

# AUSTRALIAN SCHOLARSHIP ON INDONESIAN ISLAM A Socio-historical Overview<sup>1</sup>

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**Abstract:** This article analyzes the extent to which Australian scholarship portrays the reality of Indonesian Islam from a socio-historical perspective. This article argues that there is no such thing as interest-free in the process of knowledge production in Indonesian Islam studies. The production of knowledge on Indonesian Islam made by Australian scholars in Australian universities are inextricably linked to political and economic interests of the country. This article found out that academic production among Australian scholars is directed by the vision of the country in order to protect Australia and all Australian citizens both politically and economically. In addition, the academic production is designed to make a stable relationship between Indonesia and Australia. For Australia, the existence of Indonesia does matter as its major forefront in facing external threats such as military invasion, asylum seekers as well as immigrants. The stability of relationship will lead to the creation of economic prosperity among Australian citizens in general.

**Keywords:** Australian scholars, socio-historical approach, political economy, Indonesian Islam.

## Introduction

This article discusses the extent to which all aspects related to political economy contribute to shape knowledge production process in the field of Indonesian Islam studies among scholars in Australian universities. This paper argues that the knowledge production of

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Indonesian Islam among Australian scholars is inextricably linked to political and economic factors behind the Australia's policies regarding the country's perceived best political and economic interests. In the field of politics, the Australian government has concerns with the creation of security for all of its citizens. It is understandable that the knowledge production in Islamic studies by Australian scholars is driven by the Australian government's policy to provide security for all its citizens.<sup>2</sup>

In order to fulfil such an above policy, the Australian government provides its significant funds through its research institutions such as the Australian Research Center (ARC)<sup>3</sup> to bear knowledge production on Indonesian Islam which is in line with the interest of creating security for all of its citizens. The fund channeling to such institutions reached its peak when Australia's security issues are at risks.

At the economic level, the Australian government has concerns to provide prosperity for all of its citizens. It is understandable that the knowledge production must be oriented towards this policy. In so far as the economic interests are there, research policy that shapes knowledge production by university-based scholars will be made in line with such a policy. As a field of studies, Indonesian Islam does not have anything to do with economic interests. This field, nevertheless, has overlapping intersection with economic interests in the sense that the phenomenon of Muslim community in Indonesia must be supportive to Australia's economic policy. In this context, terrorist attacks in Indonesia can distract the development of Australia's economy and prosperity among Australians.

In so far as the preliminary research is concerned, the previous works dealing with how Australian scholars portray Indonesian Islam have received inadequate attention in the circle of academia. There are of course several works on Asian,<sup>4</sup> Southeast Asian<sup>5</sup> and Indonesian

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<sup>2</sup> Michael Evans, "Towards an Australian National Security Strategy: A Conceptual Analysis," *Security Challenges* 3, 4 (November 2007), 113-130. See, also, Alan Dupont & William J. Reckmeyer, "Australia's National Security Priorities: Addressing Strategic Risk in a Globalised World," *Australian Journal of International Affairs* 66, 1 (2012), 34-51.

<sup>3</sup> Clare Tilbury, et. al., "Analysis of Australian Research Council Grants Awarded for Social Work Projects 2008-2017," *Australian Social Work* 73, 1 (2020), 4-17.

<sup>4</sup> Gwenda Milston, "Asian Studies at Monash," *Asian Studies Association of Australia* 5, 3 (1982), 4-13; Christine Inglis, "Asian Studies at the University of Sydney," *Asian Studies Association of Australia* 4, 3 (1981), 47-51; Mayumi Kamada, "Asian Studies in Australia: Approaches to Asia through Education," *Australian Journal of International Affairs* 8, 1

studies by Australian scholars.<sup>6</sup> There are, also, previous works on account of how Islamic studies are portrayed in Australia<sup>7</sup> as well as Islam in Australia in general.<sup>8</sup> Nevertheless, there are no such works as Indonesian Islam studies by Australian scholars in its most stringent sense. There are huge number of studies on Indonesian Islam by Australian scholars. Nevertheless, there is none of such study on how Australian scholars portray Indonesian Islam. The theme of this paper is, therefore, highly necessary amidst the absence of the same or similar theme in this field.

### **Political Economy: A Brief Theoretical Framework**

This paper employs political economy as its main method of analysis. As a method of science, political economy was already used by John Stuart Mills in his classical writing entitled “On the Definition of Political and the Method of Investigation Proper to It” published in 1836. This writing was reprinted in *Essays on Some Unsettled Questions of Political Economy* (1877).<sup>9</sup> Mills defines political economy as “the science which traces the laws of such of the phenomena of society as arise from the combined operations of mankind for the production of

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(1994), 1-23; Beverley Hooper, “Asian Studies in Australia: trends and prospects,” *Asian Studies Review* 18, 3 (1995), 71-80; Norman Harper, “Asian Students and Asian Studies in Australia,” *Pacific Affairs* 31, 1 (1958), 54-64; Anthony Reid, “Studying ‘Asia’ in Asia,” *Asian Studies Review* 23, 2 (1999), 141-151; Anthony Milner, “Approaching Asia, and Asian Studies, in Australia,” *Asian Studies Review* 23, 2 (1999), 193-203.

