



Transnationalism of Nusantara '*Ulamā*' Scholarly Knowledge: Intellectual Networks and the Circulation of Islamic Knowledge in Global History of the 18th–20th Centuries

Ananda Bagus Pradita*

Universitas Islam Negeri Salatiga, Salatiga, Indonesia, 50722

Email: anandabaguspradita95@gmail.com

Ahyaul Ahnafia Sholeha

Universitas Islam Negeri Salatiga, Salatiga, Indonesia, 50722

Email: ahyanulsholeha2003@gmail.com

Muhammad Noor Sulaiman Syah

Central Queensland University, Norman Gardens, Australia, 40939

Email: n.sulaimansyah@cqu.edu.au

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Abstract

Studies on the Jawi '*ulamā*' network have developed extensively, although some strands of global Islamic historiography still treat the Nusantara archipelago as a peripheral space in the formation and circulation of Islamic knowledge. The limitations of previous studies are evident in the minimal explanation of the position of Nusantara '*ulamā*' as interregional liaisons and their role in shaping the flow of knowledge across Islamic regions from the 18th to the early 20th centuries. This study aims to reconstruct the structure of the Nusantara '*ulamā*' intellectual network and explain the mechanisms of Islamic knowledge circulation that connect the Malay world with centers of Islamic scholarship. This study uses qualitative methods and a transnational intellectual history approach, employing an intellectual network analysis of '*ulamā*' works, scientific chains of transmission, intellectual biographies, and global Islamic historical literature. The results show a multidirectional network pattern, characterized by the mobility of '*ulamā*' to Mecca, Medina, Cairo, and Hadramawt, as well as the formation of scholarly communities that bring together actors from various regions. The scientific chains of transmission function as an instrument of legitimacy, a medium of intellectual integration, and a means of distributing religious authority. The production of books, *sharḥ*, *ḥashiyah*, and treatises demonstrates the involvement of Nusantara '*ulamā*' in the reproduction, adaptation, and development of Islamic discourse. The development of printing and educational networks accelerated the circulation of ideas across the Malay world and other Islamic regions. These findings demonstrate the position of Nusantara '*ulamā*' as active nodes in the global network of Islamic knowledge, thus requiring a reading that positions Nusantara as a center for the articulation and transmission of knowledge across regions.

Keywords: Transnationalism; Nusantara '*Ulamā*'; Intellectual Mobility; Circulation of Knowledge; Islamic Historiography

Abstrak

Kajian mengenai jaringan ulama Jawi telah berkembang cukup luas, meski sebagian historiografi Islam global masih menempatkan Nusantara sebagai ruang perifer dalam pembentukan dan peredaran pengetahuan Islam. Keterbatasan kajian sebelumnya tampak pada minimnya penjelasan mengenai posisi ulama Nusantara sebagai penghubung antarkawasan serta perannya dalam membentuk arus pengetahuan lintas wilayah Islam pada abad ke-18 hingga awal abad ke-20. Penelitian ini bertujuan merekonstruksi struktur jaringan intelektual ulama Nusantara serta menjelaskan mekanisme sirkulasi pengetahuan Islam yang menghubungkan dunia Melayu dengan pusat-pusat keilmuan Islam. Penelitian ini menggunakan metode kualitatif dengan pendekatan sejarah intelektual transnasional melalui analisis jaringan intelektual terhadap karya ulama, sanad keilmuan, biografi intelektual, serta literatur sejarah Islam global. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan pola jaringan yang bersifat *multidirectional*, ditandai dengan mobilitas ulama menuju Makkah, Madinah, Kairo, dan Hadramawt serta pembentukan komunitas keilmuan yang mempertemukan aktor dari berbagai kawasan. Sanad keilmuan berfungsi sebagai instrumen legitimasi, medium integrasi intelektual, sekaligus sarana distribusi otoritas keagamaan. Produksi kitab, *syarh*, *hasyiyah*, dan risalah memperlihatkan keterlibatan ulama Nusantara dalam reproduksi, adaptasi, serta pengembangan wacana keislaman. Perkembangan percetakan dan jaringan pendidikan mempercepat peredaran gagasan ke berbagai wilayah dunia Melayu dan kawasan Islam lainnya. Temuan ini menunjukkan posisi ulama Nusantara sebagai simpul aktif dalam jaringan pengetahuan Islam global, sehingga historiografi Islam memerlukan pembacaan yang menempatkan Nusantara sebagai salah satu pusat artikulasi dan transmisi keilmuan lintas kawasan.

