

## THE WESTERN PERSPECTIVE ON ISLAM: Reading the Legacy of Snouck Hurgronje on Islamic Studies

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**Abstract:** This article discusses the Western perspective on Islamic studies, particularly through the academic legacy of Snouck Hurgronje, a Dutch scholar known for his research on Muslim culture in Aceh and his influence on the Dutch colonial strategy in the Dutch East Indies. The author aims to answer two questions: what were the methods and characteristics of Islamic studies used by Snouck Hurgronje, and how do they differ from contemporary Islamic studies? Utilizing library research, it examines scholarly literature on Hurgronje, comparing his methods to current Islamic studies practices in Western universities and Indonesia. The article sheds light on Hurgronje's role in introducing anthropology and ethnography to Islamic studies, noting his significant contributions to the development of ethnographic methods in this area. It suggests that his approach has been influential in shaping the study of Islam and continues to influence contemporary research methodologies in the field. However, the article also notes that 21st-century Islamic studies are fundamentally different from Hurgronje's era, with a greater focus on insider researchers and a lack of imperialistic interests. These scholars, particularly those in Indonesian universities under the Ministry of Religious Affairs, have a significant influence on the field and continue the legacy of Hurgronje by using philological, anthropological, and ethnographic approaches to Islamic studies.

**Keywords:** Snouck Hurgronje; Islamic studies; anthropology; ethnography; orthodoxy.

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### Introduction

In general, there are certain perspectives pertaining to the study of Islam. For Muslims (insiders' perspective), studying Islam means understanding the true meaning of their religion from its religious practices to its theological beliefs with the aim to increase their devotion.<sup>1</sup> However, academically, one does not need to become a Muslim (outsider) to study Islam. This can be seen from the academic traditions in the Western world, where almost all campuses in Europe and the United States have Islamic studies departments.<sup>2</sup> Even though in some practices, there are instances of questionable ethics, such as pretending to be Muslim to obtain research data, that are debatable. One such case is Snouck Hurgronje, a researcher and professor of Arabic at Leiden University in the Netherlands.

This article explores the Western perspective on Islam as influenced by Hurgronje, a renowned Dutch scholar recognized for his study of Muslim culture in Aceh. It examines Hurgronje's academic legacy and how his research informed the Dutch colonial government's strategies, leading to their dominance over Aceh, known as the "veranda of Mecca," and the eventual control of the entire Dutch East Indies, from Sabang to Merauke. This article answers two questions. First, what are the methods and characteristics of Islamic studies used by Snouck Hurgronje? Second, what were the methods and traditions of researching Islam in the West in the late 19th or early 20th century, and how do they differ from contemporary Western Islamic studies? The article aims to answer the question posed using the library research method. The data for this study is derived from scholarly literature on Hurgronje that discusses

<sup>1</sup> Bustami MS Khir, "Islamic Studies within Islam: Definition, Approaches and Challenges of Modernity," *Journal of Beliefs & Values* 28, no. 3 (2007): 257–66.

<sup>2</sup> Charles Kurzman and Carl W. Ernst, "Islamic Studies in US Universities," *Review of Middle East Studies* 46, no. 1 (2012): 24–46; Ataullah Siddiqui, "Islam at Universities in England: Meeting the Needs and Investing in the Future," *Islamic Studies* 46, no. 4 (2007): 559–70; Birgitte Schepelern Johansen, *Islam at the European Universities* (University of Copenhagen, Research Priority Area Religion in the 21st Century, 2006).

his research on Islam. These writings will be compared with the contemporary methodologies used in the study of Islam in Western universities, with a particular focus on institutions in the Netherlands.

In previous research, many scholars have studied Hurgronje, including Harry J. Benda,<sup>3</sup> P.S. van Koningsveld,<sup>4</sup> Michael Laffan,<sup>5</sup> Jajat Burhanuddin,<sup>6</sup> Jajang Rohmana,<sup>7</sup> Arnoud Vrolijk and Richard van Leeuwen,<sup>8</sup> Dietrich Jung,<sup>9</sup> Ulrike Freitag,<sup>10</sup> Antje Missbach,<sup>11</sup> and

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<sup>3</sup> Harry J. Benda, "Christiaan Snouck Hurgronje and the Foundations of Dutch Islamic Policy in Indonesia," *The Journal of Modern History* 30, no. 4 (1958): 338–47; Harry J. Benda, *The Crescent and the Rising Sun: Indonesia Islam under the Japanese Occupation, 1942-1945* (The Hague and Bandung: W. van Hoeve, 1958).

<sup>4</sup> Pieter Sjoerd van Koningsveld, *Snouck Hurgronje dan Islam: Delapan Karangan Tentang Hidup dan Karya Seorang Orientalis Zaman Kolonial* (Jakarta: Girimukti Pasaka, 1989); Pieter Sjoerd van Koningsveld, "Conversion of European Intellectuals to Islam: The Case of Christiaan Snouck Hurgronje Alias 'Abd al-Ghaffār," in *Muslims in Interwar Europe: A Transcultural Historical Perspective*, ed. Bekim Agai, Umar Ryad, and Mehdi Sajid (Leiden: Brill, 2016), 88–104.

<sup>5</sup> Michael Laffan, "Raden Aboe Bakar An Introductory Note Concerning Snouck Hurgronje's Informant in Jeddah (1884-1912)," *Bijdragen Tot de Taal-, Land-En Volkenkunde* 155, no. 4 (1999): 517–42; Michael F. Laffan, "Writing from the Colonial Margin: The Letters of Aboe Bakar Djajadiningrat to Christiaan Snouck Hurgronje," *Indonesia and the Malay World* 31, no. 91 (2003): 356–80; Michael Francis Laffan, *Islamic Nationhood and Colonial Indonesia: The Umma Below the Winds* (New York: Routledge, 2003); Michael Laffan, *The Makings of Indonesian Islam: Orientalism and the Narration of a Sufi Past* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011).

<sup>6</sup> Jajat Burhanudin, "The Dutch Colonial Policy on Islam: Reading the Intellectual Journey of Snouck Hurgronje," *Al-Jami'ab: Journal of Islamic Studies* 52, no. 1 (2014): 25–58.

