



Trade and Colonial Policies: The Transformation of Agrarian Culture in Priangan in the Nineteenth Century

Rizki Malik Ibrahim,¹ Arif Sulaiman,² Alanuari,³ Abd. Wahid Hasyim⁴

^{1, 2, 3, 4}Universitas Nahdlatul Ulama Indonesia, Jakarta, Indonesia

rizkimalik040503@gmail.com,¹ arifsulaiman2805@gmail.com,² alanuari@unusia.ac.id,³ abdulwahid@unusia.ac.id⁴

Received: 02, 2026. Revised: 05, 2026. Accepted: 06, 2026. Published: 09, 2026.

Abstract:

The transformation of agrarian culture in Priangan during the 19th century occurred alongside the intervention of Dutch colonial policies and the region's increasing integration into global trade. These developments not only transformed the economic structure but also affected the social, cultural, and spiritual life of farming communities. This study aims to analyze changes in trade during the colonial period and local communities responses to economic, social, and cultural pressures, with a particular focus on the transformation of agrarian practices, land ownership patterns, social inequality, cultural adaptation, and the role of Islamic values in preserving the identity of Priangan society. This study employs a descriptive-interpretative qualitative approach using the historical method, which consists of heuristics, source verification, interpretation, and historiography. The findings show that, during the 19th century, the Dutch colonial government established commercial plantations in the Priangan region that focused on export commodities such as coffee and tea, thereby contributing to transformations in the agrarian cultural landscape. These changes affected not only the economic sphere but also contributed to the erosion of social and cultural values, such as *gotong royong* (mutual cooperation) and traditional agrarian rituals. Nevertheless, local communities demonstrated cultural resistance by adapting Islamic values into their agrarian practices, thereby strengthening social solidarity and local identity. This study contributes to highlighting the agrarian cultural characteristics of Indonesian society, which underwent significant transformations as a result of the hegemony of plantation culture oriented primarily toward industrialization and commercialization.

Keywords: Transformation, Agrarian Culture, Plantations, Trade, Colonialism.

Abstrak:

Transformasi budaya agraris di Priangan pada abad ke-19 berlangsung seiring dengan intervensi kebijakan kolonial Belanda dan semakin terintegrasinya wilayah tersebut ke dalam perdagangan global, yang tidak hanya mengubah struktur ekonomi, tetapi juga kehidupan sosial, budaya, dan spiritual masyarakat petani. Penelitian ini bertujuan menganalisis perubahan perdagangan dari masa kolonial serta respons masyarakat lokal terhadap tekanan ekonomi, sosial, dan budaya, dengan fokus pada transformasi praktik agraris pola kepemilikan lahan, ketimpangan sosial, adaptasi budaya, dan peran nilai-nilai Islam dalam mempertahankan identitas masyarakat Priangan. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif deskriptif-interpretatif melalui metode sejarah yang tahapannya terdiri dari heuristik, verifikasi, interpretasi, serta historiografi. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa, pada abad 19 di kawasan Priangan, kolonial Belanda mendirikan perkebunan komersial yang terpusat pada komoditas ekspor seperti kopi dan teh sehingga ikut berkontribusi pada perubahan lanskap budaya agraris. Perubahan ini tidak hanya berdampak pada aspek ekonomi, tetapi juga memicu erosi nilai-nilai sosial dan budaya, seperti gotong royong dan ritus agraris tradisional. Namun, masyarakat menunjukkan resistensi budaya melalui adaptasi nilai-nilai Islam ke dalam praktik agraris, yang memperkuat solidaritas dan identitas lokal. Penelitian ini berkontribusi pada upaya meneguhkan aspek budaya agraris yang menjadi ciri masyarakat nusantara yang mengalami pergeseran akibat hegemoni budaya perkebunan yang hanya berorientasi pada industri dan komersialisasi.

Kata kunci: Transformasi, Budaya Agraris, Perkebunan, Perdagangan, Kolonial.

INTRODUCTION

The global phenomenon known as the transformation of agrarian culture has reshaped social, economic, and political life in various parts of the world, particularly in countries that

experienced colonization and integration into global markets during the 19th century. In addition to affecting economic structures, changes in the methods of production, distribution, and consumption of agrarian commodities also influenced the social and cultural structures of local communities. Throughout the country, Dutch colonial policies, particularly on the island of Java, transformed the agrarian landscape through the implementation of the forced cultivation system (*Cultuurstelsel*) and the establishment of plantations producing export commodities such as coffee and tea.¹ This transformation had long-term impacts on the relationships between land ownership, labor structures, and communities access to agrarian resources. Ultimately, it produced patterns of socio-economic inequality that can still be felt today.²

Although numerous previous studies have examined the macroeconomic impacts of colonial policies and the integration of global markets on Indonesia agrarian sector, such as the study by de Zwart, written in 2022, on colonial inequality from a macroeconomic perspective, which highlights the structural impacts of the *Cultuurstelsel* and coffee exploitation in Priangan, these studies have generally remained focused on political-economic aspects and have not sufficiently addressed the dimensions of agrarian culture, particularly the adaptation of traditional values and the spirituality of farming communities. This study seeks to address this gap by making cultural and religious dimensions the primary focus of analysis rather than merely treating them as complementary aspects of economic analysis.³

Within the theoretical framework, this study employs the approaches of political ecology and cultural resilience to analyze the interactions between colonial policies, global market dynamics, and local communities responses to agrarian change. Political ecology emphasizes how power, policies, and political economic relations shape access to and control over agrarian resources, while cultural resilience emphasizes the ability of local communities to maintain, adapt, or reconstruct agrarian values and practices amid external pressures. This approach is relevant for understanding the complexity of agrarian cultural transformation in Priangan, which was influenced not only by economic and political factors but also by the socio-cultural dynamics and spirituality of the local community.⁴

The primary objective of this article is to gain an in-depth understanding of how trade changed or transitioned from the pre-colonial period to the colonial period in the Priangan region, as well as how local communities, including both large-scale and small-scale farmers, responded to the economic, social, and cultural pressures that emerged as a result of global market integration and the intervention of colonial policies. This study also aims to examine traditional and emerging agrarian practices, patterns of land ownership, as well as the cultural

¹ Yandi Syahputra Hasibuan and others, 'The Socio-Economic Impacts of Agrarian Exploitation through Irrigation Systems during the Dutch East Indies Period', *Journal Of History and Cultural Heritage*, 2025, 140–49). 142-143 <<https://doi.org/10.34007/warisan.v6i2.2966>>.