Kata Kunci: Transnasionalisme; Ulama Nusantara; Mobilitas Intelektual; Sirkulasi Pengetahuan; Historiografi Islam

Introduction

The Islamic scholarly tradition has developed through the mobility of scholars, the transmission of *sanad* (chains of transmission), the circulation of books, and the formation of cross-regional learning communities that connect various centers of Islamic knowledge since the classical era (Umar et al., 2025). The concept of scholarly transnationalism refers to the process of knowledge formation, exchange, and reproduction that occurs across geographical and political boundaries through networks of actors, institutions, and texts (Tedeschi, Vorobeve, & Jauhiainen, 2022). A global historical perspective views this process as part of a system of connectivity that connects various regions in reciprocal ways (Go & Lawson, 2025). The Indonesian context demonstrates significant dynamics from the 18th to the early 20th centuries, a period marked by increased Hajj mobility, the growth of the Jawi community in the Haramayn, the expansion of the Islamic boarding school network, and the intensification of the production of Islamic works in Arabic and Malay (Baso, 2019). Islamic historiography has tended to focus on the Middle East as the sole center of knowledge production, often reducing the position of the Nusantara 'ulamā' to that of mere recipients of intellectual traditions (Chande, 2023). This perspective leaves open the academic question of how the Nusantara 'ulamā'

intellectual network actually formed, operated, and contributed to the development of Islamic knowledge across regions.

The increasing intellectual connectivity between Nusantara and the Haramayn throughout the 18th and early 20th centuries is reflected in various historical facts. Hajj archives and Jawi community records indicate a growing number of Nusantara students and '*ulamā*' who resided in Mecca and Medina for years to participate in international circles of '*ulamā*' discussion (Rohmana, 2023). Studies of the Haramayn '*ulamā*' network also note the emergence of Nusantara figures as teachers, diploma grantors, authors of religious works, and liaisons within interregional scholarly networks (Imawan, 2024). Thousands of manuscripts and books in Arabic, Malay, and Jawi circulated through the Hajj, trade, and educational routes, creating a space for intellectual exchange connecting the Indonesian archipelago, the Middle East, South Asia, and the Indian Ocean region (Iswanto et al., 2025). The production of works by scholars, such as *sharḥ*, *hashiyah*, Sufism, and hadith, demonstrates the process of adapting and reinterpreting knowledge to suit the needs of local communities (Ramli et al., 2025). This phenomenon demonstrates that Islamic scholarly networks operated through multidirectional flows involving the mobility of people, texts, educational institutions, and religious authorities. Such historical evidence demands a rereading of the historiography of Islam in the Indonesian archipelago through a global historical framework that can more comprehensively explain interregional relationships.

Studies on the Indonesian '*ulamā*' network have developed quite extensively. Marsuki, Sumbulah, and Syaifuddin (2024) identified teacher-student relationships and the transmission of texts as the foundation of 17th-18th-century '*ulamā*' networks, although their focus is limited to patterns of personal connectivity and has yet to explain the mechanisms of knowledge circulation across institutions and regions. Rohmana (2023) demonstrates the role of the Malay-Indonesian '*ulamā*' community in Mecca in the production of religious literature, although the analysis does not yet link intellectual mobility to the formation of regional knowledge flows. Mujahid (2021) explains the function of yellow books and Islamic boarding schools (*pesantren*) as media for transmitting Islamic knowledge; although their primary focus is on local educational traditions, the dynamics of transnational networks are not systematically depicted. Sealy et al. (2022) examine the transformation of Southeast Asian religious authority through interactions with global discourses, although their study emphasizes changes in authority rather than the network structures that enabled knowledge exchange.