<sup>5</sup> James J. Fox, “A Genealogy of Southeast Asian Studies in Australia: Scholars and Their Works,” in Park Seung Woo and Victor T. King (ed.), *The Historical Construction of Southeast Asian Studies: Korea and Beyond* (Singapore: ISEAS, 2013), 349-398; Anthony Reid, “Historical Thought and Historiography: Southeast Asia,” in James D Wright (ed.), *International Encyclopaedia of the Social & Behavioral Sciences* (Oxford: Elsevier, 2015).

<sup>6</sup> J. Bastin, “Indonesian and Malayan studies in Australia,” *Bijdragen tot de Taal-, Land- en Volkenkunde* 113, 2 (1957), 201-2-4; Keith Foulcher, “Indonesian studies: in search of a model,” *Asian Studies Review* 13, 3 (1990), 3-6; Anthony Reid, “Indonesian Studies at the Australian National University: why so late?,” *Review of Indonesian and Malaysian Affairs* 43, 1 (2009), 51-74.

<sup>7</sup> See, for instance, A.H. Johns, “Hopes and Frustrations: Islamic and Middle Eastern Studies in Australia,” *MESA Bulletin* 25 (1991), 173-180.

<sup>8</sup> I Yilmaz, *Islam in the Anglosphere: Perspectives of Young Muslims in Australia, the UK and the USA* (2023), <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-99-3780-6>.

<sup>9</sup> John Stuart Mills, “On the Definition and Method of Political Economy,” in Daniel M. Hausman (ed.), *The Philosophy of Economics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 41-58.

wealth, in so far as those phenomena are not modified by the pursuit of any other object.”<sup>10</sup>

The term “political economy” has evolved in meaning over time. Adam Smith viewed it as the study of resource management for wealth creation. Marx saw it as the study of how ownership of production impacts history. In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, it had conflicting interpretations: sometimes as a field studying the relationship between economics and politics, other times as a methodological approach. This methodological approach further split into two: one focusing on individual rationality and the other on institutions.

This paper sees political economy as a broad combination of different perspectives. The authors believe that it is about applying economic methods to study political actions and systems. It is not a single or separate method, but a collection of approaches, particularly economics and politics as an inseparable compound. It includes concerns of political sociologists because it focuses on institutions and political behavior. It uses methodologies from economics, like mathematics and game theory, but also includes political science ideas. It usually focuses on individuals and their motivations, often using statistics or experiments to gather data.<sup>11</sup>

Economics and political science both originated from “political economy” and focus on how people make decisions within certain limitations. Rational choice theory has been central to economics for a long time, with its mathematical foundation established in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>12</sup> However, its application in political science is relatively new and still not widely embraced in the field. Therefore, political economy is not merely related to the field of economics both as method and as subject matter. When related to economics, the majority of concerns of political economy deal mainly with economics, especially its mathematical dimension. Political economy refers to the management of the economic affairs of the state.<sup>13</sup> When applied to politics,

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<sup>10</sup> Mills, “On the Definition, 43.

<sup>11</sup> Barry R. Weingast & Donald A. Wittman, “The Reach of Political Economy,” in Barry R. Weingast & Donald A. Wittman (eds.), *The Oxford Handbooks of Political Science* (Oxford & New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 3-28.

<sup>12</sup> Joe A. Oppenheimer, “Rational Choice Theory,” *Encyclopedia of Political Theory* 3 (2008), 1150-1159.

<sup>13</sup> James A. Caporaso and David P. Levine, *Theories of Political Economy* (Cambridge & New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992).

political economy mainly deals with the political life of society, especially in regards with power-relation aspects in a particular society.<sup>14</sup>

Political economy and public choice theory both view political actors (voters, politicians, bureaucrats) as primarily self-interested.<sup>15</sup> This contrasts with older economic views that saw government officials as trying to maximize social welfare. Political economy often uses rational choice and game theory to study things like government failure and complex decision-making.<sup>16</sup> Traditional topics also include regulation, monopolies, corruption, and how elections affect policy. Empirical work looks at things like predicting elections, political business cycles, and central bank independence. Political economy is the juncture where the two mainstream disciplines meet: economics and politics. They form an interdisciplinary combination where one discipline is inseparable from the other.

### **Indonesian Islam Studies in Australian Universities**

The development of Indonesian Islam studies in Australia cannot be separated from the grand project of Orientalism that flourished in the Western world since the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, with an emphasis on the study of the Near East and the Far East. Orientalism is an academic nomenclature that developed as a result of the history of Western colonialism in the Eastern world, particularly in Asia and Africa.<sup>17</sup> Orientalism has soon become a heated theoretical debate among scholars due to its critical elements in unravelling the established theory of the history of Western colonialism to the Eastern world. Of course thanks to Said's *Orientalism*, the enthusiasm among scholars to get into the experience of the Orient has become more visible especially in Western universities which eventually witnesses revision of previous oriental studies.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> See, for instance, Jacob S. Hacker, et. al. (eds.), *The American Political Economy: Politics, Markets, and Power* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2022).

<sup>15</sup> Timothy Besley, "The New Political Economy," *The Economic Journal* 117 (2007), 570-587.