<sup>7</sup> Jajang A. Rohmana, "Persahabatan Penjajah dan Bangsa Jajahan di Hindia Belanda: C. Snouck Hurgronje Dan Haji Hasan Mustapa," *Afkaruna: Indonesian Interdisciplinary Journal of Islamic Studies* 12, no. 2 (2016): 144–68; Jajang A. Rohmana, "Rereading Christiaan Snouck Hurgronje: His Islam, Marriage and Indo-European Discontents in the Early Twentieth-Century Priangan," *Walisongo* 26, no. 1 (2018): 35–66; Jajang A. Rohmana, "Colonial Informants and the Acehese-Dutch War: Haji Hasan Mustapa's Response to Teuku Umar's Collaboration with the Dutch Authorities in the East Indies," *Indonesia and the Malay World* 49, no. 143 (2021): 63–81.

<sup>8</sup> Arnoud Vrolijk and Richard van Leeuwen, *Arabic Studies in the Netherlands: A Short History in Portraits, 1580–1950* (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 119.

<sup>9</sup> Dietrich Jung, "Islam as a Problem?: Dutch Religious Politics in the East Indies," *Review of Religious Research*, 2010, 288–301.

<sup>10</sup> Ulrike Freitag, "Scholarly Exchange and Trade: Muḥammad Ḥusayn Naṣīf and His Letters to Christiaan Snouck Hurgronje," in *The Piety of Learning: Islamic Studies in Honor of Stefan Reichmuth*, ed. Michael Kemper and Ralf Elger (Leiden: Brill, 2017), 294.

Kevin Fogg.<sup>12</sup> However, none of these studies have focused on Hurgronje's contributions to the methodology of Islamic studies, particularly in the context of Indonesian Islam and their effects on Indonesian scholars. This article aims to address this gap by presenting scholarly work on Hurgronje that examines his contributions to the methodology of Islamic studies in relation to Indonesia.

In this article, the author argues that Hurgronje had a significant impact on Western scholars of Islamic studies by introducing the use of anthropology and ethnography as methods for collecting data. It can be said that Hurgronje was one of the first researchers to introduce ethnography to the study of Islam. This method is now widely used in the Department of Islamic Studies at Western universities, particularly in the Netherlands.<sup>13</sup> In contrast to the study of Islam during Hurgronje's time, recent research on Islamic studies is conducted by individuals from a variety of backgrounds, without any imperialistic intentions. Today, many researchers of Islam at universities in the West are insiders, coming from Muslim-populated countries such as Indonesia, South Asia, the Middle East and North Africa (MENA), etc. In the Indonesian context, many of these researchers are lecturers or professors at universities/institutes (UIN/IAIN) under the Ministry of Religious Affairs. The presence of these Western-educated academics brings with it the legacy of Hurgronje, namely the tradition of Islamic studies based on anthropological and ethnographic research.

This article is structured in four sections, each providing a perspective on the topic. The first section delves into Hurgronje's career trajectory and his influential research on Muslim culture in the Dutch East Indies, establishing a foundational context for his approach to Islamic studies. The second section situates Hurgronje's work within the broader landscape of Islamic studies during the

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<sup>11</sup> Antje Missbach, "The Aceh War (1873-1913) and the Influence of Christiaan Snouck Hurgronje," *Aceb: History, Politics and Culture* 390 (2010): 39.

<sup>12</sup> Kevin W. Fogg, "Seeking Arabs but Looking at Indonesians: Snouck Hurgronje's Arab Lens on the Dutch East Indies," *Journal of Middle Eastern and Islamic Studies (in Asia)* 8, no. 1 (2014): 51-73.

<sup>13</sup> Léon Buskens, "Dichotomies, Transformations, and Continuities in the Study of Islam," in *Islamic Studies in the Twenty-First Century: Transformations and Continuities*, ed. Léon Buskens and Annemarie van Sandwijk (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2016).

Dutch colonial era in Indonesia, engaging in a comparative analysis with contemporary methodologies in Western and Indonesian academic circles. In the third section, the focus shifts to the enduring impact of Hurgronje's application of anthropology and ethnography in Islamic scholarship, with a particular emphasis on the role of Indonesian institutions under the Ministry of Religious Affairs. The article concludes with a section that brings together the entire discussion, highlighting the significant transformations in Islamic studies from Hurgronje's era to the present, influenced by historical evolutions and modern perspectives.

### **Snouck Hurgronje, An Overview**

Christiaan Snouck Hurgronje was born in 1857 in Oosterhout in the southern region of the Netherlands. His father, Jacob Julianus Snouck Hurgronje (1812-1870), was a preacher in the Dutch Protestant Reformed Church, and his mother, Anna Maria, also came from a family of Protestant preachers. After completing his studies at the Hogere Burgerschool in Breda and taking the national exam, Hurgronje enrolled at Leiden University in 1874. Like many of his 19th-century orientalist contemporaries, he initially studied theology with the aim of becoming a Protestant pastor, following in the footsteps of his father and grandfather. However, in 1878, Hurgronje abandoned his plans to become a pastor and instead began studying Hebrew and Semitic philology, with the goal of being able to read and analyze the Old Testament. His teacher was Prof. Dr. De Goej, an expert in Arabic. According to Van Koningsveld, it was during this period that Snouck Hurgronje developed an interest in the study of Islam and left his studies in theology behind.<sup>14</sup>

In November 1880, Hurgronje successfully defended his doctoral thesis, titled "Het Mekkaansche Feest," which focused on the history and rituals of the Islamic pilgrimage to Mecca. In particular, the thesis examined the circumstances under which the Hajj became one of the Five Pillars of Islam. Afterward, Hurgronje worked as a teacher at the training institute for future colonial officials of the Dutch East Indies in Leiden and Delft from 1881 to 1887.<sup>15</sup> During this time, Snouck Hurgronje had the opportunity to

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<sup>14</sup> Harian Kompas, "Van Koningsveld Melacak Kehidupan Snouck Hurgronje Alias Abdoel Ghaffar," *Kompas*, January 16, 1983.

