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ARAB ETHNOPOLITICS, SPICE TRADE, AND ISLAM IN EASTERN INDONESIA

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ABSTRACT

This study will fill a significant void in understanding the ethnopolitical influences of Arab traders in developing Eastern Indonesia. It investigates the study issue of how the Arab traders influenced the local political, social, and economic situation in Eastern Indonesia through the spice trade and the spread of Islam. The research is based on the theoretical perspective of transregional trade networks and ethnopolitical entrepreneurship, and uses systematic qualitative data analysis (QDA) of historical archives and digital sources. The QDA focused on classifying patterns of influence, cultural interchange, and economic impact. The analysis revealed four significant themes: the social and political repercussions of Arab traders resulting in the establishment of Islamic sultanates; the moderating influence of European colonialism, the long-lasting economic effect of the spice trade; and cultural exchanges through Islam. The results reveal the important role of Arab traders in the Islamisation and formation of the early Islamic sultanates in the key spice islands (Ternate, Tidore, Makassar). But its impact was much attenuated by the presence of competing indigenous and colonial influences in locations like Manado and Fak-Fak, Papua. It concludes that Arab ethnopolitics had an important role in the Islamization of the region.

Keywords: Ethnopolitics, Arab Traders, Spice Trade, Islamization, Eastern Indonesia.

INTRODUCTION

The change in Eastern Indonesia was a negotiated blend of Arab ethnopolitics and local institutions. The spread of Islam was not a simple imposition, but rather a strategic acculturation dependent on the authority of pre-existing local polities. The theological and political evolution of eastern Indonesia, notably the Maluku, was not just a question of the large Indian Ocean trade patterns (Abu-Lughod, 1989; Wink, 1988), but local acculturation. Recent research (Handoko et al., 2024) suggests that Islamization was a negotiation process where Islamic legal-political principles encountered local norms.

At its root was "ethnopolitical entrepreneurship fuelled by the spice trade." For example, Sultan Zainal Abidin of Ternate transformed from a Kolano to a Sultan in order to institutionalise Islamic power (Marasabessy, 2006). This union was physically portrayed in the Wapauwe Mosque, where the three-tiered roof signified the synthesis between the pillars of Islam and traditional architecture (Handoko et al., 2023).

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But the Arab ethnopolitics was not always successful; Sultanates were established in hot spots like Ternate and Makassar, produced by confederations of Sufi networks and monarchs. But in Manado and Fak-Fak, the effect was simply economic. In Manado, the Arab merchants were a minority because of the absence of a previous sultanate and the supremacy of the Dutch Protestant (Azis, 2020). For example, in Fak-Fak, the Dutch colonial government and powerful local associations limited the opportunity for Arabs to trade textiles and spices (Clarence-Smith, 1998). Ultimately, the success of Arab ethnopolitics was dependent upon its capacity to mesh with robust native political power structures.

This historical difference implies that ethnic influence is not a static attribute in general, but a dynamic tradeoff between group identity and state building. The diverse findings at various places hint at the need for a broader theoretical framework that could account for why some ethnic groups may be able to convert economic presence into political dominance, and others are not. The larger terrain of ethnopolitics is the passage from historical observation to systemic insight.

Ethnopolitics is the study of the relationship between ethnicity and political systems. It examines the impact of ethnic identities on political organization, the distribution of power, and interethnic relations (Milne & Rothschild, 1982). This study is related to the study of the main role of ethnic communities in political activities, such as negotiating laws and the celebration of political power. The study also explores how the state controls diversity, between inclusion and exclusion (Edwards, 2021). The fundamental concepts of ethnogenesis and ethnicization demonstrate the importance of ethnicity for social bonds and systems of administration. Ethnogenesis is the process of the creation of new ethnic identities, and ethnicization is the process of the politicization of group differences.

Such dynamics often entail ethnic entrepreneurship, which usually links economic activity with political influence. For example, Syrett and Keles (2019) demonstrate how Arab ethnicity was enacted through corporate actions that combined commercial and social leverage. However, Cederberg and Villares (2018) point out that ethnic wars were spurred by the restrictions on entrepreneurship of disadvantaged populations in the Middle East. Arab merchants traded across the extensive networks of the Islamic world, especially in Southeast Asia, to achieve sociopolitical domination. The economic channels were employed for artistic and political purposes. Take the old spice trade, for example.