<sup>16</sup> Timothy Besley, *Principled Agents? The Political Economy of Good Government* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 45.

<sup>17</sup> Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1978).

<sup>18</sup> Ahlam Sbaihat, Khadijah's Image in 19th Century Orientalism, *Al-Jami'ab Journal of Islamic Studies* 60, 2 (2022).

From the study of Orientalism, the next sub-study emerged as a multiplier effect of its development, namely the study of “Asia” or “Asian” studies.<sup>19</sup> Study centers in various universities around the world are competing to open and develop Asian studies as one of their major subjects. Unlike disciplinary studies that refer to scientific fields, Asian studies take a geographical perspective as its starting point. This means that scientists at these various universities treat “Asia” or “Asian” studies as an academic hub that brings together various studies with various disciplinary approaches. As a result, studies on Asia emerged from various scientific perspectives such as political science, history, anthropology, sociology, and so forth. Most of these studies on Asia take the disciplines of social sciences and humanities as the main academic lens in viewing the historical dynamics that occur in this region.<sup>20</sup>

Academic activities to study about the “Oriental” in its serious sense certainly did not develop rapidly in Australia.<sup>21</sup> Busy with the process of nation-building with a social democratic orientation, scientists in Australia relied more on British and European sources to investigate everything about the “Oriental” and tended to imitate the trends developed in Europe regarding this study.<sup>22</sup> A professor at the University of Sydney, A.L. Sadler, for instance, clearly stated in 1936 that Japanese civilization or culture deserves to be appreciated in Australia as one of the studies that needs to be developed. In his opinion, “Even though it is the Near rather than the Far East for Australians, the channels of communication have always been by the way of Europe.”<sup>23</sup>

Studies on Asia and the “Orient” only received serious attention after the World War II with the opening of the School of Oriental

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<sup>19</sup> Reid, “Studying ‘Asia’ in Asia, 141-151.

<sup>20</sup> Fox, “A Genealogy of Southeast Asian Studies in Australia, 349-398.

<sup>21</sup> Some well-known orientalists wrote about Islam in Indonesia. See for instance As’ad, Muhammad, Muhammad Zainuddin, and M. Samsul Hady. “The Western Perspective on Islam: Reading the Legacy of Snouck Hurgronje on Islamic Studies”. *Teosofi: Jurnal Tasawuf dan Pemikiran Islam* 13, 1 (2023): 80–104.

<sup>22</sup> A response of Muslims on orientalism emerged in the late of 20<sup>th</sup> century in the name of Occidentalism. see for instance Al Haidary, Abdullah Haq. “Discourse on Occidentalism Studies in Indonesia from The Perspective of Mukti Ali,” *Islamica: Jurnal Studi Keislaman* 15, no. 2 (2021): 273-294.

<sup>23</sup> Sadler, 1936, 101, as cited by Milner, “Approaching Asia, and Asian Studies, in Australia).

Languages in 1952, supported by Prime Minister Menzies at the Australian National University. In 1962, this School was transformed into the Faculty of Oriental Studies. Similar to the School of Oriental and African Studies in London, which was established in 1916, the teaching and research emphasized in this Faculty were on languages, history, and culture of the Asian nations. This emphasis on academic aspects was apparently designed to meet the demands of the Australian Department of External Affairs, which had taken a fairly prominent role in the establishment of the national capital of what was called in this Department as the “School of Oriental (or Asian) Studies.”<sup>24</sup>

In addition to the development of Oriental and Asian studies at ANU, the University of Sydney has established an extensive engagement with Asian studies. The deep engagement with Asian studies has started in the Faculty of Arts and Economics where a significant number of studies were carried out with substantial orientation towards various Asian countries. As reported by Inglis, there were three departments that treat Asian studies seriously: Indonesian and Malayan Studies, Oriental Studies and Semitic Studies, all of which offer Honors programs.<sup>25</sup> From 1990 onwards, Asian Studies has become increasingly important in Australia as the country seeks to reposition itself in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, with a strong focus on Asia.<sup>26</sup>

### ***Southeast Asian Studies***

In its further development, Asian studies has split into several sub-studies, one of which is Southeast Asian Studies. These studies cover countries such as Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore, Vietnam and others. Monash University is one of the universities in Australia that holds the Center of Southeast Asian Studies which constitutes the major contribution to the study of Asia. While the decision to create a postgraduate center for Asian Studies was made in 1964, it took longer to decide on Southeast Asia as its specific focus.<sup>27</sup> Several factors

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> Christine Inglis, “Asian Studies at the University of Sydney,” *Asian Studies Association Review* 4, 3 (1981): 47-51.

<sup>26</sup> Beverley Hooper, “Asian Studies in Australia: Trends and Prospects,” *Asian Studies Review* 18, 3 (1995), 71-80.

<sup>27</sup> Gwendda Milston, “Asian Studies at Monash,” *Asian Studies Association of Australia* 5, 3 (1982): 4-13.

contributed to this choice: the existing research interests of faculty members in the region, the lack of attention given to mainland Southeast Asia by other universities, and Southeast Asia's geographical proximity to Australia.