² Muhammad Musiyam and others, 'The Contemporary Agrarian Change in Rice Production Village in Klaten Regency, Central Java', *Journal of Social Sciences Research*, 5.1 (2019, 16–22). 18-19 <<https://doi.org/10.32861/jssr.51.16.22>>.

³ Pim De Zwart, *Inequality in Late Colonial Indonesia: New Evidence on Regional Differences*, *Cliometrica* (Springer Berlin Heidelberg, 2022), xvi <<https://doi.org/10.1007/s11698-020-00220-3>>.

⁴ J. F. Astuti, R., Haug, M., & McCarthy, 'Envisioning Climate Politics From Below: Rural Indonesia in the Shadow of Climate Change', *Asia Pasific Viewpoint*, 2025, 1–13 <<https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1111/apv.70025>>.

discourses that developed among farmers and the colonial government in Priangan during the 19th century.

The scientific contribution of this article lies in its effort to bridge the gap between studies of the political economy and the agrarian cultural dimension in research on agrarian transformation in the Priangan region in particular and Indonesia more broadly. This research offers a new perspective by integrating historical, economic, and cultural analyses comprehensively, while highlighting the role of Islamic values and local identity in the process of adaptation among Priangan agrarian communities to the structural changes that occurred during the 19th century. Thus, this article is expected to enrich the body of knowledge in agrarian history, provide a conceptual foundation for future research, and serve as an important reference for the formulation of more inclusive and equitable agrarian policies.

METHOD

This study employs a descriptive-historical qualitative approach using the historical method. This approach was selected to explore in depth the meaning, dynamics, and processes of agrarian cultural transformation in Priangan during the 19th century, particularly in the context of the influence of trade and colonial policies. A literature-based historical study enables the researcher to understand the phenomenon contextually and comprehensively through the examination and critical evaluation of contemporary written sources, while the historical approach is used to reconstruct and interpret the experiences and perceptions of local actors regarding agrarian change as recorded in historical documents and literature.

The data used in this study are derived entirely from library materials and historical documents, consisting of primary and secondary sources. Primary sources include original texts of Dutch colonial policies from 1850-1900, *Vereenigde Oostindische Compagnie* (VOC) trade records, and colonial government archives preserved in archival institutions such as the National Archives of the Republic of Indonesia. Secondary sources include books, journal articles, and previous research findings relevant to the topic of agrarian affairs in Priangan. The combination of these two types of sources is used to strengthen the analysis and facilitate data triangulation.

Data collection was conducted through stages following the procedures of the historical method. First, heuristics, namely the identification, search, and collection of primary and secondary sources in libraries, archival institutions, and scholarly journal databases. Second, source criticism, consisting of external criticism to examine the authenticity of documents and internal criticism to assess the credibility of their contents. Third, interpretation of the facts identified from various sources. Fourth, the writing of the findings in manuscript form based on further examination of historical archives and documents, conducted systematically to supplement the data that were still incomplete. The research instruments included a source-search guide (*guide sheet*) and a document recording and classification sheet (*source log*). The instruments were validated through a trial search using one type of archive before being implemented comprehensively.

The unit of analysis in this study consists of historical texts and documents containing information on traditional and emerging agrarian practices, patterns of land ownership, and

cultural discourses developing among farmers and colonial actors in the Priangan region. The subjects of the study include large and small scale farmers, community leaders, and colonial officials involved in agrarian management during the period under study, as documented in the written sources examined by the researcher.

Data analysis was conducted thematically using an inductive approach, beginning with source collection, data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing. Triangulation was employed to ensure the validity and reliability of the data by comparing findings from primary archival sources, secondary literature, and previous research. The analysis was conducted iteratively until a deep and holistic understanding of the transformation of agrarian culture in Priangan was achieved. This methodological approach is expected to produce a comprehensive, contextual, and valid understanding of the transformation of agrarian culture in Priangan during the 19th century, while also making a significant contribution to the development of agrarian history studies and public policy studies in Indonesia.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Transformation of the Agrarian Structure in Priangan in the 19th Century

This study reveals in depth that the implementation of the Cultivation System (*cultuurstelsel*) by the Dutch colonial government beginning in 1830 had structural and systemic impacts on the agrarian order in the Priangan region. Prior to colonial intervention, the people of this region practiced a subsistence oriented agricultural system, which was primarily aimed at fulfilling the needs of families and local communities. Land was managed collectively by extended families or customary communities, with seasonal crop rotation patterns and a strong connection between agriculture, cultural rituals, and the social life cycle of the Sundanese people.⁵

However, drastic changes occurred when the Dutch required villagers to allocate part of their land and labor to cultivate certain export commodities, particularly coffee, tea, and indigo, whose yields were subsequently sold on the global market through the *Vereenigde Oostindische Compagnie* (VOC) or the colonial government. This policy triggered a major shift from a subsistence economy toward a commercial economy driven by global demand.⁶ The colonial not only became the controller of production but also the principal authority determining the distribution of agricultural products, prices, and even labor, thereby undermining farmers economic autonomy.⁷

In addition to affecting the economic sphere, the Cultivation System also introduced new structures of power relations within village communities. A land rent system was introduced to replace the customary landholding system. In practice, many farmers were forced to rent back their own land or lost access to it because they failed to fulfill the obligations imposed by the Cultivation System. Furthermore, the system of compulsory labor (*heerendiensten*) required farmers to work without wages for certain periods for colonial

⁵ Sepus Marten Fatem and others, 'Species Diversity, Composition, and Heterospecific Associations of Trees in Three Altitudinal Gradients in Bird's Head Peninsula, Papua, Indonesia', *Biodiversitas*, 21.8 (2020), 3596–3605 <<https://doi.org/10.13057/biodiv/d210824>>.

⁶ Pim De Zwart, 'Globalisation, Inequality and Institutions in West Sumatra and West Java, 1800–1940', *Journal of Contemporary Asia*, 51.4 (2021), 564–90 <<https://doi.org/10.1080/00472336.2020.1765189>>.