Shaheen (2025) demonstrates the importance of the circulation of Islamic manuscripts across the Indian Ocean. Although manuscripts are positioned as the primary object, the relationships between actors, educational institutions, and social networks have not been analyzed in an integrated manner. Imawan (2024) reconstructs the Nusantara-Haramayn network of '*ulamā*' as a channel for the

transmission of Islamic intellectual tradition, although the analytical framework remains oriented toward center-periphery relations. These studies affirm the existence of intellectual connectivity among Nusantara 'ulamā', but have yet to develop an analytical model that explains the simultaneous interactions among scholarly mobility, *sanad*, written works, educational institutions, social networks, and the circulation of knowledge from a global historical perspective. This gap highlights the need for research that more fully reconstructs the transnational mechanisms of production, distribution, and reproduction of Islamic knowledge throughout the 18th to early 20th centuries.

The research questions include: how the structure of the intellectual network of Indonesian 'ulamā' developed throughout the 18th century and into the early 20th century; how scientific mobility shaped the production and transmission of Islamic knowledge; how the works of 'ulamā' functioned as a medium for the circulation of knowledge across regions; and how the position of Indonesian 'ulamā' can be reconstructed through a global historical perspective. The objectives of this research are to reconstruct the intellectual network of Indonesian 'ulamā', identify the mechanisms by which Islamic knowledge circulates across regions, analyze the relationship between scientific mobility and the production of works, and develop a new interpretation of the position of Indonesian 'ulamā' in the intellectual history of global Islam. The research argument is based on the theoretical assumption that Islamic scientific authority is formed through transnational networks that connect actors, texts, institutions, and geographical spaces in a system of knowledge exchange. The global historical perspective and network theory offer a more adequate explanation than the center-periphery approach because they capture the pattern of reciprocal relationships among regions. This research can contribute to the development of an analytical model for the transnational circulation of Islamic knowledge that integrates the mobility of 'ulamā', the transmission of *sanad*, the production of works, and educational networks within a single conceptual framework.

Method

This research uses a historical qualitative method with a transnational intellectual history approach combined with connected history and intellectual network analysis to explain the formation, development, and transformation of the Nusantara 'ulamā's scientific network in the circulation of global Islamic knowledge in three phases, namely the 18th century, the 19th century, and the early 20th century. The units of analysis include 'ulamā', educational institutions, scientific works, *sanad*, and mobility spaces that shape intellectual relations across regions. The research data consists of primary sources in the form of turats books, *ijāzah* and *sanad* of science, correspondence, travel notes, archives of religious institutions, manuscript catalogs, and prosopographic documents originating from the collections of Nusantara, Haramayn, Egypt, and other centers of Islamic knowledge,

as well as secondary sources in the form of historiography and reputable scientific articles. Data collection was conducted through identification, selection, and documentation of sources based on criteria of temporal, geographic, and thematic relevance, followed by external and internal criticism, triangulation between sources, extraction of relational data on teacher-student relationships, academic mobility, text transmission, and correspondence networks, and coding of data into a research database. Analysis was conducted through classification of actors, institutions, works, and spaces, reconstruction of network structures and patterns of knowledge circulation temporally and spatially, and then historical interpretation to explain changes in scientific authority, the central position of actors, and the contribution of Nusantara scholars as knowledge producers in global Islamic intellectual history.

Results and Discussion

Formation of the Nusantara '*Ulamā*' Intellectual Network in the Center for Islamic Knowledge

The formation of the intellectual network of Indonesian '*ulamā*' from the 18th to the early 20th centuries unfolded through a historical configuration linking Hajj mobility, educational migration, economic patronage, and scholarly institutions across the Indian Ocean region (Nurhayati, Tarigan, & Nasution, 2020). The network did not emerge as an automatic consequence of the journey to the Haramayn, but rather developed through a gradual process of integration into established structures of scholarly authority. Biographical accounts of Jawi '*ulamā*' show a recurring pattern of departure via maritime trade routes, leveraging the financial support of merchant families or local patrons, and then long-term involvement in the Haramayn's educational environment (A. Rahman, Tengah, & Makmun, 2022). This situation created a social space that enabled the formation of sustainable intellectual relationships between actors from different regions. A global historical perspective shows the '*ulamā*' network as part of a system of connectivity in the Islamic world that moved through flows of people, capital, texts, and scholarly legitimacy (Affan, 2023).