Kersten (2024) states in the literature that Arab entrepreneurship is a strategy to connect the commercial channels of the Middle East and South East Asia and to promote the political-cultural integration of Islam. Moreover, these networks were a political expansion through strategic alliances for more than trade, as noted by Laffan (2023). These activities are an indication of the old trade system, such as the trade routes of Rome in the Mediterranean, which included a multitude of participants and built the foundation of global connectivity (Sulistiono, 2022). Arab traders, located in Mediterranean trading centers such as Alexandria, exploited these worldwide networks to extend their influence over the Malay Archipelago and to effect important ethnopolitical changes.

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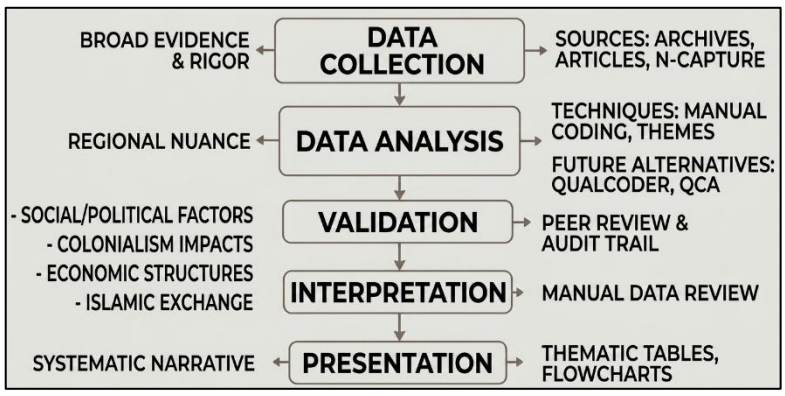
However, there is a lacuna in the study of the actual process and the long-term impact of this ethnopolitical interaction in remote geographical spaces. Research has revealed that Arab trade, Islam, and political control in Southeast Asia have a basic link. The swift transition from global trade theory to localized change can sometimes mask the particular case of Maluku and eastern Indonesia. With its complex pre-colonial governance institutions and much sought-after resources, the region offers a unique laboratory to study the hybridization of local administration, Islamic principles, and Arab economic interests. Therefore, the study offers a micro-level narrative of how centuries of cross-cultural interaction, facilitated by ethnic entrepreneurship and global trade networks, coalesced to create regional identities and power relations in this singular, unacknowledged site.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employs a structured qualitative data analysis method to analyse the ethnopolitical dynamics of Arab traders in the spice trade route and the process of Islamization in Eastern Indonesia. To maintain the credibility of the results, data is collected comprehensively from document studies of books, scientific articles, and historical archives, and in line with the qualitative inquiry standards set out by Creswell and Poth (2018:121) in their foundational work on narration research design. Following the notion of data source integration (Maher et al., 2018), physical and digital data are synchronised in this study. The digital literature is rigorously organised before analysis by Google N-capture.

The framework matrix was the only method used for manual thematic analysis, ensuring great methodological precision in analysing regional and thematic differences in this study. This manual method was used intentionally to allow researchers to capture the richness of contextual nuances and implicit data typically lost in automated coding software-based analysis, a technique known for its transparency and systematic rigour. This matrix provides a rigid thematic mapping of four main domains: (1) the social and political influence of Arab traders, (2) the impact of European colonialism, (3) the role of economics in spice routes, and (4) cultural exchange and the influence of Islam on local political systems (Mortelmans, 2019).

Figure 1. Simplified Qualitative Methodology



Source: Data Processed.

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As seen in Figure 1 above, each piece of data received from the document is made a critical component in the source triangulation technique. Here, each piece of information is manually cross-checked between different sorts of historical archives. This technique provides a strong empirical basis for each finding. The researcher employed a cross-researcher validation procedure and an in-depth analysis of implicit data in the framework, to eliminate the interpretation bias and restrictions of manual approaches, to get an objective and thorough comprehension of the ethnopolitical.

The framework is useful as it allows you to cut the data horizontally by region and vertically by theme at the same time, giving a sharper depth of manual analysis than automated alternatives. QualCoder is considered a free alternative for qualitative data management in the future without the need for complicated paid software (Brailas et al., 2023), and digital coding is not yet in use. Furthermore, if the research emphasis is on testing causal conditions that trigger formal regional variation, the Qualitative Comparative Analysis (QCA) method is highly recommended as a better supplementary instrument to strengthen the validity of these ethnopolitical research results, especially in linking qualitative depth with set-theoretic logic (Schneider & Wagemann, 2012).