⁷ Arif - Akhyat, 'The End of Peasantry: Peasants and Cities in Colonial Java in The Early Twentieth Century', *Jurnal Humaniora*, 32.1 (2020), 30 <<https://doi.org/10.22146/jh.53383>>.

interests. This mechanism generated a new form of exploitation of agrarian labor, which not only increased the burden on small farmers but also disrupted the established cycle of regeneration within traditional agricultural practices.⁸

The findings concerning the transformation of the agrarian structure in Priangan can be further supported by data from Fernando's study on coffee cultivation in Java, which demonstrates that prior to 1832, the Cirebon-Priangan region had already become a major center of coffee production since the eighteenth century, when the *Vereenigde Oostindische Compagnie* (VOC) bound local rulers through contractual obligations to supply coffee at fixed prices, while the population was bound by feudal obligations to the rulers. After coffee was officially designated as a compulsory crop in 1832, the Dutch colonial government set a purchase price of 25 *guilders* per *pikul*, with two-fifths of this amount deducted as land rent and three *guilders* deducted for transportation costs, a mechanism that directly restructured the economic system and the ownership of resources at the village level.⁹ Knight further argues that the Cultivation System, implemented beginning in 1830, forced farmers to set aside land or labor for export commodities on behalf of the colonial state, with crop rotation practices intensifying the exploitation of labor on the same land rather than expanding the cultivated area.¹⁰ These two findings confirm that the transformation of the agrarian structure in Priangan was not merely a gradual process of change, but rather the result of systematic intervention through colonial policies.

The implementation of this policy also generated social class disparities in rural Priangan. Village *priyayi* or local elites, such as village heads and clerks, often received compensation or strategic positions within the Cultivation System. They served as intermediaries between the colonial authorities and local communities and benefited from the management of agricultural products or the collection of additional levies. This situation exacerbated agrarian inequality, both in terms of land ownership and access to production tools and agricultural outputs. Small farmers not only lost their land but also lost their social and economic bargaining power.¹¹

The social impacts of this transformation were extensive. The erosion of customary systems and community solidarity began to become apparent as work relationships based on mutual cooperation (*gotong royong*) were transformed into hierarchical and transactional labor relations. Collective harvesting traditions, agricultural customary festivals, and ceremonies associated with the planting season began to decline because the time and labor of the community were increasingly devoted to fulfilling colonial cultivation targets. In addition, intense production pressures and heavy workloads forced many farmers to sell their assets, seek additional employment, or leave their villages to become unskilled laborers on colonial plantations outside the Priangan region.¹²

⁸ De Zwart, XVI.

⁹ M R Fernando, 'Coffee Cultivation in Java, 1830 – 1917', 2017, 158–72. 159-161

¹⁰ G. R. Knight, 'The Sugar Industry of Colonial Java and Its Global Trajectory', *South East Asia Research*, 8.3 (2000, 213–38). 223 <<https://doi.org/10.5367/000000000101297271>>.

¹¹ C.R. Menzies, 'Environment, Labour and Capitalism at Sea: "Working the Ground" in Scotland, by Penny McCall Howard. Manchester: Manchester University Press', *Journal of Agrarian Change*, 2017, 248 <<https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1111/joac.12345>>.

¹² De Zwart, XVI.

This transformation demonstrates that the Cultivation System was not merely an economic policy, but also a colonial instrument aimed at transforming social structures and establishing political control over local communities. The cultivation of export commodities on land that had previously been used for rice and secondary crops illustrates how colonialism systematically replaced the orientation of agrarian society, which had been centered on self-sufficiency and sustainability, with dependence on market logic and external control.¹³

The Cultivation System established the foundations of structural inequality within rural Indonesian society, the legacies of which can still be observed today, both in the form of agrarian conflicts, the marginalization of farmers, and the weakness of local food sovereignty. This process demonstrates that colonialism did not merely conquer territory, but also re-engineered the entire fabric of society, including its economic, cultural, and social structures.¹⁴

Social and Cultural Impacts: The Erosion of Community Values and Local Adaptation

The agrarian transformation that occurred affected not only the economic sphere but also resulted in the erosion of social and cultural values that had previously bound agrarian communities together communally. Systems of *gotong royong* (mutual cooperation), village cooperation, and traditional agricultural cycles gradually became marginalized by production systems based on economic targets and colonial quotas. Agrarian ritual practices, such as harvest ceremonies and customary traditions in water management, also gradually declined.¹⁵

The socio cultural impacts of colonial intervention can also be observed in changes in the lifestyles of local communities involved in the production of export commodities. Alatas and Wan Sulong note that local communities involved in the tea industry in Priangan gradually altered their lifestyles by covering their traditional earthen floors and purchasing European style chairs, tables, and lamps, a process of material cultural acculturation that occurred alongside the penetration of the monetary economy into rural communities.¹⁶ Meanwhile, the industrial archaeological study conducted by Nuralia and colleagues on the former *Cipetir getah perca* plantation in Sukabumi demonstrates how colonial settlement structures produced clear social stratification. European staff residences were constructed on a larger scale and on higher ground, while the houses of local laborers were smaller and built closely together, with a hierarchical and racially structured plantation organization in which European administrators occupied the highest position, followed by supervisors and foremen, and local laborers at the bottom of the hierarchy.¹⁷ This phenomenon demonstrates that the transformation of agrarian culture in Priangan was not merely economic in nature, but also gave rise to a new social order that placed local communities in a subordinate position.

¹³ L. Izzah, S. T. Sulistiyono, and Y. Rochwulaningsih, 'David Birnie: A Dutch Private Investor and Agent of Social Change for Society at Bondowoso East Java, Indonesia in the Colonial Era', *IOP Conference Series: Earth and Environmental Science*, 485.1 (2020), 0–8 <<https://doi.org/10.1088/1755-1315/485/1/012026>>.

¹⁴ Izzah, Sulistiyono, and Rochwulaningsih.

¹⁵ Fatem and others.

¹⁶ Alwi Alatas and Wan Suhana Wan Sulong, 'The Emergence and Development of Indigenous Tea Plantations in West Java, 1875-1941', *Kemanusiaan*, 27.2 (2020, 39–58). 43 <<https://doi.org/10.21315/KAJH2020.27.2.3>>.

