as squatting on your neighbor’s property.²⁹ These laws set an expectation of behavior for the masses to follow In consequence, the natives followed the laws making them apart of a uniform society. A common code of conduct consolidates a nation, because it creates a widely accepted set of norms and customs that the people mutually agreed upon. These laws came to fruition through meetings held by the Dutch government, as well as the native elites.³⁰

Several things happened with these meetings that were key in Indonesia’s consolidation, the first being the formal abolition of slavery and the second being an establishment of a bureaucracy in Western Sumatra. All these are signs of a nation coming together and operating as one. The government brought the Minangkabau together through legally established conduct. The creation of laws is a major prerequisite for the formation of a nation and this historical process can

²⁷ *Ibid*, 50.

²⁸ *Ibid*, 15-20.

²⁹ *Ibid*, 10-12.

³⁰ *Ibid*, 14-17.

be seen in Indonesia. Based on this logic, it can be argued that Indonesia's consolidation can be attributed to the Dutch for implementing a unified law system.

The Dutch soon began instituting schools in the islands. Colonial education is one of the most important consolidating factors in Dutch involvement. The purpose of the education was to educate the native population and prepare them to serve the Indonesia as public employees. Without education a society cannot ascend past certain plateaus, but with the addition of education it is entirely possible to create a competent society that becomes self-sufficient. At one point the amount of natives being educated in Western Sumatra was very low: about 1/6000 to be exact. This improved drastically over a period of a few decades due to the Dutch government's intervention. The Dutch government facilitated the standardization and establishment of formal education. Additionally, the entire educational system was reorganized. As a result, the educational system flourished, and education was a widely utilized system.

On a final note, the Dutch government built infrastructure to modernize the country. This infrastructure included, bridges, roads, irrigation, and buildings.³¹ These projects were essential in Indonesia's development because it allowed for the people to freely travel the country and seek opportunity in the city. Also, it allowed for even further development because it got people where they needed to be in a timely fashion. The addition of infrastructure unified Indonesia by making the entire country more accessible to its own people. Infrastructure has always been a consolidating factor in societal development as it allows for the transportation of goods and people. In conjunction with the creation of infrastructure, there was public assistance given by the Dutch government in the form of housing and social welfare. These modern elements further synthesized Indonesia by conveniently providing accessible living, with effective means of travelling, in addition to incentive to work for the sake of society.

It can be seen that the Dutch involvement was much more importance the formation of Indonesia than Islam. Both were impressive forces that shaped modern day Indonesia, but Islam did not directly shape and hold the country together like the Dutch did. The Dutch built an economy, a government, and an entire country over 400 years of occupation. The Dutch installed school and educational reform as well as provide public health education. Islam's grasp could

³¹ *Ibid*, 80.

not reach to these heights. Islam could not build infrastructure and prevent dysentery from wiping out villages. On the other, hand the Dutch government could. It is easy to see and say that the Dutch had much more involvement in the consolidation of Indonesia and all the evidence presented points toward that. The information provided by Ricklefs and Hadler both show that the Dutch implemented a government that paved the way for Modern Indonesia to be created.