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Result

The development of Islam in Eastern Indonesia was particularly influenced by Arab traders and political officials in the spice-rich areas of Ternate and Tidore. As Putuhena (1980) and Ricklefs (2020) indicate, Arab traders and rulers such as the Sultan of Malacca were within the broader trade networks that linked Southeast Asia with the Arab world, and Islam was propagated along these networks. These areas became focal places in the spread of Islam, and the first conversions took place as early as the 8th century. The political prominence of the traders and the instability of the region resulted in the rise of Islam in local communities.

By the sixteenth century, Islam had a firm hold in places such as South Sulawesi, particularly in the Gowa-Tallo Kingdom. The role of Datuk ri Bandang was crucial in the conversion of local rulers and the dissemination of Islamic practices in the region (Dahlan, 2013). In addition to missionary work, intermarriage between local elites and Arab traders helped to cement Islam into the political and social fabric of the region. This dynamism continued even after the onset of European colonialism, which tried to control the trade routes but failed to diminish the religion's impact. The socio-political relationship between Arab traders and local rulers was relevant in maintaining the significance of Islam, especially as a symbol of resistance against colonial forces (Handoko et al., 2023).

The position of the exiled Islamic leaders also facilitated the spread of Islam in the region, such as in Manado and its surroundings. Kyai Modjo and others like him were exiled by the Dutch and were able to build lasting Muslim communities in Tondano through their connections to local populations and intermarriages (Lopez, 2018). These villages, such as Kampung Jawa Tondano, became important centers of Islam, thus stressing further how

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Arab traders and their connections helped Islam's spread in the region (Azis, 2023). The spread was facilitated by maritime trade routes connecting Southeast Asia with the rest of the Islamic world, dominated by Arab traders from the 9th century onwards.

Social and Political Influence of Arab Traders

Islamic influence in Eastern Indonesia was spread through the spice trade and Arab commercial networks. This effect remains uneven, reflecting levels of political integration in history. Dominance is particularly apparent in historic commercial centers where traditional rulers became Sultans, institutionalising Islam as the authority of the state. Hubs of the Sultanate grew in key cities like Makassar and Gowa. The important spice ports in North Maluku anchored this political transition. In Ternate and Tidore, as well as Buton and Gowa, the monarchs became Sultans, thus cementing Islam in the power structure of the region.

Arab connections were crucial to political and economic integration, especially in the trade networks of Kendari-Buton and Makassar. By contrast, regions like Manado and Papua are hardly influenced by Islamic or Arab rule, primarily due to the counter-influence of European colonialism. But Islamic influence was not limited to the great sultanates but was disseminated through cultural ties in places such as Palu and Gorontalo. Even the old ports of Ambon and Fak-Fak were under the power of the Sultanates of Ternate and Tidore. Ultimately, these trade networks irreversibly changed the demographic picture of Eastern Indonesia, and the foundation of the Sultanates left a profound political impact.

Table 1. Transition from Traditional Rulers to Islamic Sultanates in Eastern Indonesia

Region	Original Name Before Sultan Title	Reign Period	First Islamic Title
Ternate	Zainal Abidin, 18th Kolano	1486-1500 AD	Sultan Zainal Abidin
Tidore	Ciriliyati, 11th Kolano	1495-1512 AD	Sultan Djamaluddin
Buton	Lakilaponto (Haluoleo), 6th king	1542 AD	Sultan Qaimuddin Khalifatul Khamiz
Gowa	I Mangarangi Daeng Manrabbia, 14th King	1593-1639 AD	Sultan Alauddin I

Source: Processed Data

Impact of European Colonialism

The rivalry between the colonial European powers for spices in eastern Indonesia had major consequences for the political and economic situation in the region. The Dutch East India Company changed from a commercial corporation to a sort of territorial capitalism (Mostert, 2023). Things changed with the coming of the Portuguese, Spanish, and then the development of the Dutch East India Company. The focus was on significant spice ports and marginalising non-spice-producing areas. The colonial paradigm was one of military, economic, and political superiority through building huge stone forts, such as Fort Oranje and Fort Rotterdam. These strongholds dominated the trade routes and undermined the power of local Sultanates, as exemplified by the Makassar War that resulted in the Treaty of Bongaya, which almost abolished local sovereignty (Bulbeck, 1990). Colonial authority was most

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centralised there, and European intervention in places such as Manado and Ambon swiftly changed past regimes of administration.