While Southeast Asian studies has grown significantly in Australian universities due to the region's proximity and national interest, it has not become a unified field of study. Research on Southeast Asia is often intertwined with specific disciplines like sociology, anthropology, politics or economics.<sup>28</sup> Many leading scholars in Southeast Asian studies identify primarily with their discipline or their country of focus rather than the broader field. It is possible to argue that the concept of "Southeast Asia" is a relatively recent construct, emerging after World War II.

### ***Indonesian Studies***

Australian scholars were early pioneers in researching Indonesia, particularly in history and political science, later branching out into anthropology, economics and other fields outside social sciences and humanities. Since the mid-1960s, Indonesian studies in Australia have developed independently, led by Australian-educated scholars. However, there has been limited research into how Australians have approached studying Indonesia. Simon Philpott's book is one exception, critiquing Western knowledge of Indonesian politics.<sup>29</sup> Other analyses have explored the broader evolution of Southeast Asian Studies.<sup>30</sup>

In *Locating Southeast Asia*, the intellectual approach of Australian scholars is described as being "between the European orientalist tradition and US social science, developing eclectic approaches and distinctive research agendas of their own."<sup>31</sup> The study of a foreign

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<sup>28</sup> James J. Fox, "A Genealogy of Southeast Asian Studies in Australia: Scholars and Their Works," in Park Seung Woo & Victor T. King (eds.), *The Historical Construction of Southeast Asian Studies: Korea and Beyond* (Singapore: ISEAS, 2013), 349-398.

<sup>29</sup> Simon Philpott, *Rethinking Indonesia* (New York & London: MacMillan Basingstoke, 2000).

<sup>30</sup> Anthony Reid (ed.), *Southeast Asian Studies, Pacific perspectives* (Arizona: Program for Southeast Asian Studies Monograph Series: Arizona State University, 2003).

<sup>31</sup> Paul H. Kratoska, et. al. *Locating Southeast Asia: Geographies of Knowledge and Politics of Space* (Singapore: National University of Singapore Press, 2005), 7. See also, Jemma Purdey, "Ways of Knowing Indonesia: perspectives from Australian academy," *Review of Indonesian and Malaysian Affairs* 43, 1 (2009), 2.

language and its culture usually thrives when that country is powerful, politically and economically. While academics might prefer to focus on the humanistic value of studying other cultures, national policies prioritize political and economic interests. This is clear in the widespread teaching of English, driven by the global dominance of English-speaking countries in the last century. Similarly, Australian schools focused on European languages for both cultural and practical reasons.<sup>32</sup>

In 1955, the Commonwealth Government made a grant of £A 14,000 to the Universities of Sydney and Melbourne and Canberra University College to develop Indonesian and Malayan studies.<sup>33</sup> The University of Melbourne had conducted informal seminars on Indonesia since 1954 and has set up a Department of Indonesian Studies which offers a course in Bahasa Indonesia at the university level and extended it to form part of the normal degree courses.<sup>34</sup> The University of Sydney has introduced courses in Malayan and Indonesian history and culture in 1958.<sup>35</sup> In the Australian National University, Departments of Pacific Studies and Far East History have been established (1949-51).<sup>36</sup>

In 2008, Australian academics under the Asian Studies Association of Australia gathered to discuss the history and current state of Indonesian studies in Australia in a conference with the title, “Ways of Knowing Indonesia: scholarship and engagement in the Australian academy.” They examined how research on Indonesia has changed over time, and how it connects to broader political and social factors. The collection of papers presented in the conference was published in the journal *Review of Indonesian and Malaysian Affairs*, vol. 43, no. 1 (2009). All authors have discussed the ways in which Indonesia has been studied in Australia, and sought to understand the relationship between this scholarship and the politics of this engagement.

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<sup>32</sup> John Ingleson, “Directions in Indonesian Studies,” *Asian Studies Association of Australia. Review* 13, 3 (1990): 7-12.

<sup>33</sup> Norman Harper, “Asian Students and Asian Studies in Australia,” *Pacific Affairs* 31, 1 (1958), 54-64.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 62.

<sup>35</sup> J. Leyser, “Indonesian Studies in Australian Universities,” *Hemisphere* (1957), 6-7. See, also, J. Bastin, “Indonesian and Malayan Studies in Australia,” *Bijdragen tot de taal—land en volken kunde van Neerlandsch Indie* 113, ii (1957), 203-204.

<sup>36</sup> Harper, “Asian Students, 62.

### *Islamic Studies*

Even though many universities in this country open Islamic studies departments, their development is not older than similar studies in Islamic study centers in other parts of the Western world such as Europe, the United States, and Canada. In North America, Islam has become a subject of study offered at the University of Chicago (USA) and McGill University (Canada). Outside of these two campuses, we can still find study centers that have overlapping studies with two campuses above, such as the University of California Los Angeles (UCLA), the State University, Boston University, and so on.