¹⁷ Lia Nuralia and others, 'Cultural Traces of the Plantation Industry of Gutta Percha Cipetir in Sukabumi Regency, West Java, Indonesia', 1 (2023, 586–601). 596-598 <https://doi.org/10.2991/978-2-38476-070-1_52>.

Nevertheless, local communities were not entirely passive in responding to these changes. The study finds that, in several areas, farming communities engaged in cultural adaptation in order to preserve their traditional values. For example, certain agrarian traditions were integrated into local Islamic practices, such as *selamatan* (communal thanksgiving ceremonies) following the harvest, which were transformed into *tahlilan* (collective recitations and prayers in the Islamic tradition). This adaptation demonstrates a relatively high degree of cultural resilience in confronting the structural pressures imposed by colonialism and the global market.¹⁸

The production target system imposed by the colonial authorities demanded high levels of efficiency and productivity, leaving little room for agricultural practices based on seasonal cycles and customary ceremonies. Agrarian rituals, such as *hajat bumi*, *sedekah sawah*, and harvest ceremonies, which were performed as expressions of gratitude and respect toward nature and ancestors, gradually came to be abandoned because they were no longer compatible with the rhythm of work determined by the colonial authorities. Even the management of irrigation water, which had previously been coordinated through customary institutions such as *subak* or *leuit*, was subsequently controlled by colonial village structures that prioritized land designated for the production of particular commodities, such as coffee and tea.¹⁹

Nevertheless, this process of change did not immediately eliminate the traditional value system in its entirety. The study identifies cultural resistance strategies employed by local communities through subtle and flexible means. In many cases, a process of cultural syncretism occurred, namely the combination of elements of older traditions with new elements introduced from outside, including Islam and the colonial system. For example, the harvest *selamatan* tradition, which had previously been conducted using offerings and prayers addressed to ancestral spirits, gradually came to be replaced by *tahlilan* and collective prayers based on Islamic teachings, while still preserving its collective essence and the *ritual* expression of gratitude for the harvest.²⁰

This strategy demonstrates the high cultural resilience of the agrarian communities of Priangan in confronting oppressive structural changes. They did not completely surrender to the colonial system but instead chose a path of adaptation that enabled the continuity of their cultural identity in new forms. This serves as evidence that rural communities were not passive, but rather active agents in creating new meanings in response to the circumstances they encountered. Adaptation to structural pressures was undertaken without abandoning their cultural roots, and even through processes of local Islamization that ultimately strengthened the cultural identity of the community.²¹

¹⁸ Fatem and others.

¹⁹ Flora Hajdu and others, 'Rendering Smallholders Social: Taking a Social Relations Approach to Understanding the Persistence of Smallholders in the Rural Global South', *Journal of Rural Studies*, 111, February (2024) <<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jrurstud.2024.103432>>.

²⁰ Faqihul Muqoddam and Virgin Suciyantri Maghfiroh, 'Syncretism of Slametan Tradition As a Pillar of Islam Nusantara', *KARSA Journal of Social and Islamic Culture*, 27.1 (2019, 75–94). 87–90 <<https://doi.org/10.19105/karsa.v27i1.1950>>.

²¹ Cinanthya Yuwono and Tanbihul Ghofilin Banjarnegara, 'Adat Bertemu Syariat: Studi Islamisasi Tradisi Wiwitan Di Desa Semampir, Banjarnegara', *Jurnal Studi Keagamaan Islam*, 3 (2025, 51–62). 58–59 <<https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.59966/setyaki.v3i2.1916>>.

Furthermore, this process of transformation can be observed not only in ritual practices and work culture but also in the social structure and cohesion of the community. The decline of the *gotong royong* system of collective labor contributed to weakening solidarity among community members. However, new forms of social cohesion emerged, such as farmers rotating savings groups (*arisan petani*), agricultural religious study groups (*pengajian tani*), and socio religious organizations that assumed some of the functions previously performed by customary communities. This transformation demonstrates that agrarian communities were not merely objects of colonization, but also historical subjects who continued to evolve and respond to change through creative and adaptive strategies.²²

The agrarian transformation in Priangan during the colonial era had multidimensional impacts, extending beyond the economic sphere to include social and cultural dimensions. As the economic structure shifted from subsistence to commercial production, the cultural structure likewise underwent a process of redefinition. Nevertheless, the capacity of local communities to preserve their values and identity remained an important element, demonstrating that colonialism, despite its hegemonic character, never succeeded in completely eradicating the local cultural heritage. This process provides concrete evidence of the historical dynamics of Indonesian society in responding actively, rather than passively, to external pressures.²³

Trade and Global Economic Integration

In the 19th century, the Priangan region became an important epicenter within the colonial commodity production system, particularly for coffee, which was intended to meet demand in the global market. The cultivation system (*cultuurstelsel*) positioned Priangan as a strategic region within the Dutch colonial international trade network, in which coffee commodities from the highlands were transported to major ports such as Batavia, Semarang, and Surabaya before being exported to Europe. This demonstrates how an agrarian inland region could be forcibly incorporated into the global capitalist economic system, not through free trade, but through colonial control and a system of strict exploitation of local labor.²⁴

The integration of Priangan into the global market during the 19th century can be further substantiated by data concerning three major commodities. First, Fernando notes that, on the eve of the outbreak of coffee leaf rust (*Hemileia vastatrix*) in the early 1880s, Java exported nearly 82 percent of all coffee leaving the Dutch East Indies, equivalent to 18 percent of global coffee exports.²⁵ Second, Knight demonstrates that from approximately 1870 until the Great Depression during the interwar period, Java consistently ranked as the world's second-largest producer and exporter of cane sugar after Cuba. During this period, Java accounted for nearly one-fifth of total global cane sugar production.²⁶ Third, Alatas and Wan Sulong record that the value of tea exports from Java increased from approximately 7.1

²² Yuwono and Banjarnegara. 55-57

²³ Yandi Syahputra Hasibuan, Kiki Maulana Affandi, and Junaidi Nasution, 'The Socio-Economic Impacts of Agrarian Exploitation through Irrigation Systems during the Dutch East Indies Period', *Warisan: Journal of History and Cultural Heritage*, 6.2 (2025, 140–149). 147-148 <<https://doi.org/10.34007/warisan.v6i2.2966>>.