For instance, local rulers were regularly pushed to take part in Fak-Fak and the Ternate-Tidore archipelago, combining colonial pressure with economic incentives (Platenkamp, 2013). Makassar also became a hub of armed resistance against the European invasion. These varied responses notwithstanding, the long-term effect across the area was the deliberate demolition of sovereign sultanates and the construction of a centralised colonial bureaucracy. The latter, less involved in the global spice trade, did not, of course, undergo the same demographic and religious transformations as formerly powerful trading centres such as Ternate and Makassar, which maintained their identities as Muslim majority societies, a product of this intense period of interaction between colonial powers and Islamic sultanates (Clulow & Mostert, 2025).

Economic and Political Influence of Arab Spice Traders

Arab traders were an important economic force throughout Eastern Indonesia, with their intensity fluctuating according to the local political situation. The strongest integration was in the spice trade cities of Ternate, Tidore, and Makassar. Arab control influenced commercial infrastructure and reinforced their standing as global marine hubs. These regions had organised commercial ties and a certain synergy between the merchant networks and the local Sultanates, which was the main impetus of economic progress.

This influence reached far into the economic politics, especially in Makassar and the Maluku islands. Here, Arab traders worked with local monarchs to determine how to rule and trade, ensuring key routes and interests. On the other hand, areas like Gowa and Manado have high levels of engagement but more diverse foreign influences. At the same time, in the periphery territories of Fak-Fak and Buton, the power of the Arab economic authority became weaker.

Table 2. Number of Arab Merchant Communities in Ambon, Ternate, and Manado, 1859–1915

Year	Ambon	Ternate	Manado
1859	53	23	11
1870	170	66	17
1885	444	111	147
1905	875	368	819
1915	n.a	n.a	1,600

Source: Clarence-Smith, 1998.

Although the scores for political influence and infrastructural engagement were very low, the Arab merchant community was largely based in Manado (Clarence-Smith 1998). The Arab population in Manado increased drastically from just 11 in 1859 to 1,600 in 1915, establishing itself as the key center for the community in Eastern Indonesia. But this increase brought about the Manado Paradox. A big Muslim population with only 6.72% resident Arabs. This stems from the suppression of Islamization under Dutch colonial authority,

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where Christian missionaries were dominant and Arab businessmen were concerned only with economic enterprises such as copra and textiles. A second approach of Arab traders in propagating Islam was to strengthen trade networks, and this technique was only effective when there were strong sultanates, such as in Makassar and Ternate, which was not the situation in Manado and Papua.

Cultural Exchange and the Impact of Islam on Local Politics

The spread of Islam and Arab culture in Eastern Indonesia was very much based on the historical trade and the might of the strong Sultanates. Arab traders and intellectuals became of enormous importance in the principal centres of Makassar, Ternate, and Tidore from the 16th century onwards. In consequence, the Arabic language was widely used, mosques and schools were erected, and Islamic law was incorporated into the government. This theological and political structure was further consolidated by the conversion of the Sultanate of Gowa.

On the other hand, areas like Ambon, Banda Neira, and Manado show fewer indications of Arab-Islamic influence. The difference is attributable to the period of Dutch colonialism and the subsequent expansion of Christianity. In the beginning, the relationship of Fak-Fak, Papua, with the Sultanate of Tidore was limited by distance. This unequal share of inheritance is, ultimately, a reflection of the bigger Islamic influence on the trading Sultanates and the more diverse cultural developments in other areas due to the colonial presence and the already existing local beliefs.