<sup>15</sup> Vrolijk and van Leeuwen, *Arabic Studies in the Netherlands*, 119.

engage with issues in the Dutch East Indies, even though he had never physically been there.

Academically, during this time, he published various research on Islamic law. While conducting this research, Hurgronje became increasingly captivated by the Hajj in Mecca and sought ways to make a journey to the Arab world.<sup>16</sup> In addition, the colonial government was concerned that the Hajj could be used as a vehicle for the spread of pan-Islamic ideas and anti-colonial sentiment among the pilgrims. Therefore, they sought to gain a better understanding of the Hajj and the motivations of the pilgrims in order to effectively regulate and control the situation.<sup>17</sup>

To address this problem, the Dutch consulate in Jeddah needed an expert in the field of the Hajj to find solutions to their concerns. Hurgronje's expertise in Islamic law and his interest in the Hajj made him the perfect candidate to be sent to Mecca on a research mission for the government. The Dutch colonial government decided to send Hurgronje to Mecca to gather information about the Hajj and pan-Islamism. He arrived in Mecca in late January 1885 and left the holy city in August of the same year. Hurgronje successfully participated in the Hajj ritual, particularly along with those performed by people from the Archipelago in the Holy Land. He was also observing and collecting information on the local Islamic community and their religious practices. Upon his return to the Netherlands, he wrote a detailed report on his findings, which was highly regarded by the colonial government and became a valuable resource for their administration of the Dutch East Indies.<sup>18</sup>

Snouck Hurgronje's journey and stay in Mecca sparked debate about how he was able to enter and reside in the city, given that only Muslims are typically allowed to enter. Some accounts suggest that Hurgronje converted to Islam to gain access to the Southeast Asian Muslim community in Mecca.<sup>19</sup> In the following sub-section, the author will provide more details about Hurgronje's conversion to Islam. For now, it is sufficient to say at this point that the conversion was likely due to political factors.

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<sup>16</sup> Jung, "Islam as a Problem."

<sup>17</sup> Ulrich Freitag, "Scholarly Exchange and Trade: Muḥammad Ḥusayn Naṣīf and His Letters to Christiaan Snouck Hurgronje," 294.

<sup>18</sup> Harian Kompas, "Van Koningsveld Melacak Kehidupan...."

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

As a Muslim, it was easy for Hurgronje to approach the Jawi (Dutch East Indies) Muslims who were performing the hajj in Mecca and obtain data about their behavior there. Hurgronje was not alone; he was assisted by several people in gaining access to the Jawi community, including two Bā'Alawī sayyids from Kalimantan, Habib Salim and Habib Ja'far al-Qadri, and Raden Aboe Bakar Djajadiningrat, the son of a regent of Pandeglang.<sup>20</sup> It was through his relationship with Raden Aboe Bakar Djajadiningrat that Hurgronje had the opportunity to learn the Malay language and even became his assistant during the six months he stayed in Mecca. Based on field research during these six months, Hurgronje published several studies on the history and social conditions of Mecca based on his observations and written and oral sources provided by Sayyid Ahmad Zayni Dahlan. The results of his field research were published in German under the title "Mekka" around 1889.<sup>21</sup> This work can be considered the first ethnographic writing by a non-Muslim about Mecca.

From Mecca, Hurgronje continued his ethnographic adventures to the Dutch East Indies by joining the Office for Indigenous and Arab Affairs (het Kantoor voor Inlandsce en Arabische zaken) as an advisor. He arrived on the island of Java in 1889 and stayed in Buitenzorg (Bogor).<sup>22</sup> His first task assigned by the colonial government was to study Islam in Aceh and its influence on the ongoing war in the northern province of Sumatra. Like his study in Mecca, Hurgronje again "converted to Islam" and stayed from July 1891 to February 1892 in Aceh. The purpose of his research was to analyze the daily lives of the Acehnese people using the method of interviews and participant observation. In one of his writings, Hurgronje said that his task during his stay in Aceh was to "gain a basic understanding of the influence of Islam on the political, social, and domestic life of the Acehnese people."<sup>23</sup> The results of this

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<sup>20</sup> Laffan, "Raden Aboe Bakar An Introductory Note Concerning Snouck Hurgronje's Informant in Jeddah (1884-1912)"; Burhanudin, "The Dutch Colonial Policy on Islam."

<sup>21</sup> For this book's English version, see Christiaan Snouck Hurgronje, *Mekka in the Latter Part of the 19th Century* (Leiden: Brill, 2007).

<sup>22</sup> Vrolijk and van Leeuwen, *Arabic Studies in the Netherlands*, 119.

<sup>23</sup> Christiaan Snouck Hurgronje, *The Acehnese*, trans. A. W. S. O'Sullivan (Leiden: EJ Brill, 1906), v.

research were published in a book entitled *De Atjehers* (The Acehnese).

The published research report had a significant influence on the colonial government, especially in regard to the handling of the Aceh War. The war, which had been ongoing for years (since 1873), was finally able to be ended in 1904 thanks to Snouck Hurgronje's recommendations to the Dutch colonial government. The core of his recommendations was that Islam in the Dutch East Indies, including Aceh, was not like the Catholic religion that had a hierarchical power structure like the papal institution in Rome. Hurgronje even said that the issue of pan-Islamism, which was trending in Mecca at the time, did not have a strong influence in the Dutch East Indies. He said that not all Muslims were subject to the authority of sharia law (*ulama*). Many of them were subject to the authority of *adat* (*uleebalang*), including in Aceh. Therefore, as his recommendation, Snouck advised that Islam as a religion should be allowed to continue. However, the Islamic groups that were politically opposed to the Dutch through the issue of jihad and others should be eliminated.<sup>24</sup> Seeing the potential power of the *adat* (*uleebalang*) competing with the *ulama*, the Dutch used this recommendation by accommodating the *adat* groups in the colonial government structure and attacking the sharia authorities who were not cooperative with them.<sup>25</sup>

Three years after the victory in the Aceh War, Hurgronje was offered a professorship in Arabic studies at Leiden University and returned to the Netherlands. In general, Hurgronje was a notable scholar who played a significant role in the study of Islam in the Netherlands and its colonies. He was one of the first scholars to bring the study of Islam into the field of social studies, using ethnography as a tool for studying the religion. In addition to his contributions to anthropology, Hurgronje also developed the study of Islamic philology in the Netherlands and its colonies. After his era, many other philologists emerged in the Netherlands who continued his work in studying the wealth of Islamic manuscripts in the region.