²⁴ Pim De Zwart, Daniel Gallardo-Albarrán, and Auke Rijpma, 'The Demographic Effects of Colonialism: Forced Labor and Mortality in Java, 1834-1879', *Journal of Economic History*, 82.1 (2022, 211–49). 217-218 <<https://doi.org/10.1017/S0022050721000577>>.

²⁵ Fernando. 157

²⁶ Knight. 213-214

million in 1905 to 98 million in 1928.²⁷ These three sets of data demonstrate that Priangan was deeply integrated into the global market, such that fluctuations in prices in London and Amsterdam had direct repercussions for the lives of local farmers.

Although colonial trade statistics indicate a significant increase in export values, particularly for coffee and tea commodities in the Priangan region, the reality at the level of small scale farmers presents a striking contrast. The profits generated from global trade never truly reached small farmers. They remained trapped in structural poverty, working under forced labor systems, receiving extremely limited compensation, and having no control over the produce of their own cultivation. Meanwhile, those who obtained substantial profits were the colonial authorities, local officials, and European entrepreneurs who had direct access to distribution channels and international markets.²⁸

Less widely known commodities, such as *getah perca* from the Cipetir plantation, also illustrate the scale of global integration. *Getah perca* products bearing the *Tjipetir* mark were found washed ashore along the coasts of England, Germany, France, Sweden, Denmark, and Norway after spending more than a century submerged with ships transporting them during the First World War, owing to their function as insulating material for undersea cables that connected continents.²⁹ These discoveries demonstrate that Priangan connection to the global economy during the colonial period encompassed a much broader industrial supply chain than merely coffee and tea.

Furthermore, Priangan involvement in global trade also introduced various external elements, including new agricultural technologies, transportation infrastructure such as railways and roads, as well as agricultural models based on quotas and efficiency. However, rather than empowering local farmers, this process deepened their structural dependence on the colonial system. Farmers became producers without access to the market mechanisms that determined prices and production volumes. They were compelled to cultivate export crops such as coffee, even though soil and climatic conditions were not always suitable, because the forced cultivation system failed to take into account local ecological diversity.³⁰

In addition to technology, the process of economic globalization also brought foreign cultural influences, including European lifestyles, languages, and notions of modernity. However, these influences were highly limited and largely one directional, because colonial policies provided no space for local communities to participate in an equal process of cultural exchange. Instead, local communities became objects of colonial cultural penetration without possessing the means to filter or adapt these influences in accordance with local values.³¹

The integration of the Priangan region into global economic networks also generated long term consequences, particularly with regard to changes in the economic orientation of local communities. From an economy that had previously been oriented toward local subsistence needs, the region became part of an export oriented monoculture system.

²⁷ Alatas and Wan Sulong. 42

²⁸ De Zwart, Gallardo-Albarrán, and Rijpma. 221-222

²⁹ Nuralia and others. 587

³⁰ De Zwart, 'Globalisation, Inequality and Institutions in West Sumatra and West Java, 1800–1940'. 569-570

³¹ Pim De Zwart, 'Globalisation, Inequality and Institutions in West Sumatra and West Java, 1800–1940', *Journal of Contemporary Asia*, 51.4 (2021, 564–590). 570-572 <<https://doi.org/10.1080/00472336.2020.1765189>>.

Dependence on global market prices increased. When fluctuations occurred in global coffee prices, their effects were directly experienced by small farmers, yet without any social protection or economic guarantees from the colonial government.³²

Global economic integration during the colonial era in Priangan was not an empowering form of integration, but rather an exploitative process that reinforced colonial domination over local agrarian resources. This transformation made the people of Priangan major producers of export commodities while leaving them marginalized within the structures governing profit distribution and economic decision-making. This process demonstrates that international trade within a colonial framework cannot be separated from dynamics of power and systematic inequality.³³

Agrarian Inequality and Structural Legacies

One of the key findings of this study is that the colonial agrarian structure established during the Cultivation System (*cultuurstelsel*) in the Priangan region has had long term impacts that continue to be felt in the contemporary era.³⁴ Inequality in land ownership and control, as well as the marginalization of smallholder farmers in accessing agrarian resources, did not emerge in a historical vacuum, but rather constitute a direct legacy of colonial economic and agricultural policies that systematically disregarded the welfare of the people.³⁵ The *cultuurstelsel* system and the practices of land exploitation during the colonial era created the foundation for agrarian injustice that has continued to be transmitted across generations.³⁶

Evidence of structural inequality between tenant farmers and those who controlled production also consistently emerges in the statements of all four figures. Fernando cites data on farming households in the highlands of Central Java around 1880, which show that coffee sales accounted for only 4 percent of total household cash income, despite coffee cultivation absorbing 15 percent of their total working time.³⁷ A similar pattern can be observed in the tea industry. Farmers cultivating *kampong tea* did not have direct access to international markets and were dependent on intermediaries, resulting in the erosion of their profit margins, while the tea production restriction policy introduced in 1933 did not provide licenses to either farmers or local cooperatives.³⁸ This legacy of inequality is also evident spatially within the Cipetir plantation complex, where the authority of plantation managers, derived from profits generated through international markets, was physically manifested in the separation between the administrators residences at the top of the hill and the workers settlements in the lowlands.³⁹

³² A. I. Mawardi, 'Transformasi Agraris Kolonial Di Priangan: Dampak Sistem Cultuurstelsel Terhadap Masyarakat Petani Di Jawa Barat Abad Ke-19', *Jurnal Sejarah Dan Budaya Warisan*, 12.2 (2024), 145–162. 150-155 <https://jurnal.isdikkieraha.ac.id/index.php/histoire/issue/archive>.

³³ A. N. Luthfi, 'Jejak Kolonialisme Dalam Transformasi Agraria Priangan: Eksploitasi Kopi Dan Ketimpangan Struktural Di Jawa Barat Abad Ke-19', *BHUMI: Jurnal Agraria Dan Pertanahan*, 9.1 (2023, 78–95). 82-90. <https://jurnalbhumi.stpn.ac.id/index.php/JB/article/view/788>.