Table 3. Adoption of Arabic Terms in Various Government Activities and Others

Category	Arabic Loanwords
Politics and Government	*Sultan* (ruler/king), *Wazir* (minister/advisor), *Amir* (commander/prince), *Khalifah* (caliph/leader), *Syahbandar* (harbormaster), *Bendahara* (treasurer), *Qadi* (judge), *Mufti* (Islamic jurist), *Dewan* (council), Hakim (judge), Hisbah (moral police), *Diwan* (office/court), *Adil* (just/fair), *Rais* (chief/head), *Nash* (text/scripture), *Qanun* (law), *Daim* (permanent), *Mahkamah* (court), *Imarat* (province/emirate)
Law & Judiciary	*Syariah* (Islamic law), *Fatwa* (legal ruling), *Hukum* (law), *Adl* (justice), *Hudud* (punishments in Islamic law), *Ijtihad* (independent reasoning), *Istisna'* (exception), *Mu'amalah* (transaction), *Takzir* (discretionary punishment), *Hibah* (gift/donation)
Economy & Trade	*Baitul Mal* (treasury), *Zakat* (almsgiving), *Wakaf* (endowment), *Sadaqah* (charity), *Muamalat* (economic dealings), *Syirkah* (partnership), *Murabahah* (cost-plus financing), *Ijarah* (leasing), *Fidyah* (compensation payment), *Qirad* (profit-sharing loan)
Religion & Education	*Masjid* (mosque), *Madrasah* (Islamic school), *Khatib* (preacher), *Imam* (prayer leader), *Mubaligh* (Islamic missionary), *Muazin* (caller to prayer), *Hafiz* (Quran memorizer), *Sufi* (mystic), *Ulama* (scholar), *Ijazah* (certificate/diploma), *Tafsir* (exegesis/interpretation), *Fiqih* (Islamic jurisprudence), *Hadis* (Prophetic tradition), *Akidah* (creed), *Syahadah* (testimony of faith), *Haji* (pilgrimage to Mecca), *Umrah* (minor pilgrimage), *Tahfiz* (Quran memorization), *Talim* (education/instruction)

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Social & Cultural	*Adab* (manners), *Akhlak* (ethics/morals), *Nikah* (marriage), *Talak* (divorce), *Jariah* (charitable work), *Hijrah* (migration), *Ihsan* (excellence/benevolence), *Barakah* (blessing), *Amanah* (trust/responsibility), *Fitrah* (innate nature/purification), *Mahr* (dowry), *Ibadah* (worship), *Fardu* (obligatory), *Mustahik* (recipient of charity), *Jamaah* (congregation/community), *Rahmat* (mercy/blessing), *Silaturahmi* (family ties), *Dakwah* (Islamic preaching), *Syukur* (gratitude)

Source: Processed Data.

But Arab power was not confined to politics and commerce. It left behind a rich cultural and intellectual legacy. The enormous mosques, a mix of Middle Eastern and indigenous style, are scattered on both ends of the archipelago, with Arab-Muslim populations clustered around them. This history is also reflected in the more than 200 Islamic manuscripts (Qur'ans, Sufi tracts, royal genealogy) showing deep intellectual absorption of Islam. The Arab traders and intellectuals, through political relations, were able to convert Islamic teachings into local governance and values. In places such as Maluku, Islam was a deeply embedded system of culture and political ideals.

Language and Syariah were more prominent at the historic power centres of Ternate and Tidore, and less so in the new Muslim villages such as Fakfak. This geographical variation demonstrates the problems of Islamization in Indonesia as local cultures, Islamic teachings, and national politics continue to form diverse regional identities. The urban fabric, the literary sources, and the syncretic institutions demonstrate that the Arab-Islamic heritage is an essential element of the dual role of Islam as a spiritual and socio-political force.

The uneven distribution of Islam in the ethnopolitical landscape of eastern Indonesia is the consequence of a historical battle between Arab-Islamic commercial networks and European colonial power. The degree of Islamisation was very much reliant on the presence of local power structures, as Arab traders were able to leverage existing royal power to convert previous kingdoms into powerful Islamic Sultanates. This institutional shift has led to countries like North Maluku and South Sulawesi still having significant Muslim majorities today, as the faith became so embedded in local political and social institutions.

But the "Manado paradox" of many Arab enterprises in a city with a small Muslim population revealed the limits of economic supremacy without political support. In places like Manado and Ambon, the Arab influence was kept within the market square by the Dutch authorities and missionaries. The economic advantage of the Arabs could not compel any religious or political reform. There was no local Sultanate as a political base, and the process of Islamization was totally controlled by the colonial repression. This geo-economic and political contestation, therefore, left a structural imprint in the modern demographic geography with the remarkable contrast of Muslim-majority former Sultanate capitals and Christian-majority former colonial/missionary cities. One of the main reasons for the survival of Islam was the political institutionalisation of Islam by the sultanates, as evidenced in the usage of Arabic terminology in politics, government, and law (see Table 4). This further

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supports the argument that the social and political impact of Arab Traders was largely dependent on their incorporation into strong local political organisations.