The integration of Nusantara '*ulamā*' into the Haramayn scholarly environment took place through institutional mechanisms operating within the *halaqah* (Islamic study groups), religious scholars' homes, and Jawi communities, which served as social mediating spaces (Bachtiar & Baidhaw, 2022). Such educational structures created access to teachers, literary sources, and a network of students across generations. A student's position was determined by proximity to authoritative figures with extensive reputations within the Islamic world. Scholarly relationships then developed into social relationships, resulting in the distribution of access to knowledge, academic recommendations, and opportunities to attain scholarly legitimacy. This phenomenon demonstrates the presence of power relations in the formation of intellectual networks, as recognition of one's

competence is highly dependent on the teacher's position within the broader authority structure. A social network perspective explains this process as a mechanism for reproducing intellectual elites, thereby enabling the continuity of authority across space and generations (Solahudin & Fakhruroji, 2019).

The teacher-student relationship served as the primary infrastructure connecting the various nodes of the '*ulamā*' network in the Islamic world. The function of pedagogical relationships is not limited to the transmission of textual knowledge, but also encompasses the reproduction of symbolic capital that determines one's position within the scholarly hierarchy (Singh, 2017). Students who gain a teacher's recognition have the opportunity to become interregional liaisons upon returning to their home regions. This pattern is evident in several Nusantara scholars who subsequently established new educational centers while maintaining academic relationships with their teachers through correspondence, student exchanges, and the distribution of written works (Bachtiar & Baidhaw, 2022). This mechanism created a multi-layered network connecting the Haramayn, the Nusantara, and various other Muslim regions through intermediary actors. John Voll's (1980) study of '*ulamā*' communication networks helps explain how authority moves through continuously reproduced interpersonal relationships. The process of network formation must therefore be understood as the formation of a structure of intellectual connectivity with long-term reproductive power.

The legitimacy of the network is firmly grounded in the *sanad* system, which serves as both a mechanism for certifying knowledge and an instrument for distributing authority. The *sanad* of teaching, *sanad* of hadith, and scholarly certificates created a chain of legitimacy that connected Nusantara scholars to the scholarly tradition across centuries (Monady, Hasan, & Sagir, 2025). The *sanad*'s function extended beyond verifying the transmission of knowledge; it also helped determine the validity of one's position within the Islamic scholarly community. Possession of a *sanad* from a reputable teacher increased the chances of having one's work accepted, of receiving academic recognition, and of leading educational institutions. This structure established a hierarchy of authority structured through a network of intellectual relationships, not through geographic proximity. Manuscripts of diplomas and lists of scholarly transmissions demonstrate a pattern of connectivity linking the Nusantara with Mecca, Medina, Yemen, Egypt, and even India (Xie, Zhu, & Grydehøj, 2020). A transnational intellectual history perspective reveals the *sanad* as a social technology that enabled the circulation of legitimacy across geographical spaces and maintained the continuity of the scholarly tradition of the Islamic world (Jamil & Khaled, 2022).

The Jawi community in the Haramayn serves as a crucial collective node that strengthens the network's sustainability. This community's function extends beyond ethnic solidarity, providing social support, academic resources, economic access, and opportunities to integrate into the international '*ulamā*' community. Michael

Laffan's (2003) study demonstrates the development of Jawi identity as an intellectual category that facilitated the formation of a collective consciousness among Southeast Asian scholars. The presence of dormitories, guest houses, and patronage networks of Muslim merchants created a material infrastructure that sustained scholarly activity. Information about prominent teachers, *sanad*, and study opportunities circulated through these social networks, accelerating the integration of new students.

The character of the Nusantara '*ulamā*' network became increasingly complex through simultaneous connections with the Haramayn, Cairo, and Hadramawt. Each center represented a distinct source of authority, creating a multipolar configuration in the production of Islamic knowledge. The Haramayn served as a center for legitimizing *sanad* and religious authority; Cairo provided access to formal educational institutions and reformist discourses; and Hadramawt connected genealogical networks and scholarly traditions within the '*ulamā*' families (Azra, 2004a). Engseng Ho (2006) shows that the Hadrami network served as a crucial medium connecting various Muslim communities along the Indian Ocean. Interactions with these diverse centers fostered an epistemological negotiation that encouraged Nusantara scholars to absorb, select, and integrate various intellectual traditions.