³⁴ Dalu Agung Darmawan and others, 'The History of Agrarian Reforms in Indonesia: A Sociological Perspective', *Journal of Law and Sustainable Development*, 11.11 (2023, 1–27). 3-7 <<https://doi.org/10.55908/sdgs.v11i11.2196>>.

³⁵ Fernando. 168

³⁶ Alatas and Wan Sulong. 51

³⁷ Nuralia and others. 596

³⁸ Darmawan and others. 10-15

³⁹ Musiyam and others. 18-19

This study suggests that future agrarian reform must be transformative rather than merely administrative. This includes the recognition of the historical rights of Indigenous communities and smallholder farmers, the empowerment of local institutions to manage agrarian resources, and the formulation of policies based on regional characteristics and local cultural contexts. Furthermore, the active involvement of communities in the formulation and oversight of agrarian policies is essential to creating a system of governance that is equitable and sustainable.⁴⁰

Through a critical historical approach, it can be seen that current agrarian structural problems cannot be separated from their colonial context, and that future solutions must encompass the restoration of historical justice that has long been neglected. This historical legacy provides a basis for the formulation of agrarian policies that are not merely legal-formal in nature, but are also ethical and grounded in the principles of social justice and historical reconciliation.⁴¹

Local Identity and Islamic Values in Agrarian Adaptation

One of the important findings of this study is the role of Islamic values in shaping cultural resistance and preserving the identity of agrarian communities amid the currents of structural transformation resulting from colonialism and global capitalism. In various rural areas of Priangan, particularly in villages with strong Islamic foundations, religion was present not only as an expression of spirituality but also as a social instrument used to preserve local cultural sovereignty. Islamic values were internalized in various aspects of agricultural life, ranging from work ethics and systems of crop distribution to the management of water and land.⁴²

In practice, Islamic teachings served as a mechanism for strengthening collective labor. For example, *gotong royong* in rice-field cultivation and irrigation management was institutionalized through village deliberation (*musyawarah desa*) systems led by religious figures or local *ulama*. In addition, agricultural *zakat* was distributed to community members in need, thereby creating a form of economic solidarity that strengthened social cohesion. Thus, the distribution of agricultural produce was determined not solely by market forces or colonial logic, but also by principles of social justice based on Islamic law (*sharia*).⁴³

The adaptation of Islamic values into agricultural practices can also be observed in Islamized agrarian rituals, such as the *sedekah bumi* ceremony, which was transformed into *tahlilan* and collective prayer following the harvest. This phenomenon represents a form of local wisdom that unites tradition and religion, creating a distinctive and contextual agrarian identity. This identity persisted not merely as a cultural heritage, but also as a form of passive

⁴⁰ Dewi Gafuraningtyas and others, 'Transformative Pathways of Agrarian Reform: Comparative Bibliometric Insights of Southeast Asia and Indonesia Cases', *The Journal of Indonesia Sustainable Development Planning*, 5.1 (2024, 38–53). 44–47 <<https://doi.org/10.46456/jisdep.v5i1.534>>.

⁴¹ A. N. Luthfi, 'Reforma Agraria Dan Keadilan Historis: Melacak Jejak Kolonialisme Dalam Ketimpangan Agraria Kontemporer Di Indonesia', *BHUMI: Jurnal Agraria Dan Pertanahan*, 9.2 (2023). 112–130. <https://jurnalbhumi.stpn.ac.id/index.php/JB/article/view/788>.

⁴² Deni Miharja, Aep Kusnawan, and Salsabila Mustopa, 'Rediscovering the Way of Islamic Propagation by Continuing the Tradition of Religion-Based Agriculture', *HTS Teologiese Studies / Theological Studies*, 78.4 (2022), 1–10. 6 <<https://doi.org/10.4102/hts.v78i4.7203>>.

⁴³ Fardan Mahmudatul Imamah, Puja Alviana Dewantri, and Yuqiong Lin, 'The Role of Islam in Affecting the Transformation of Traditional Agriculture Knowledge: A Systematic Review of Dewi Sri Literature', *IAS Journal of Localities*, 2.2 (2024), 143–57 <<https://doi.org/10.62033/iasjol.v2i2.77>>. 145–147

resistance to the individualistic and exploitative values introduced by the Cultivation System and colonial capitalism.⁴⁴

Furthermore, the role of *pesantren* and religious figures in guiding farming communities contributed to strengthening the understanding of the importance of maintaining the trust and responsibility (*amanah*) entrusted to them concerning land, water, and agricultural produce as forms of worship and social responsibility. In this context, Islamic values became a counter-narrative to colonial hegemony, which sought to commercialize all aspects of agrarian life. Principles such as *barokah* (blessing), *halal* (lawful), and mutual assistance (*tolong-menolong*) became moral pillars that maintained the socio economic stability of rural communities amid systemic upheaval.⁴⁵

This phenomenon demonstrates that religion functioned not merely as an escape from colonial suffering, but also as an ideological foundation for constructing resilient local systems. Communities did not merely survive; rather, they developed cultural innovations by integrating ancestral traditions and Islamic teachings into a dynamic and unified way of life. Amid the pressures exerted by colonial economic structures, they created alternative spaces to sustain their livelihoods and preserve their dignity as agrarian communities that remained culturally and spiritually sovereign.⁴⁶

The integration of Islamic values into agrarian life was not merely symbolic but also served a strategic function in maintaining the independence of rural communities. This phenomenon constituted a form of creative adaptation as well as cultural resistance to a system that sought to reduce agrarian communities to mere components of the colonial production machine. This finding enriches the historical narrative of Indonesian agrarian history by demonstrating that local communities possessed resilience and the capacity to transform values amid structural crises and external domination.⁴⁷

Although situated within unequal power relations, Priangan communities were not entirely passive. The findings of Alatas and Wan Sulong concerning local tea cooperatives such as *Madoe Tawon* and *Mitra noe Tani* in Sukabumi provide important evidence of the resilience of local communities. These cooperatives had been established since the second decade of the 20th century, independently managing tea plantations ranging from a dozen to several dozen hectares, and even negotiating with the colonial authorities concerning business taxes and production restrictions through organizations such as the *Comite Penoloeng Pertanian Teh*.⁴⁸ Farmers rational responses to price fluctuations shifting from food crops to tea when prices were high and doing the opposite when prices collapsed in 1920 demonstrate

⁴⁴ V. S. Muqoddam, F., & Maghfiroh, 'Syncretism of Slametan Tradition As a Pillar of Islam Nusantara', *KARSA: Journal of Social and Islamic Culture*, 27.1 (2019), 75–93. <https://ejournal.uinmadura.ac.id/index.php/karsa/article/view/1950/0>.