Islamic studies in Australian universities is closely associated with the existence of Semitic and Middle Eastern Studies established at the Universities of Sydney and Melbourne. These have included courses relating to Arabic and Islam.<sup>37</sup> Arabic language instruction began at ANU in 1970 as a single course. By 1975, it had expanded into a three-year program with an optional fourth year for honors students. Interestingly, the initial justification for teaching Arabic was not its connection to the Middle East, rather its importance for understanding Indonesian cultures. However, the program evolved beyond its original purpose and become a center for research on Islamic theology and the interpretation of the Qur'an, essentially establishing itself as a dedicated field of Islamic studies.<sup>38</sup>

The enthusiasm of Islamic studies in Australia gained its momentum in the turn of the millennium, with special reference to the post-September 11 terrorist attacks in New York.<sup>39</sup> The terrorist attacks have pushed scholars and politicians in Australia to take Islamic studies into serious account. As a result, more research projects on Islam especially in relation to the studies of terrorism are on the peak in Australia, both for the security reason and academic one. Those projects have produced a great deal of scholarly works published in peer-reviewed journals or books. Among those are Master's and Doctoral theses written by students in some Australian universities.

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<sup>37</sup> A.H. Johns, "Hopes and Frustrations: Islamic and Middle Eastern Studies in Australia," *MESA Bulletin* 25 (1991): 173-180.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 176.

<sup>39</sup> Andrew Silke, *Research on Terrorism: Trends, Achievements & Failures* (London and Portland: Frank Cass, 2004).

### ***Indonesian Islam Studies***

Indonesian Islam studies represent an overarching intersection between Indonesian studies and Islamic studies. In general, there are two approaches in the making of Indonesian Islam studies in Australian universities. The first approach is discipline-based studies. Research and teaching about Indonesian Islam are carried out in various faculties and departments scattered in most Australian universities. Students and faculty members are undertaking their research projects under particular disciplinary subject such as economics, law, politics, law, sociology, philosophy, history, and other applied sciences. Research on Indonesian Islam can be undertaken in the Faculty of Arts, Faculty of Education, Faculty of Law, even in the Faculty of Engineering, Mathematics, and the like. Islam takes only one perspective as the lens of accomplishing the research of students or faculty members.

Through the second approach, Islamic studies research is carried out under the departments of Indonesian studies, Asian Studies as well as Southeast Asian Studies. According to Ingleson, area studies approach can be really successful only in new universities where “deliberate decision was made right at the beginning to structure the university into areas of study.”<sup>40</sup> In his opinion, creating an interdisciplinary approach to Indonesian studies for undergraduate students has been challenging. As an alternative, some have adopted a program-based approach. However, this approach faces resistance from some disciplines that are hesitant to offer courses on Indonesia.<sup>41</sup>

The University of Melbourne’s Law School has established the Centre for Indonesian Law, Islam and Societies (CILIS) in 2013.<sup>42</sup> CILIS is dedicated to researching Indonesian law and Islamic legal studies, with the goal of becoming a leading global hub for this field. The center focuses on the Indonesian state legal system, Islamic legal traditions, and how they interact with Indonesian society. It organizes annual workshops on relevant themes and boasts several distinguished professors, including Prof. Tim Lindsey and A/Prof. Nadirsyah Hosen. The center currently receives a multi-year grant from The Australian Research Centre and publishes the *Australian Journal of Asian Law*, a biannually blind-peer reviewed international journal.

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<sup>40</sup> Ingleson, “Directions in Indonesian Studies, 9.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

<sup>42</sup> <https://law.unimelb.edu.au/centres/cilis> (accessed on 14 November 2024).

The University of Melbourne is also involved in a national consortium called the National Centre for Contemporary Islamic Studies (NCCIS) in developing Islamic studies.<sup>43</sup> The center's goal is to deepen knowledge and comprehension of both the historical traditions and current complexities of Islam. Through research, education, and community outreach, they strive to be leaders in addressing the needs of Australia and the surrounding region regarding Islamic issues. The center's experts also offer guidance to government and various organizations on topics related to contemporary Islam. This center involves three Australian universities as follows: the University of Melbourne, Griffith University (QLD) and the University of Western Sydney (NSW). Since 2011, all three universities have gone to establish their own independent Islamic studies programs.

### **Australia's Interests-Driven Indonesian Islam Studies**

Following the theory of political economy, there is no such thing as a value-free academic enterprise.<sup>44</sup> This means that behind the academic enterprise lies political and economic interests of particular powers. These interests can be in the form of motif, purpose, or consideration of someone involved in academic studies. Likewise, in the context of Indonesian Islam studies, the authors assume the involvement of political and economic interests of particular parties. The vision and direction of the development of Indonesian Islam studies is influenced by Australia's economic-political interests.

There are two fundamental elements to trace the presence of the political economic interests behind the production of Indonesian Islam studies. The first element is the presence of the issue of national security inserted by the Australian government in its foreign policy.<sup>45</sup> National security is one of the serious considerations behind Australia's foreign policy, which must be referred to as a guide for academic studies at various universities in Australia. Because what is studied at universities must support the government policies,

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<sup>43</sup> <https://arts.unimelb.edu.au/national-centre-for-contemporary-islamic-studies> (accessed on 15 November 2024).

<sup>44</sup> Anthony Gill, "A Political Economy of Religion," in Ted G. Jelen (ed.), *Sacred Markets, Sacred Canopies: Essays on Religious Markets and Religious Pluralism* (New York & Oxford: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2002), 115-132.