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<sup>24</sup> Benda, "Christiaan Snouck Hurgronje and the Foundations of Dutch Islamic Policy in Indonesia," 1963.

<sup>25</sup> Missbach, "The Aceh War (1873-1913) and the Influence of Christiaan Snouck Hurgronje."



Some of his notable students include B.J.O. Schrieke, Johan Doorenbos, and G.W.J. Drewes.<sup>26</sup>

### **Islamic Studies and Dutch Colonization in Indonesia**

There are various definitions of Islamic studies, but in general, it can be understood as the academic study of Islam. Islamic studies encompass a wide range of disciplines, including religious studies, history, sociology, and political science, among others. It involves the examination of Islamic texts, beliefs, practices, and their development over time, as well as the impact of Islam on various aspects of society.<sup>27</sup> As a field of study, Islamic studies is concerned with the systematic and critical examination of Islam from a scholarly perspective. Historically, Muslim scholars, particularly in Southeast Asia, have tended to focus on the figures and personalities of Islam, as well as its legal and textual aspects. On the other hand, researchers from North America and Europe have tended to focus on the social and political aspects of Islam. However, this was the case 50 years ago. Nowadays, it can be said that the balance has shifted, and researchers from Muslim-majority countries, including Indonesia, not only study Islam from a theological perspective but also from social and political perspectives.

In the context of Hurgronje (and other Western researchers in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries), studying the social and political aspects of Islam was a major attraction. This was also related to the field of Orientalism, in which, historically (particularly in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries), Western scholars in this field specifically studied the languages and literature of the Middle East and Asia. This definition changed and became more politicized, particularly in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, when Orientalism was understood as a conservative approach by the British colonial government in its territories. In practice, Orientalism meant that the British colonizers had to consider the use of traditional laws of religion (whether Islam or Hinduism) for the social and political stability of their territories.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Martin van Bruinessen, "In the Tradition or Outside? Reflections on Teachers and Influences," *Al-Jami'ab: Journal of Islamic Studies* 53, no. 1 (2015): 53–103.

<sup>27</sup> Clinton Bennett, "Introduction," in *The Bloomsbury Companion to Islamic Studies*, ed. Clinton Bennett (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2015), 2.

<sup>28</sup> John MacKenzie, *Orientalism: History, Theory and the Arts* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1995).

Each colonial government had its own way of implementing the policies it deemed appropriate. Clearly, the study of Orientalism was used to study the communities in colonies, where the data and findings they had were used as recommendations for governing the people in those territories. This is then related to the emergence of Islamic studies in universities in mainland Europe around the 19<sup>th</sup> century. In these departments, scholars examined Islamic texts, beliefs, and practices, as well as the development of Islamic law, in order to better understand and control the populations in the conquered lands. This type of research was often motivated by a desire to maintain social and political stability in the territories, and to prevent potential uprisings or challenges to colonial rule. Today, in the post-colonial era, the purpose of Islamic studies has changed slightly. Departments of Islamic studies in European and American countries still exist and are needed not only in relation to the existence of Islam in Asia or Africa but also to study a large number of Muslim immigrants in Western countries, and also security issues in relation to the global war after 9/11.<sup>29</sup>

In relation to the study of Islam, the author will elaborate on two characteristic models of Islamic study methods carried out by Hurgronje and their close connection to Orientalism. The first is the study of Islam in its function as academic research, and the second is the study of Islam in its function as a political interest. These two characteristics of Islamic studies were generally carried out by Western scholars in the Hurgronje era and several decades afterward. This pattern began to change in the 1980s, partly due to the criticism of Edward Said, who wrote his *magnum opus* on Orientalism in 1978. In this book, Said showed how the Orient was depicted by Western scholars as inferior and backward, which ultimately became the justification for colonization in those regions.<sup>30</sup> This approach mirrors the one adopted by Hurgronje, who believed that the West was superior and had the right to intervene in the East in order to “civilize” the population there. This view was justified by the belief that Western values were superior, and that Easterners needed to be taught these values in order to progress. Snouck Hurgronje’s goal of

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<sup>29</sup> Léon Buskens, “Dichotomies, Transformations, and Continuities in the Study of Islam,” in *Islamic Studies in the Twenty-First Century: Transformations and Continuities*, ed. Léon Buskens and Annemarie van Sandwijk (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2016).

<sup>30</sup> Edward Said, *Orientalism* (London: Penguin Books, 1991), 40–41.

using a secular system to limit the function of Islam in the Netherlands Indies to religion was part of this broader idea of Western superiority and the necessity of enlightening Eastern populations.<sup>31</sup>

Regarding the first, studying Islam as academic research was characterized by a tendency among scholars to create a dichotomy between the theoretical model of Islam found in religious texts (orthodoxy) and the model of Islam practiced by the general population (heterodox). In the case of Hurgronje, this dichotomy was applied to the population of Aceh. Hurgronje reached this conclusion after observing the Muslims of Aceh and finding that they did not follow the teachings of religious texts.<sup>32</sup> Acehnese, according to Hurgronje, were different from the Jawi community in Mecca. He believed that the former were inferior because their ritual practices were different from the prescribed or orthodox form of Islam of the latter.<sup>33</sup> Based on this conclusion, Snouck Hurgronje recommended that the colonial government support the *adat* group. By doing so, the government could weaken the authority of the ulama, who adhered to a theoretical form of Islam and had a jihadist spirit of resistance against the Dutch. This would allow the government to diminish or even defeat the power of the ulama.<sup>34</sup>

The dichotomy between 'Islam theory' and 'Islam practice', as proposed by John Bowen,<sup>35</sup> can be found in Clifford Geertz's work, *The Religion of Java*.<sup>36</sup> In this work, Geertz introduces the trichotomy of santri, abangan, and priyayi, which has been criticized by scholars such as Sutherland,<sup>37</sup> and Harsja Bachtiar<sup>38</sup> for being unbalanced and not allowing for comparison between the categories. They argue that

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<sup>31</sup> Harry J. Benda, "Christiaan Snouck Hurgronje and the Foundations of Dutch Islamic Policy in Indonesia," *The Journal of Modern History* 30, no. 4 (1958): 338–47

<sup>32</sup> Fogg, "Seeking Arabs but Looking at Indonesians."