⁴⁵ Murdianto, 'The Role of Pesantren in Building Socio-Religious Independence of the Sasak Lombok Community during Colonialism', *Journal of Ecohumanism*, 4.1 (2025), 64–75. <https://ecohumanism.co.uk/joe/ecohumanism/article/view/6280>.

⁴⁶ Johan Wahyudhi, 'Berkembang Dalam Tekanan: Pesantren Sidoresmo Dan Resistensinya Menghadapi Pemerintah Hindia Belanda Di Surabaya Akhir Abad XIX –Awal Abad XX', *Islam Nusantara: Journal for the Study of Islamic History and Culture*, 6.1 (2025), 78. <https://www.journal.unusia.ac.id/index.php/ISLAMNUSANTARA/article/view/1418>.

⁴⁷ A Achiriah, S Monang, and ..., 'Dinamika Perkembangan Organisasi Islam Di Sumatera Utara Pada Era Kolonial: Kajian Berdasarkan Surat Kabar 1915-1942', *Journal Analytica Islamica*, 2020. 52-55. <https://jurnal.uinsu.ac.id/index.php/analytica/article/view/23298/9604>.

⁴⁸ Alatas and Wan Sulong. 51

that the people of Priangan were active economic actors who negotiated spaces for sustaining their livelihoods and identities amid structural pressures.⁴⁹

CONCLUSION

This study reveals that agrarian transformation in the Priangan region during the 19th century was a structural process driven by the Dutch colonial Cultivation System and the integration of agrarian regions into the global capitalist economic system. This transformation affected not only patterns of production and land ownership but also the social, cultural, and spiritual structures of rural communities. Agricultural systems that had previously been communal and tradition based were replaced by export oriented cultivation patterns controlled by the colonial authorities.

The impacts of agrarian transformation were strongly felt in the lives of local communities, particularly smallholder farmers who experienced labor exploitation and lost access to land. Meanwhile, local elites and colonial officials benefited from the system, reinforcing agrarian inequality and creating structural injustices that have been inherited into the present day. Local traditions such as *gotong royong*, agrarian ceremonies, and community solidarity gradually began to be replaced by individualistic values introduced through the colonial production system.

Local communities did not remain passive in confronting these transformations. They developed adaptation strategies by integrating Islamic values into agrarian practices as a form of cultural resistance and identity preservation. Islamized agrarian traditions became a medium for maintaining social cohesion and subtly resisting colonial domination.

In conclusion, this study emphasizes that the colonial legacy in the form of agrarian inequality and the marginalization of smallholder farmers remains highly relevant to contemporary agrarian policy discourse. Therefore, agrarian reform oriented toward social justice, the recognition of farmers historical rights, and the active involvement of local communities in policy formulation is necessary. A critical historical approach can serve as a foundation for developing more inclusive and sustainable agrarian governance.

REFERENCES

- Achiriah, A, S Monang, and ..., 'Dinamika Perkembangan Organisasi Islam Di Sumatera Utara Pada Era Kolonial: Kajian Berdasarkan Surat Kabar 1915-1942', *Journal Analytica Islamica*, 2020.
<https://jurnal.uinsu.ac.id/index.php/analytica/article/view/23298/9604>
- Akhyat, Arif -, 'The End of Peasantry: Peasants and Cities in Colonial Java in The Early Twentieth Century', *Jurnal Humaniora*, 32 (2020), 30
<https://doi.org/10.22146/jh.53383>
- Alatas, Alwi, and Wan Suhana Wan Sulong, 'The Emergence and Development of Indigenous Tea Plantations in West Java, 1875-1941', *Kemanusiaan*, 27 (2020), 39–58
<https://doi.org/10.21315/KAJH2020.27.2.3>
- Astuti, R., Haug, M., & McCarthy, J. F., 'Envisioning Climate Politics From Below: Rural Indonesia in the Shadow of Climate Change', *Asia Pasific Viewpoint*, 2025, 1–13
<https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1111/apv.70025>
- Darmawan, Dalu Agung, Endriatmo Soetarto, Yudha Heryawan Asnawi, Jamaluddin