The theory of ethnopolitics developed by Rothschild (1981) highlights the interrelation between ethnic identification, political authority, and economic influence, and can be applied to explain the role of Arab merchants in the Islamisation process in Eastern Indonesia. Arab traders brought the practice of Islam as a religion into their business networks and into local administrative systems. This trend is in conjunction with Cederberg & Villares (2018), who name ethnic business a mechanism of political integration. This fact illustrates, for example, the establishment of Islamic sultanates in Ternate and Tidore, having a close relationship with the main role of Arab traders in transforming the Islamic political model in the institutionalization of Islam as a system of government (Azra, 2021). In the context of Arab and colonial trade, the relationship between Islamization and political and economic institutions in Southeast Asia is very important.

Islamization is also related to political and economic institutions in Southeast Asia, which were driven by Arab merchants to conquer colonial power. As described by Abu-Lughod (1989), Fadhil (2024), and Wink (1988), Arab traders and intellectuals spread Islam through the spice trade and social networks. This trade also precipitated the emergence of Islamic sultanates. Cederberg & Villares (2018) reaffirmed Azra's (2021) evidence of the Islamization of Maluku. However, with the emergence of the European colonial powers, the Arab influence waned, argue Laffan (2018) and Fox (2019).

Islam also provided political legitimacy to kingdoms like Ternate and Tidore (Bose, 2020; Reid, 2020). The idea is reinforced by Mufrodi (2022) and Turner (2022), who state that Islam is not only a religious movement but a vehicle for political consolidation. But, Feener (2020) says, Islam was used more as a tool of societal control than merely state control. Azis et al. (2022) reconcile these views by arguing that Islamistization in government has political and social objectives.

Hourani (2017), Sidebothem (2019), and Syrett & Keles (2019) have highlighted the role of Arab merchants in the establishment of Islamic-based trade networks in economic terms. These traders also altered the politics of ethnicity and culture (Cheigh, 2005). However, Laffan (2018) and Fox (2019) argue that the European colonisation played a major role in the rupture of the Arab superiority and the change in economic grip. Our data, however, suggest that Arab traders continued to play an economically vital role in several locations, especially in Ternate and Tidore.

There are two differences that assess the process of Islamization through trade and politics (Abu-Lughod, 1989; Reid, 2020; Hourani, 2017), and those who are more inclined to the impact of colonialism (Laffan, 2018; Fox, 2019). Through the findings, Azis et al. (2022) concluded that local government systems have a correlation with Islamization, politics, and economic structures. According to Laffan (2018), Arab networks have played a key role in the Islamisation process since they were part of the process of embedding Islamic legal and governance frameworks within commercial systems. This perspective is supported by the study. But Laffan goes further to argue that the level of Arab influence is

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geographically variable. The Islamization process in Aceh and Java was facilitated by the continual movements of the ulama (Azra, 2021). In eastern Indonesia, Arab enterprises relied more on political links with local elites than on the spread of Islam. This erratic growth reflects the diversity of the Hadhrami diaspora (Freitag & Clarence-Smith, 1997).

In this study, we contribute to the larger discussions on the Islamization of Southeast Asia by injecting the concerns of ethnopolitical entrepreneurship and transregional trade. This study is distinct from other studies on religious conversion (Ricklefs, 2020) in that it addresses the economic-political aspects of Islamisation. This is in line with Turner's (2022) assessment that Islamization was a planned process in commercial and political fights. The Islamization of Southeast Asia can be seen as not a missionary paradigm in the strict sense, but as driven by a transregional economic logic, when compared to the trading networks of the Indian Ocean (Bose, 2020).

As Abu-Lughod (1989) and Wink (1988) have shown, spice routes were important conduits. Arab trade was a major element in the Islamization of eastern Indonesia. The alliances of Arab traders with local elites in Makassar, Gorontalo, Ternate, and Tidore increased the process of Islamization, and social structures witnessed a transition (Fadhil, 2024). One of the things that helped Muslims gain acceptance was the social engagement of Muslim traders with the rulers of Maluku (Azra, 2021). This is reflected in the Islamic law system of Ternate and Tidore.