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> Chairul Fahmi, "The Snouck Hurgronje's Doctrine in Conquering the Holy Revolts of Acehnese Natives," *Heritage of Nusantara: International Journal of Religious Literature and Heritage* 10, no. 2 (2021): 248–73.

<sup>35</sup> John R. Bowen, "Western Studies of Southeast Asian Islam: Problem of Theory and Practice," *Studia Islamika* 2, no. 4 (1995).

<sup>36</sup> Clifford Geertz, *The Religion of Java* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1976).

<sup>37</sup> Heather Sutherland, "The Priyayi," *Indonesia*, no. 19 (1975): 57–77.

<sup>38</sup> Harsja W. Bachtiar, "The Religion of Java: A Commentary," in *Readings on Islam in Southeast Asia*, ed. Ahmad Ibrahim, Sharon Siddique, and Yasmin Hussain (ISEAS: Singapore, 1985).

the santri and abangan fit into the category of religion, but the priyayi does not because it is a category of social class. Koentjaraningrat, another critic of Geertz's trichotomy, has suggested that a more appropriate dichotomy would be between "agami Jawi" and "agami Jawi santri". The former represents syncretic Javanese Islam, while the latter represents puritanical and orthodox Islam.<sup>39</sup> Bowen argues that Geertz follows the approach of Hurgronje in creating a dichotomy between a theoretical model of Islam that follows religious texts and Islam practice that is less devout.<sup>40</sup> In another book "Islam Observed," published in 1968, Geertz also employs this dichotomy. He portrays Indonesian Islam as syncretic and mystical, and Moroccan Islam as scripturalist.<sup>41</sup>

The dichotomy between Islam theory and Islam practice is a common theme in the research of Western scholars. It is highly influenced by the "great tradition" and "little tradition" dichotomies created by orientalists. Asad argues that Western researchers often use this polarity to divide Islamic societies into two groups: the orthodox, who follow the great tradition, and the heterodox, who follow the little tradition. This dichotomy leads to a distinction between scripturalist, puritanical, urban-based Islam and syncretic, Sufi, rural-based Islam.<sup>42</sup> Hurgronje and other Western researchers in the late 19th and early 20th centuries studied Islam using this methodology. They divided Islam into two categories: orthodox Islam in the Middle East, which adhered to religious texts, and heterodox Islam in Asia, such as in Aceh, which was considered less devout and diverged from the Middle Eastern interpretation

In addition to that, Hurgronje's study of Islam was used for the benefit of colonial political interests. Hurgronje is even referred to as clearly placing his personal life, knowledge, and skills in service of the Dutch colonial project.<sup>43</sup> He devoted himself fully to this colonial

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<sup>39</sup> Koentjaraningrat, *Javanese Culture* (Singapore: Oxford University Press, 1985), 317–18.

<sup>40</sup> Bowen, "Western Studies of Southeast Asian Islam."

<sup>41</sup> Clifford Geertz, *Islam Observed: Religious Development in Morocco and Indonesia* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1968).

<sup>42</sup> Talal Asad, "The Idea of an Anthropology of Islam," *Qui Parle* 17, no. 2 (2009): 1–30.

<sup>43</sup> Stijn Cornelis Van Huis, "Debates about the Place of Islamic Law in Society: Snouck Hurgronje and Van Den Berg Revisited," University Website, Rubric of Faculty Members, 2019, <https://business-law.binus.ac.id/2019/08/23/debates->

agenda from the moment he was assigned to study the Jawi community in Mecca. There, he decided to become a convert, witnessed by two Turks and changed his name to Abdul Ghaffar.<sup>44</sup> Hurgronje's decision to convert to Islam while conducting research raises ethical concerns, as it was done with the goal of collecting data. In today's world, informed consent is an absolute ethical requirement for researchers, and failing to obtain it can lead to ethical problems. When entering a community for research and conducting interviews, it is important for researchers to be transparent about their intentions and the fact that they will be studying the community.<sup>45</sup>

Furthermore, Van Koningveld provides evidence that Hurgronje's conversion to Islam was temporary and only done to gain entry to Mecca.<sup>46</sup> Hurgronje consciously pretended to be a devout Muslim by performing all the necessary rituals, to gain the trust of the Muslim community in Mecca. This was described by his main informant and assistant, Raden Aboe Bakar Djajadiningrat, in a letter stored in the Leiden library. The letter mentions how Hurgronje regularly attended prayers at the Masjid al-Haram, participated in religious studies with scholars, and performed the tawaf. This would have convinced anyone that he was a true Muslim. At the very least, it convinced Aboe Bakar, who addressed him as "*akabī fi Allab*" (brother in faith) in their correspondence.<sup>47</sup> While living in the Dutch East Indies, Hurgronje continued to present himself as a Muslim in order to collect data on the region's Muslim community. He also married two Muslim women during his 17 years in the region (1889-1906),

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about-the-place-of-islamic-law-in-society-snouck-hurgronje-and-van-den-berg-revisited/.

<sup>44</sup> Burhanudin, "The Dutch Colonial Policy on Islam."

<sup>45</sup> One of the guidelines for ethical research in anthropology and ethnography, issued by the European Commission's ethics unit, requires that researchers obtain informed consent from informants before conducting their studies. For a fuller understanding see Ron Iphofen, "Research Ethics in Ethnography/Anthropology" (The European Commission, 2013).

<sup>46</sup> Pieter Sjoerd van Koningsveld, "Conversion of European Intellectuals to Islam: The Case of Christiaan Snouck Hurgronje Alias 'Abd al-Ghaffār,'" in *Muslims in Interwar Europe: A Transcultural Historical Perspective*, ed. Bekim Agai, Umar Ryad, and Mehdi Sajid (Leiden: Brill, 2016), 88–104.