<sup>45</sup> Allan Gyngell & Michael Wesley, *Making Australian Foreign Policy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 161.

universities cannot be separated from efforts to strengthen these policies through a series of research and teaching activities at a university.<sup>46</sup>

In this context, Indonesia is considered by Australia as the most important frontline of the international geographic border that can serve as a buffer zone for incoming threats outside the country.<sup>47</sup> Almost every time there is a migration influx from outside Australia intending to enter the country, they must enter through the Indonesian border. Therefore, there is no reason for the Australian government not to maintain good communication and friendship with Indonesia because Indonesia becomes the gateway for migration flows from outside, especially for asylum seekers from conflicting Middle Eastern countries.<sup>48</sup>

Moreover, security is also a concern for the Australian government because many Australian citizens make Indonesia (especially Bali, Lombok, and surrounding areas) their vacation destination. This is why most victims of the Bali 1 and 2 bombings were Australian citizens (202 Australian citizens died in the terrorist attacks on Bali 1 in 2001). Although the terrorists chose foreign citizens randomly as targets for their attacks, the high number of Australian victims was not a coincidence. The terrorists considered Australia as one of the closest Western allies, constructed as a “*kaafir*” (unbelievers) enemy that must be fought through terrorist acts.<sup>49</sup>

The presence of Australia’s national security interests in the development of academic studies can be traced through the provision of profound research grants given by Australian funding agencies such as the Australian Research Council (ARC). The main focus given by

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<sup>46</sup> Sandra Meiras, “International Education in Australian Universities: Understandings, Dimensions and Problems,” *Journal of Higher Education Policy and Management* 26, 3 (2004), 371-380.

<sup>47</sup> Harold Crouch, “Indonesia and the Security of Australia and Papua New Guinea,” *Australian International Affairs* 40, 3 (1986), 167-174. See, also, Rod Lyon, “Australia’s Security and the Threat of Islamic Extremism in Southeast Asia,” *Cambridge Review of International Affairs* 16, 3 (2003), 447-462.

<sup>48</sup> Antje Missbach, “Doors and Fences: Controlling Indonesia’s Porous Borders and Policing Asylum Seekers,” *Singapore Journal of Tropical Geography* 35, 2 (2014), 228-244.

<sup>49</sup> Anthony L. Smith, “Terrorism and the Political Landscape in Indonesia: The Fragile Post-Bali Consensus,” in Paul J. Smith (ed.), *Terrorism and Violence in Southeast Asia: Transnational Challenges to States and Regional Stability* (New York: Routledge, 2005), 98-121.

the Australian government on academic study themes through these research grants becomes incentives from the government to support and strengthen national security issues for Australian citizens, which must be linked to research proposals by Australian university-based scholars. In the early 2000s, national security became of the priority theme of research at ARC, which was openly competed for by Australian academics.

Given the importance of this national security issue, the Australian government, through the ARC, has a research cluster under the National Intelligence and Security Research Grants (NISDRG)/National Intelligence Discovery Grants (NIDG) Program. For example, in 2025, the Australian government allocated research funds of AUS \$400,000 to \$800,000 per project for three years. The opportunity to receive this research grant is opened once every year.<sup>50</sup>

Another example can be mentioned here, for instance, in 2009, the ARC granted \$951,578.00 to Prof. Vedi Hadiz (the University of Melbourne) to undertake research on a topic entitled “State, Class and Islamic Populism: Indonesia in Comparative Perspective.”<sup>51</sup> This project specifically examines Australia’s policy response to the phenomenon of Islamic radicalism in Indonesia, particularly the social foundations of the rise of Islamic populism as an expression of political Islam that allows public policymakers in Australia to understand more comprehensively the complex networks and relationships that produce Islamic populism, including the currents of Islamic radicalism.

In the same year, 2009, The Australian National University also received an ARC research grant through Prof. Greg Fealy to conduct a research project under the Discovery Projects scheme with a funding amount of \$336,647.00.<sup>52</sup> The research titled “The Origins and Development of Islamic Terrorist Behavior in Indonesia” specifically examines the root-causes and dynamics of terrorists in carrying out their jihadist actions, the relevance of local and international factors in the making of radical Islamism. The objective of this research project is to provide in-depth information and analysis regarding the

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<sup>50</sup> [https://www.researchgrants.gov.au/grant-opportunities/nisdrgr\\_nidg/#funding](https://www.researchgrants.gov.au/grant-opportunities/nisdrgr_nidg/#funding), accessed on 28 August 2024.

<sup>51</sup> <https://dataportal.arc.gov.au/RGS/Web/Grants#/20/1//radicalism/>, accessed on 28 August 2024.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

phenomenon of radicalism and terrorism in Indonesia as well as its connection to the role of media in the spread of radical ideology.

Beside the two examples above, there are certainly many other research projects on Islam in Indonesia from various aspects and perspectives. Especially in Australia, there are many universities with teaching resources in Indonesian studies, such as the University of Melbourne, the Australian National University, Sydney University, Monash University and so on. Most lecturers and professors teaching at these universities initially started from disciplinary based subjects such as history, sociology, anthropology, law, humanities, gender studies and media studies. From these disciplinary studies, they then shifted to area studies, namely Indonesian studies.