The transformation of the network throughout the 19th century was influenced by material changes that altered the intensity of connectivity in the Islamic world. The opening of the Suez Canal, the development of steam transport, and the increased mobility of Hajj pilgrims accelerated the movement of people and information between regions (Ewertowski, 2024). This led to more Nusantara scholars staying longer in the Middle East and expanded the scope of academic relationships that could be established. This new connectivity strengthened the flow of ideas and increased opportunities for the emergence of prominent scholars with cross-regional reputations. Economic and technological factors therefore played a crucial role in the development of intellectual networks, something often overlooked in conventional religious narratives.

Mobility of '*Ulamā*' and the Dynamics of the Transmission of Islamic Knowledge

The movement of Indonesian scholars to Mecca, Medina, Cairo, and Hadramawt served as a means of knowledge circulation, connecting various Islamic intellectual traditions across regions. Czaika and Orazbayev (2018) view scholarly mobility as a process of knowledge circulation involving the transfer of texts, methods, learning practices, scholarly authority, and interpretive frameworks. Through active participation in *halaqah*, hadith assemblies, fiqh discussion forums, and multiethnic student communities, Indonesian scholars gained access to diverse scholarly traditions that developed in the intellectual centers of the Islamic world. The learning process unfolded through intensive interactions among teachers,

students, texts, and scholarly communities, so that knowledge did not transfer linearly. Encounters with Arab, Indian, North African, and Anatolian scholarly traditions created a space for intellectual exchange that enabled selection, reinterpretation, and the formation of new epistemological horizons (Sembiring, 2022).

The pedagogical relationships established throughout the study period drove the transmission of knowledge through the *sanad* network, which served as a mechanism for both authentication and reproduction of scholarly traditions. The function of the *sanad* is not limited to symbolic legitimacy but also regulates methodological standards, interpretative boundaries, and patterns of intergenerational transmission in scientific disciplines (Akib, 2025). The diplomas earned by Nusantara students signify their connection to the broader scientific community and provide access to specific corpuses of literature and intellectual practices. This structure allows knowledge to move through chains of personal relationships that maintain methodological continuity across geographic spaces. The knowledge network perspective suggests that scientific authority is formed through involvement in interpretive communities that recognize the validity of a scientific tradition (Noy & O'Brien, 2026). Mobility to centers of Islamic study transforms the epistemic status of Nusantara students, as academic experience, mastery of texts, and scholarly recognition are then converted into sources of authority when they carry out educational and religious functions in their home regions.

The cross-regional learning experience also facilitates the transfer of curricula, disciplinary structures, and methods of reading religious texts. This transfer does not occur through passive adoption but through epistemological negotiations that take into account social needs, the characteristics of educational institutions, and local intellectual traditions. The texts on Shāfi'ī *fiqh*, hadith, *tafsīr*, and Sufism studied in the Haramayn were then introduced to Islamic boarding schools (*pesantren*), *surau* (prayer rooms), and *madrasahs* (Islamic schools) through a selection process tailored to the needs of the Muslim community in the Indonesian archipelago (Mahrus et al., 2025). The curriculum adaptation resulted in significant transformations as Middle Eastern learning structures adapted to different social environments. Teaching practices, the sequence of textual studies, and the emphasis on specific disciplines demonstrate a recontextualization of knowledge that transformed its function without severing ties to the original tradition.

Interactions between Indonesian students and interregional scholarly communities expanded intellectual exchange beyond the teacher-student relationship. The cosmopolitan environment of Islamic scholarly centers brought together diverse approaches to *fiqh*, hadith, theology, and Sufism that developed across Muslim regions. Informal discussion forums, collective readings of texts, and academic debates facilitated the exchange of argumentative methods and

approaches to understanding textual authority (Umar et al., 2025). This situation led to the formation of transregional scholarly communities united by shared scholarly practices rather than by geographical identities. Encounters with scholars from India, Yemen, Egypt, the Maghreb, and Anatolia broadened the intellectual horizons of Nusantara scholars regarding the diversity of Islamic traditions (Pratama et al., 2026). The flow of ideas through such communities demonstrates how knowledge develops through dialogue among nodes in scholarly networks. This scholarly mobility ultimately created a collective knowledge production space that shaped the intellectual orientation of subsequent generations of scholars.