The findings support the work of Bose (2020) and Reid (2020) that Islamic sultanates used Islam to justify authority politically. This is supported by Mufrodi (2022) and Ricklefs (2020), who consider Islamization as a political tool and religious movement. Feener (2020) adds to this the importance of Islam in social control. But its effects were parochial. The findings indicate that Hourani (2017) and Sidebothem (2019) suggest that the Muslim traders used religious networks for the economic development of commerce and links. The research of Basundoro & Nugroho (2024) offers evidence of the significant role of Arab traders in the spice trade and the propagation of Islam. According to Kumoratih (2022), the socio-economic character of the archipelago was influenced by factors of Arab-VOC-Sultanate relations. But the statistics do not correspond with the statement of Lahilote (2021) about the strong Arab religious influences in Manado. But here the effects of Islam are weaker because of the dominance of Protestantism and local cultural elements. This indicates the regionalisation of Islamisation.

Previous studies have mapped out Islamization at the macro level, but current generalisations do not pay attention to the social anomalies and variances at the local level, such as in terms of discrepancies in Islamic effect in Maluku vis-a-vis Manado or Papua. This is a remarkable break, and it requires a reassessment of Arab traders, not only as carriers of ideas, but as strategic political agents. This gives rise to a novel idea that ethno-political entrepreneurship is a key determinant in determining the success of the integration of Islamic politics.

This research offers a unique perspective by focusing on the role of Arab ethnopolitical entrepreneurship in the propagation of Islam and its impact on local politics in

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eastern Indonesia. This study is different from past studies that have tended to isolate the economic and political repercussions. It highlights the role of Arab traders as economic actors and political participants in a strategic sense. Arab businessmen set up commercial networks in the area, contacted local kings, and promoted the setting up of Islamic authority. This led to the development of governmental structures and religion in the area.

A specificity of this study is the regional variances, i.e., between regions having strong Islamic control, like Ternate and Tidore, and locations with less Islamic authority, like Manado and Fak-Fak, Papua. In this study, I dispute the dominant narratives that conceptualise Islamization as a uniform process. It instead emphasises the role of Arab commercial networks that altered the reach of Islamic influence according to trade routes, location, and local resistance. The research adds the notion of ethnopolitical entrepreneurship to the analysis and provides a new viewpoint on the political consolidation of Islam in the territories.

This study also demonstrates the significance of Arab traders, not only as economic actors, but also as political actors in the history of the Islamic sultanates and administration. Trade, not religious missions and political ties. The relationship between business, politics, and Islamisation was complex. The approach presents a critique of hegemonic narratives of Islamic expansion and opens up new options for research on the long-term impact of ethnopolitical entrepreneurship in Southeast Asia.

CONCLUSION

The historical trajectory of the spread of Islam in Eastern Indonesia is an interesting case study of intersectional dynamics where religious, commercial, and ethnic influences come together to influence socio-political identity. The region demands a profound theoretical engagement with inter-ethnic relations, historical and contemporary, especially in the context of the ongoing effect of the spice trade and Islamization. The case of Eastern Indonesia, from a theoretical point of view, invites an investigation of the manner in which the long-term institutional and structural consequences of Islamization, frequently mediated through global commerce, have profoundly transformed local political economies. Theoretical vectors: the role of the Arab diaspora as a vector articulating a particular ethno-religious identity, not reducible to the economic function of the diaspora, as the main challenge to indigenous social-political models; contribution to the field of diaspora studies and Islamic politics.

Furthermore, the theoretical lens should include the disruptive and codifying role of Dutch colonial policies, often acting as catalysts for the consolidation of ethnic boundary maintenance and possibly sowing seeds for future ethnic tensions and sectarianism, which is a critical element for the theory of post-colonial state formation and identity politics. The interaction between Arab entrepreneurship and local economic development also points to the importance of religious and cultural acculturation in economic sociology. The process of incorporation of Islamic values through Arab-Islamic culture into local economic systems provides rich data for the study of theories of religion and capitalism, as well as the cultural

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embeddedness of economic action. In short, Indonesia's East is a micro-laboratory to develop and test hypotheses on the co-evolution of global trade, religious expansion, and localised identity politics. There is no place for prescriptive policy here. The complexity of the region is not going away anytime soon, and there is a need for strong multidisciplinary frameworks that can incorporate the intertwined nature of historical precedent, political structure, and cultural identity in current Islamic politics.

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