The profile of Tim Lindsey, a professor of law at Melbourne Law School the University of Melbourne, is one of the best scholars with expertise in law who shifted to the study of Islamic law in Indonesia. M.C. Ricklefs, Greg Fealy, Greg Barton, M.B. Hooker, James Fox, and other professors are similar. They started from disciplinary studies who shifted onto area studies due to demands of Australia's foreign policy. This indicates that the development of particular studies in universities is driven by socio-political demands of external forces such as the state policy.<sup>53</sup> When the state makes a particular condition as priority in research scheme, it determines the direction of research scheme shared by scholars in universities.

In addition to scholars with various disciplinary expertise, the aforementioned universities also have institutional resources with centers for studies on Indonesia. At the University of Melbourne, there is a research center called The Asia Institute under the Faculty of Arts (previously known as the Melbourne Institute of Asian Languages and Societies) which serves as a hub for conducting studies on Asia, Islam, Indonesia, Japan and China. It houses well-known names like Professors Abdullah Saeed, Vedi Hadiz, and others. Moreover, this university also has the Center for Islamic Law and Islamic Studies (CILIS) which is under the Melbourne Law School. This research

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<sup>53</sup> Edward P. St. John, "Policy Research and Political Decisions," in Edward P. St. John and Michael D. Parsons (eds.), *Public Funding of Higher Education: Changing Contexts and New Rationales* (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2004), 231-252.

center includes Professors Tim Lindsey and Nadirsyah Hosen, the two scholars with expertise on Indonesian Islamic law (*shari'ah*).<sup>54</sup>

In addition, there is also Monash University which has a strong tradition of Asian studies, particularly Indonesian studies. On this campus, there is a research center called the School of Languages, Literatures, Cultures, and Linguistics, which includes Indonesian Studies.<sup>55</sup> Prof. Ricklefs taught at this university for 13 years (1980-1993). Greg Fealy was one of his students at Monash University. Currently, only Julian Millie remains as the the sole Indonesianist at this campus. Before moving to Melbourne Law School, Nadirsyah Hosen taught at Monash University. Hosen taught at Monash for 9 years (2015-2024).<sup>56</sup>

Aside from national security factors, the presence of Australia's economic-political interests is another factor behind the development of Islamic studies in Indonesia.<sup>57</sup> The term economic-political interests refer to the motives of economic and political gain behind a country's policy. The choice to develop Indonesian studies becomes inevitable when this country shows a tendency of economic development towards becoming a middle-class economic power.<sup>58</sup> Especially under the leadership of President Joko Widodo, Indonesia has shown a positive trend in terms of national economic development,<sup>59</sup> among other thing with his controversial omnibus law policy,<sup>60</sup> even though the Covid-19 pandemic hit this country in 2020-2022.

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<sup>54</sup> <https://law.unimelb.edu.au/centres/cilis> (accessed on 14 November 2024).

<sup>55</sup> <https://www.monash.edu/arts/languages-literatures-cultures-linguistics> (accessed on 14 November 2024).

<sup>56</sup> Nadirsyah Hosen, Interview, Melbourne, 22 August 2024.

<sup>57</sup> Alan Lindsay and Ruth Neumann, "University Research in Flux: Policy Debate in Australia," *Higher Education* 16, 4 (1987), 433-448.

<sup>58</sup> Amitav Acharya, *Indonesia Matters: Asia's Emerging Democratic Power* (New Jersey, Singapore: World Scientific, 2015).

<sup>59</sup> This also achieved with the performance of Islamic-based sector. See for instance Banjaran Surya Indrastomo, Rahmatina Awaliah Kasri, Nur Dhani Hendranastiti, Understanding the Historical Emergence of Islamic Finance in Indonesia: An Institutional and Social Movement Perspective, *Qudus International Journal of Islamic Studies* 11, 1 (2023)

<sup>60</sup> EMK Alidar, Muhammad Maulana, Yuhasnibar Syah, Bustamam Usman, Juridical Provisions on Government Policies Towards Marginal Economic Actors in Indonesia in the Perspective of Islamic Law, *Samarah: Jurnal Hukum Keluarga dan Hukum Islam* 7, 1 (2023)

## Declining Trends of Indonesian Islam Studies

The studies on Indonesian Islam have enjoyed its reputation as one of the most popular research themes carried out by universities-based scholars around the world, including by scholars in Australian universities, as a result of terrorist attacks known as September 11, 2001 and two series of the Bali bombing in 2002 and 2005. Studies on Islam in relation to radicalism and terrorism received most attention of scholars across disciplines, both social, political, and religion scientists. Those terrorist attacks, both in Indonesia and across the world, have stimulated a great deal of disciplinary-based scholars to conduct their research based on area studies.<sup>61</sup>

Those terrorist attacks have stimulated not only scholars but also students from around the world to carry out research projects on Islam in relation to terrorism, radicalism, and security issues. Australian universities are, of course, not exception from this trend. Australian funding agencies have poured a great number of funding through the ARC and public universities to fund researches on that issue. Within a decade-time span, the issue of Islam, terrorism and security have dominated the priority scale of research scheme among scholars and researchers.