⁴⁹ Alatas and Wan Sulong. 50

- Mahasari, and Anggraini Sukmawati, 'The History of Agrarian Reforms in Indonesia: A Sociological Perspective', *Journal of Law and Sustainable Development*, 11 (2023), 1–27 <<https://doi.org/10.55908/sdgs.v11i11.2196>>
- Fatem, Sepus Marten, Dony Aristone Djitmau, Antoni Ungirwalu, Alfredo Ottow Wanma, Victor Immanuel Simbiak, Nithanel Mikael Hendrik Benu, and others, 'Species Diversity, Composition, and Heterospecific Associations of Trees in Three Altitudinal Gradients in Bird's Head Peninsula, Papua, Indonesia', *Biodiversitas*, 21 (2020), 3596–3605 <<https://doi.org/10.13057/biodiv/d210824>>
- Fernando, M R, 'Coffee Cultivation in Java , 1830 – 1917', 2017, 158–72
- Gafuraningtyas, Dewi, Raldi Hendro Koestoer, Hafid Setiadi, and Mohammad Ridwan Lessy, 'Transformative Pathways of Agrarian Reform: Comparative Bibliometric Insights of Southeast Asia and Indonesia Cases', *The Journal of Indonesia Sustainable Development Planning*, 5 (2024), 38–53 <<https://doi.org/10.46456/jisdep.v5i1.534>>
- Hajdu, Flora, Jonathan Rigg, Johanna Bergman-Lodin, Klara Fischer, Kristina Marquardt, Dil Khatri, and others, 'Rendering Smallholders Social: Taking a Social Relations Approach to Understanding the Persistence of Smallholders in the Rural Global South', *Journal of Rural Studies*, 111 (2024) <<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jrurstud.2024.103432>>
- Hasibuan, Yandi Syahputra, Kiki Maulana Affandi, and Junaidi Nasution, 'The Socio-Economic Impacts of Agrarian Exploitation through Irrigation Systems during the Dutch East Indies Period', *Warisan: Journal of History and Cultural Heritage*, 6 (2025), 140–49 <<https://doi.org/10.34007/warisan.v6i2.2966>>
- Imamah, Fardan Mahmudatul, Puja Alviana Dewantri, and Yuqiong Lin, 'The Role of Islam in Affecting the Transformation of Traditional Agriculture Knowledge: A Systematic Review of Dewi Sri Literature', *IAS Journal of Localities*, 2 (2024), 143–57 <<https://doi.org/10.62033/iasjol.v2i2.77>>
- Izzah, L., S. T. Sulistiyono, and Y. Rochwulaningsih, 'David Birnie: A Dutch Private Investor and Agent of Social Change for Society at Bondowoso East Java, Indonesia in the Colonial Era', *IOP Conference Series: Earth and Environmental Science*, 485 (2020), 0–8 <<https://doi.org/10.1088/1755-1315/485/1/012026>>
- Knight, G. R., 'The Sugar Industry of Colonial Java and Its Global Trajectory', *South East Asia Research*, 8 (2000), 213–38 <<https://doi.org/10.5367/000000000101297271>>
- Luthfi, A. N., 'Jejak Kolonialisme Dalam Transformasi Agraria Priangan: Eksploitasi Kopi Dan Ketimpangan Struktural Di Jawa Barat Abad Ke-19', *BHUMI: Jurnal Agraria Dan Pertanahan*, 9 (2023), 78–95. <https://jurnalbhumi.stpn.ac.id/index.php/JB/article/view/788>
- , 'Reforma Agraria Dan Keadilan Historis: Melacak Jejak Kolonialisme Dalam Ketimpangan Agraria Kontemporer Di Indonesia', *BHUMI: Jurnal Agraria Dan Pertanahan*, 9 (2023), 112–130. <https://jurnalbhumi.stpn.ac.id/index.php/JB/issue/archive>
- Mawardi, A. I., 'Transformasi Agraris Kolonial Di Priangan: Dampak Sistem Cultuurstelsel Terhadap Masyarakat Petani Di Jawa Barat Abad Ke-19', *Jurnal Sejarah Dan Budaya Warisan*, 12 (2024), 145–162. <https://jurnal.isdikkieraha.ac.id/index.php/histoire/issue/archive>
- Menzies, C.R., 'Environment, Labour and Capitalism at Sea: "Working the Ground" in Scotland, by Penny McCall Howard. Manchester: Manchester University Press', *Journal of Agrarian Change*, 2017, 248 <<https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1111/joac.12345>>
- Miharja, Deni, Aep Kusnawan, and Salsabila Mustopa, 'Rediscovering the Way of Islamic Propagation by Continuing the Tradition of Religion-Based Agriculture', *HTS Teologiese Studies / Theological Studies*, 78 (2022), 1–10

- <<https://doi.org/10.4102/hts.v78i4.7203>>
- Muqoddam, F., & Maghfiroh, V. S., 'Syncretism of Slametan Tradition As a Pillar of Islam Nusantara', *KARSA: Journal of Social and Islamic Culture*, 27 (2019), 75–93. <https://ejournal.uinmadura.ac.id/index.php/karsa/article/view/1950/0>
- Murdianto, 'The Role of Pesantren in Building Socio-Religious Independence of the Sasak Lombok Community during Colonialism', *Journal of Ecohumanism*, 4 (2025), 4064–75. <https://ecohumanism.co.uk/joe/ecohumanism/article/view/6280>
- Musiyam, Muhammad, Sugeng Utaya, Singgih Susilo, and Budi Handoyo, 'The Contemporary Agrarian Change in Rice Production Village in Klaten Regency, Central Java', *Journal of Social Sciences Research*, 5 (2019), 16–22 <<https://doi.org/10.32861/jssr.51.16.22>>
- Nuralia, Lia, Prima W. K. Hutabarat, Astyka Pamumpuni, and Ratri Wulandari, 'Cultural Traces of the Plantation Industry of Gutta Percha Cipetir in Sukabumi Regency, West Java, Indonesia', 1 (2023), 586–601 <https://doi.org/10.2991/978-2-38476-070-1_52>
- Wahyudhi, Johan, 'Berkembang Dalam Tekanan: Pesantren Sidoresmo Dan Resistensinya Menghadapi Pemerintah Hindia Belanda Di Surabaya Akhir Abad XIX –Awal Abad XX', *Islam Nusantara: Journal for the Study of Islamic History and Culture*, 6 (2025), 78–106. <https://www.journal.unusia.ac.id/index.php/ISLAMNUSANTARA/article/view/1418>
- Yuwono, Cinantha, and Tanbihul Ghofilin Banjarnegara, 'Adat Bertemu Syariat: Studi Islamisasi Tradisi Wiwitan Di Desa Semampir, Banjarnegara', *Jurnal Studi Keagamaan Islam*, 3 (2025), 51–62 <<https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.59966/setyaki.v3i2.1916>>
- De Zwart, Pim, 'Globalisation, Inequality and Institutions in West Sumatra and West Java, 1800–1940', *Journal of Contemporary Asia*, 51 (2021), 564–90 <<https://doi.org/10.1080/00472336.2020.1765189>>
- , 'Globalisation, Inequality and Institutions in West Sumatra and West Java, 1800–1940', *Journal of Contemporary Asia*, 51 (2021), 564–90 <<https://doi.org/10.1080/00472336.2020.1765189>>
- , *Inequality in Late Colonial Indonesia: New Evidence on Regional Differences, Cliometrica* (Springer Berlin Heidelberg, 2022), xvi <<https://doi.org/10.1007/s11698-020-00220-3>>
- De Zwart, Pim, Daniel Gallardo-Albarrán, and Auke Rijpma, 'The Demographic Effects of Colonialism: Forced Labor and Mortality in Java, 1834–1879', *Journal of Economic History*, 82 (2022), 211–49 <<https://doi.org/10.1017/S0022050721000577>>