<sup>47</sup> Pieter Sjoerd van Koningsveld, "Snouck Hurgronje Alias Abdul Ghaffar: Beberapa Catatan Pinggir Kritik Sejarah," in *Snouck Hurgronje dan Islam: Delapan Karangan Tentang Hidup dan Karya Seorang Orientalis Zaman Kolonial*, ed. Pieter Sjoerd van Koningsveld (Jakarta: Girimukti Pasaka, 1989), 125–55.

first a 17-year-old girl named Sangkana, and then a Sundanese woman named Siti Sadiyah. Hurgronje had four children with his first wife and one child with his second wife.<sup>48</sup>

Overall, it can be said that Hurgronje took every measure to obtain data on the Muslim community, both in Mecca and in the Dutch East Indies. He devoted himself entirely to being a Muslim and successfully convinced everyone he encountered to consider him a true Muslim. Scholars in the Dutch East Indies even referred to him as the “Mufti of Batavia,” “Mufti of the Dutch East Indies,” and even the “Syaiikhul Islam of Java.”<sup>49</sup> This is proof of how his tactic of becoming a Muslim succeeded in gaining the trust of the Muslim community in the Dutch East Indies and obtaining the desired data.

As a linguist with a background in Arabic, Hurgronje could easily access Islamic religious literature, study it, and pretend to be a religious scholar in order to gain recognition and trust as a community leader in the Dutch East Indies. However, this behavior is clearly unethical for a researcher, as it involves deceiving informants and pretending to be someone else to obtain information. Hurgronje’s actions were particularly corrupt because he used his position as a trusted member of the Muslim community to provide political recommendations to the colonial government on how to conquer the Dutch East Indies.

When conducting ethnographic research in Mecca for six months, Hurgronje provided recommendations that changed the Dutch colonial government’s policies. Before Hurgronje joined the colonial government, the Dutch had a hardline policy that restricted and even prohibited Indonesian Muslims from going on the hajj fearing that they would be influenced by pan-Islamist ideas and return to Indonesia to spread rebellion.<sup>50</sup> Hurgronje disagreed with this policy. In his book about the hajj in Mecca, Hurgronje stated that indeed, hajj pilgrims had the potential to be influenced by pan-Islamist ideas. However, few acted on these ideas. Hurgronje only noted those who had the potential to rebel and should be dealt with.

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<sup>48</sup> Jajang A. Rohmana, “Rereading Christiaan Snouck Hurgronje: His Islam, Marriage and Indo-European Discents in the Early Twentieth-Century Priangan,” *Walisono* 26, no. 1 (2018): 35–66.

<sup>49</sup> van Koningsveld, “Snouck Hurgronje Alias Abdul Ghaffar: Beberapa Catatan Pinggir Kritik Sejarah.”

<sup>50</sup> Harry J. Benda, “Christiaan Snouck Hurgronje and the Foundations of Dutch Islamic Policy in Indonesia,” *The Journal of Modern History* 30, no. 4 (1958): 338–47.

However, hajj pilgrims in general were not dangerous.<sup>51</sup> While not all Hurgronje's recommendations were implemented by the colonial government, they did help to reduce some of the restrictions on hajj pilgrims.

Snouck Hurgronje's most famous and impactful recommendation was about Aceh. As previously mentioned, the Dutch colonial government favored the *adat* group over religious scholars. In the end, the Dutch were able to quell the rebellion supported by the religious scholars with the help of the *adat* that were incorporated into the colonial government's structure.<sup>52</sup> In addition to recommendations about hajj pilgrims and the Aceh war, the most monumental recommendation from Hurgronje was about the political role of Islam in the Dutch East Indies. In general, Hurgronje believed that Islam was a peaceful religion. However, he also understood the potential for political mobilization through Islam and recommended that the colonial government be wary of using Islam as a political doctrine.<sup>53</sup>

Edward Said argues that Hurgronje's work in the study of Islam, both for academic purposes and for political gain, embodies the typical approach of Orientalists. These studies, including research on Islam, were conducted with the intention of colonizing the East.<sup>54</sup> Orientalists often exhibit a Western perspective and is carried out by Western scholars. This was the case in the Dutch East Indies, where all Indonesian Islamic researchers were Dutch, including Snouck Hurgronje, G. A. J. Hazeu, D.A Rinkes, R.A Kern, Emile Gobeel, and G.F.Pijper.<sup>55</sup> These researchers all studied Indonesian Islam with the goal of conquering and occupying the region, a common characteristic of Orientalist research.

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<sup>51</sup> Hurgronje, *Mekka in the Latter Part of the 19th Century*.

<sup>52</sup> Missbach, "The Aceh War (1873-1913) and the Influence of Christiaan Snouck Hurgronje."

<sup>53</sup> Aqib Suminto, *Politik Islam Hindia Belanda* (Jakarta: LP3ES, 1985), 10–12.

<sup>54</sup> Said, *Orientalism*, 40–41.

<sup>55</sup> E. Zaenal Muttaqin, "Kebertahanan dan Perubahan Pranata Kantor Kementerian Agama Dari Masa Kolonial Kepada Periode Setelah Kemerdekaan," *Al Qisthas: Jurnal Hukum Dan Politik Ketatanegaraan* 8, no. 1 (2019): 1–18.