Despite its golden season, Tim Lindsey argues that the study of Indonesian Islam in Australia has undergone a difficult ups-and-downs with the worrisome tendency of declining trend in recent years.<sup>62</sup> In his opinion, there several factors that contribute to the declining of Indonesian Islam studies. First, the generation changes. The Indonesian Islam studies have been passed onto one generation of scholars to another younger generation in Australia. Since its first introduction by first generation such as Anthony Reid, the study of Indonesian Islam has produced a significant bulk of scholarly works on Indonesian studies with slight emphasis on Islam and Muslims. The production of Indonesian Islam studies continues where the younger generation such as M.C. Ricklefs, Barry Hooker, Virginia Hooker and

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<sup>61</sup> See, for instance, Biveer Singh, "The Challenge of Militant Islam and Terrorism in Indonesia," *Australian Journal of International Affairs* 58, 1 (2004), 47-68; Matt Cianflone, et. al., "Anatomy of a Terrorist Attack: An In-depth Investigation Into The 2002 Bali, Indonesia, Bombings," Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh, 2007; Greg Fealy, *Radical Islam in Indonesia: History, Ideology and Prospects*, *ASPI Local Jihad: Radical Islam and Terrorism in Indonesia*, 2005.

<sup>62</sup> Tim Lindsey, Interview, Melbourne, 21 August 2024.

their contemporaries have carried out the production of scholarly works on the same studies. The next generation such as Greg Fealy, Tim Lindsey, Greg Barton and the like hold on the same duty to carry on the same studies.

However, the problem happens when Indonesian Islam studies suffered the lack of interests among younger generation. Why such a problem happens to younger Australian scholars studying Indonesian Islam studies? Of course, it has something to do with the second factor: inconsistency between the policy made by the politicians in order to support Indonesian Islam studies with the rhetoric support made by them in public. They often argue that Indonesia does matter for Australia. Nevertheless, this rhetoric is not translated to the concrete action by supporting research grants on this theme. Following Tim Lindsey, there is a “rhetoric gap” in making Indonesian studies important for Australia.

The third factor is policy failure in the investment of educating more specialists in Indonesian Islam studies. Lindsey predicts that, if the problem of educating more Australians in Indonesian Islam studies persists, Australia will suffer the lack of Australian scholars specialized in Indonesian Islam studies in the next decade or so and the government will regret due to this problem. It must be admitted that Australian scholars whose expertise is Indonesian studies are getting scarce and there are no concerted serious efforts by the government to anticipate the scarcity of Indonesianists in the future by investing more funds in the field of higher education sector.

The last factor is the absence of critical issues such as terrorism and radicalism. Despite the damaging effects, some terrorist attacks can result in deep concern from the government in the forms of policy in security issues. This policy must be supported by a series of research projects and concrete measures to counter the spread of the ideology of radicalism and terrorism. By doing so, scholars in Islamic studies or Indonesian studies are benefitted from those terrorism issues. The Bali bombings have awakened the government in order to produce a policy or measure to counter terrorist attacks. The Australian scholars specialized in Indonesian Islam were really busy to undertake a series of scholarly projects such as research, conferences and publications. As admitted by Lindsey, he himself can go to Indonesia 16 times back-

and-forth in the post Bali Bombing I & II and could produce 137 types of publications on this theme and its related themes.<sup>63</sup>

Indonesian Islam studies in Australian universities are now declining. The same trend seems to be the case across the globe. Indonesian Islam studies in most Western universities has undergone one of the most difficult phases ever. The declining trend in the study of Indonesian Islam is a global phenomenon that can be seen in many leading universities in Europe and North America such Canada's McGill University, Chicago University in the US, or the Netherlands' Leiden University. Now it is the time for reflection as to what has happened to the study of Indonesian Islam in those universities in order to provide the best solution to that problem.

## Conclusion

From the discussion above, it can be concluded that there is no such thing as interest-free in the process of knowledge production. This is precisely the case when one looks at the Australian scholarship on Indonesian Islam. The Indonesian Islam studies has formed a political economy logic following the interests of Australia along with the country's political and economic affairs. When the country deems necessary to make Indonesian Islam as its priority in research, university-based Australian scholars are encouraged to investigate Indonesian Islam in its various aspects as its main theme of their research projects. The government does not hesitate to pour a large sum of grants to fund such research themes. This is the case when Australia's or Australians' interests at home and abroad are distracted by such security issues as terrorism and radicalism.

The Bali Bombings in 2002 and 2005 that caused hundreds of Australian lives have stimulated a huge funding scheme among Australian scholars to investigate radicalism, terrorism and security issues. This scheme made most Australian scholars with expertise in Indonesian Islam from various disciplines (law, political science, religious studies, sociology, anthropology, and others) come together in a series of interdisciplinary research projects funded by the government. The purpose of this project is one: to ensure the political and economic interests of Australia and all Australians are protected. Due to this reason, it is highly challenging in the context of Australian scholarship to maintain a steady development of Indonesian Islam

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<sup>63</sup> Tim Lindsey, Interview, Melbourne, 21 August 2024.

studies among Australian scholars. Therefore, it can be argued that the knowledge production process on Indonesian Islam in Australia is mostly project-driven. []

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