## The Legacy of Snouck Hurgronje and the Study of Islam in Indonesia

While his actions and motivations may have been unethical and politically motivated, Snouck Hurgronje still made significant contributions and left a legacy in the field of Indonesian Islam. He was instrumental in introducing anthropology and ethnographic methods to this area of study and was also one of the first to bring philological studies to Indonesian Islamic research. His collection of books by Indonesian scholars brought back from Mecca and the Dutch East Indies and now housed in the Leiden library, has provided valuable data for ongoing philological studies of Indonesian Islam in the Netherlands. At Leiden University, a tradition of Islamic studies has emerged, in which texts and manuscripts are critical for understanding the culture of a particular community, and Hurgronje played a key role in its development.<sup>56</sup> Despite the controversy surrounding him, scholars such as Kevin Fogg and Stijn Cornelis have referred to Hurgronje as the Father of Indonesian Islam due to his significant influence and impact on the field.<sup>57</sup>

Furthermore, the traditional dichotomy of categorizing beliefs and practices in Islam as either 'Islam theory' versus 'Islam practice', which was prevalent during Hurgronje's time, is being rejected in favor of new approaches, particularly in the field of anthropology of Islam. This novel perspective, introduced by Talal Asad, perceives Islam as a discursive tradition. It aims to comprehend Muslim discourse about specific traditions and religious practices, which not only align with the Quran and Ḥadīth but are also deeply influenced by social, political, and power networks. Instead of simply comparing different religious groups and determining their level of orthodoxy solely based on religious textual references, the discursive tradition approach views orthodoxy as a dynamic and evolving process, shaped by various factors. The power relations and actions of certain groups of Muslims in determining the correctness of certain traditions are a key consideration in this domain of orthodoxy. The discourse of orthodoxy is always subject to challenge and contestation by different

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<sup>56</sup> One of the articles discussing Islamic research in the Leiden tradition is van Bruinessen, "In the Tradition or Outside?"

<sup>57</sup> Kevin W. Fogg, "Seeking Arabs but Looking at Indonesians: Snouck Hurgronje's Arab Lens on the Dutch East Indies," *Journal of Middle Eastern and Islamic Studies (in Asia)* 8, no. 1 (2014): 51–73; Van Huis, "Debates about the Place of Islamic Law in Society: Snouck Hurgronje and Van Den Berg Revisited."



groups of Muslims, and the dominant discourse in each period is ultimately what is considered authoritative or orthodox.<sup>58</sup>

In addition to Talal Asad's approach, another new perspective called 'Articulatory Labor' has been proposed, which refers to the ongoing process of constructing the Muslim community based on the teachings of the Prophet Muhammad. This concept was introduced by Ismail Fajrie Alatas, an Indonesian scholar teaching at New York University. According to Alatas, building the Muslim community in accordance with the sunnah involves continuously transmitting the teachings of the Prophet to create a Muslim community and establish orthodoxy.<sup>59</sup> Different groups of followers, including those who follow a tariqa, traditionalists, modernists, or Salafis, may have different interpretations of what they consider to be a sunnah-compliant practice of religion. With this approach, researchers do not evaluate religious practices as correct or incorrect, or orthodox or not, but present field data from interviews with informants or participatory observations of the research object.

It is worth noting that the study of Islam and other subjects in the West is no longer motivated by imperial interests and the domination of western researchers. Rather, there is a focus on promoting collaboration and inclusivity in research, as well as a recognition of the importance of indigenous and insider perspectives. This began with the Netherlands Cooperation in Islamic Studies (INIS), a collaboration program between the Ministry of Religious Affairs and the Dutch government that was established in 1989.<sup>60</sup> It provided Indonesian scholars with opportunities for training and research at the Leiden library, as well as a graduate scholarship program. This program was designed to support the study of Islam in Indonesia and promote collaboration between Indonesian and Dutch scholars. It has since evolved into other programs, such as the Dissemination of Religious Authority in 20<sup>th</sup> Century Indonesia scholarship and the Training of Young Leaders, which have supported the development of a new generation of Indonesian Islamic scholars. Many of them are professors and researchers at

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<sup>58</sup> Asad, "The Idea of an Anthropology of Islam."

<sup>59</sup> Ismail Fajrie Alatas, *What Is Religious Authority? Cultivating Islamic Communities in Indonesia* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2021).

<sup>60</sup> Affandi Mochtar, "Sumbangan Kerja Sama Indonesia-Belanda Pasca Kolonial Dalam Bidang Kajian Islam Di Indonesia" (PhD Thesis, Jakarta, UIN Syarif Hidayatullah, 2008).

universities/institutes (UIN/IAIN) affiliated with the Ministry of Religious Affairs, and they have made significant contributions to Islamic studies to both their peers in academia and students. Some of these scholars are Machasin (Yogyakarta), Ali Mufrodi (Surabaya), Kamaruddin Amin (Director General of Islamic Community Guidance),<sup>61</sup> Mohamad Nur Kholis Setiawan (former Secretary General of the Ministry of Religious Affairs), Jajat Burhanudin,<sup>62</sup> Ahmad Najib Burhani,<sup>63</sup> Noorhaidi Hasan,<sup>64</sup> Zulkifli,<sup>65</sup> M. Nor Ichwan,<sup>66</sup> Euis Nurlaelawati,<sup>67</sup> Hilman Latief,<sup>68</sup> Din Wahid,<sup>69</sup> Amiq

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<sup>61</sup> Kamaruddin Amin, "The Reliability of Hadith-Transmission: A Re-Examination of Hadith-Critical Methods" (PhD Thesis, Bonn, Germany, Friedrich-Wilhelms-Universität, 2005).

<sup>62</sup> Jajat Burhanudin, "Islamic Knowledge, Authority, and Political Power: The 'Ulama in Colonial Indonesia" (PhD Thesis, Leiden University, 2007).

<sup>63</sup> Ahmad Najib Burhani, "The Muhammadiyah's Attitude to Javanese Culture in 1912-1930: Appreciation and Tension" (MA Thesis, Leiden University, 2004); Ahmad Najib Burhani, "When Muslims Are Not Muslims: The Ahmadiyya Community and the Discourse on Heresy in Indonesia" (PhD Thesis, California, University of California, Santa Barbara, 2013).

<sup>64</sup> Noorhaidi Hasan, *Laskar Jihad: Islam, Militancy, and the Quest for Identity in Post-New Order Indonesia* (Ithaca, New York: Southeast Asia Program Publications, Cornell University, 2006); Noorhaidi Hasan, "The Salafi Madrasas of Indonesia," in *The Madrasa in Asia: Political Activism and Transnational Linkages*, ed. Yoginder Noor, Farish A; Sikand and Martin van Bruinessen (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2008), 247–74; Noorhaidi Hasan, "Piety, Politics, and Post-Islamism: Dhikr Akbar in Indonesia," *Al-Jami'ab: Journal of Islamic Studies* 50, no. 2 (2012): 369–90.

<sup>65</sup> Zulkifli Zulkifli, "The Struggle of the Shi'is in Indonesia" (PhD Thesis, Leiden University, 2009), <https://scholarlypublications.universiteitleiden.nl/handle/1887/14017>.

<sup>66</sup> Mohammad Nor Ichwan, "Official Reform of Islam: State Islam and the Ministry of Religious Affairs in Contemporary Indonesia, 1966-2004" (PhD Thesis, Tilburg, Tilburg University, 2006); "Ulama, State and Politics: MUI after Suharto," *Islamic Law and Society* 12, no. 1 (2005): 45–72; "Toward A Puritanical Moderate Islam: The Majelis Ulama Indonesia and the Politics of Religious Orthodoxy," in *Contemporary Developments in Indonesian Islam: Explaining the "Conservative Turn,"* ed. Martin Van Bruinessen (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 2013), 60–104.

<sup>67</sup> Euis Nurlaelawati, *Modernization, Tradition and Identity: The Kompilasi Hukum Islam and Legal Practice in the Indonesian Religious Courts*, vol. 4 (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2010).

<sup>68</sup> Hilman Latief, "Islamic Charities and Social Activism: Welfare, Dakwah and Politics in Indonesia" (PhD Thesis, Utrecht University, 2012).

<sup>69</sup> Din Wahid, "Nurturing the Salafi Manhaj: A Study of Salafi Pesantrens in Contemporary Indonesia" (PhD Thesis, Utrecht, the Netherlands, Utrecht University, 2014).

Ahyad,<sup>70</sup> Yanwar Pribadi,<sup>71</sup> Sunarwoto,<sup>72</sup> Munirul Ikhwan,<sup>73</sup> Syaifudin Zuhri,<sup>74</sup> and Muhammad Latif Fauzi.<sup>75</sup>

The above-mentioned scholars all follow in the footsteps of Hurgronje in their studies of Islam, which incorporate elements of anthropology, ethnography, and philology. However, it is important to note that the study of Islam in the West has evolved significantly since Hurgronje's time, and contemporary scholars have expanded upon and revised many of the methods and approaches developed by Hurgronje and his contemporaries. While Hurgronje's work remains highly respected and influential, contemporary scholars have also incorporated newer theories and approaches, such as postcolonial studies into their studies of Islam. Additionally, the field of Islamic studies has become increasingly interdisciplinary, with scholars from a wide range of disciplines, including history, political science, anthropology, and sociology, contributing to the understanding of Islam and its role in the world today. Despite these changes, Hurgronje's legacy and influence can still be seen in the methods and approaches used by contemporary Muslim scholars and in the well-preserved manuscripts found in the Leiden library. Hurgronje is considered a pioneer in the academic study of Islam in Indonesia and has contributed significantly to the field through his facilitation of research and publication of numerous theses and dissertations.

### Concluding Remarks

In this article, we delve into Snouck Hurgronje's impact on the Western understanding of Islamic studies, focusing on his methodologies and their contrast with current practices. Hurgronje's

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<sup>70</sup> Amiq Ahyad, "Islamic Manuscript Culture in the Pondok Pesantren of East Java in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries" (PhD Thesis, Leiden, Leiden University, 2015).

<sup>71</sup> Yanwar Pribadi, *Islam, State and Society in Indonesia: Local Politics in Madura* (New York: Routledge, 2018).

<sup>72</sup> Sunarwoto, "Contesting Religious Authority: A Study on Dakwah Radio in Surakarta" (PhD Thesis, Tilburg University, 2015).

<sup>73</sup> Munirul Ikhwan, "An Indonesian Initiative to Make the Qur'an Down-to-Earth: Muhammad Quraish Shihab and His School of Exegesis" (PhD Thesis, 2015).

<sup>74</sup> Syaifudin Zuhri, *Wali Pitu and Muslim Pilgrimage in Bali, Indonesia: Inventing a Sacred Tradition*, vol. 8 (Leiden: Leiden University Press, 2022).

<sup>75</sup> Muhammad Latif Fauzi, *Aligning Religious Law and State Law: Negotiating Legal Muslim Marriage in Pasuruan, East Java*, Leiden Studies in Islam and Society (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2023).

work, particularly his anthropological and ethnographic approach to the Hajj in Mecca and the societal dynamics in Aceh, brought forth new dimensions in Islamic scholarship. His comprehensive analysis, spanning theological, juridical, and social aspects, culminated in influential publications that have significantly informed and shaped the trajectory of Islamic studies from the late 19th century to the present.

Hurgronje's research on Islam had two main components: academic study and political interests. He distinguished between two groups of Islam: one that was scriptural (orthodox) and another that was syncretic (heterodox). This dichotomy was influenced by Orientalist' concept of the great tradition and little tradition, as well as Hurgronje's perception of Islam as being Arab-centric. According to Hurgronje, Arab Islam was considered more authentic, while Islam practiced in Asia, such as in Aceh, was seen as being less pure. In addition to being published as books, Hurgronje's research in Mecca and Aceh was also used as political reports to the colonial government, which resulted in changes to Dutch policies on hajj pilgrim restrictions and the conquest of Aceh in 1904. This became a success story for the Dutch Islamic policy, which managed to conquer the Islamic political group in the Dutch East Indies in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries.

In the current day, the study of Islam has evolved significantly from the methods used by Hurgronje, which were heavily influenced by Orientalism. Researchers studying Islam today include both Muslims and individuals from Indonesia, and the dichotomy between scriptural and traditional Islam has begun to fade as new theoretical approaches, such as the concept of Islam as a discursive tradition and 'Articulatory Labor', have emerged. While the study of Islam has changed significantly from the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, the use of philology, anthropology, and ethnography as methodological approaches, as exemplified by Hurgronje, is still prevalent in contemporary studies of Islam. Universities under the Ministry of Religious Affairs in particular have adopted these approaches as complementary to more traditional methods, such as the study of thought, biographies, texts, and *fiqh* studies.

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