The most significant transformation occurred when knowledge acquired through intellectual travel was translated into the socio-religious context of Southeast Asia. '*Ulamā*' once again acted as epistemic agents, reinterpreting concepts, methods, and scholarly traditions to suit the needs of local communities. The Islamic jurisprudence framework, acquired through cross-regional studies, was applied to local social issues, while the Sufism tradition was developed using approaches more relevant to the cultural conditions of Malay-Indonesian society (Azra, 2013). This adaptation process demonstrates that the transfer of knowledge always results in changes in meaning when entering new environments. The traveling knowledge perspective holds that knowledge takes on new forms when it interacts with different social contexts (Heever, 2022). Islamic knowledge circulating through networks of '*ulamā*' cannot be understood as a fixed product, but rather as the result of ongoing negotiations between global traditions and local needs.

The reproduction of knowledge occurred through the establishment of educational institutions, the teaching of scriptures, the compilation of religious works, and the development of student networks, thereby extending the cycle of scholarly transmission. These activities created a mechanism for disseminating knowledge, allowing ideas to continue to circulate across generations. Students who studied with scholars experienced in international mobility gained access to methods for reading texts, standards of argumentation, and scholarly traditions that had been previously adapted (Welch, 2012). This situation resulted in a multi-layered reproduction of scholarly traditions, as each generation contributed to the reinterpretation of inherited knowledge. The relationship between mobility, education, and intellectual reproduction demonstrates that the circulation of knowledge did not cease after the scholars returned to the archipelago. Knowledge continued to move through institutional networks, expanding its reach while maintaining connections with the broader scholarly community of the Islamic world.

The formation of regional scholarly authority was a crucial consequence of this knowledge circulation process. International academic experience, possession of *sanad*, mastery of classical literature, and the ability to adapt epistemologically

produced '*ulamā*' figures who gained strong legitimacy within Southeast Asian Muslim communities. Such authority demonstrated the changing relationship between the center and the maritime regions of Southeast Asia. The position of Nusantara '*ulamā*' evolved into knowledge producers who actively participated in shaping Islamic discourse across regions. Their writings, student networks, and pedagogical contributions demonstrate the transfer of authority through academic mechanisms rather than a permanent dependence on a particular center. This change strengthened the formation of a regional scientific community with close connections to the intellectual networks of the Islamic world and the capacity to develop its own scientific traditions.

Production and Circulation of Works by Nusantara '*Ulamā*' in Global Networks

The production of works by Indonesian scholars from the 18th to the early 20th centuries occurred through transregional textual networks that connected the Malay-Indonesian region with centers of Islamic scholarship in the Indian Ocean (Masudi, 2022). Texts functioned as a material medium that enabled the movement of ideas, methods, and scholarly authority across geographical boundaries. The works of Shaikh Abd al-Samad al-Palimbani, Shaikh Muhammad Arsyad al-Banjari, Shaikh Nawawi al-Bantani, and Shaikh Ahmad Khatib al-Minangkabawi demonstrate the active involvement of Indonesian scholars in shaping cross-regional discursive spaces through the writing of *sharhs*, *ḥāshiyahs*, treatises, and pedagogical works in Arabic and Malay-Jawi. Such writing traditions created a dialogical relationship with the corpus of Islamic literature that developed in the Haramayn, Egypt, Yemen, India, and East Africa. The significance of this phenomenon lies in the ability of texts to connect scholarly communities that are not always bound by face-to-face relationships, allowing scholarly networks to develop through the circulation of works that can be read, copied, taught, and reinterpreted in different social settings.

The material traces of manuscripts demonstrate the mobility of knowledge through distribution chains far more complex than the movement of individuals. Manuscript catalogs from the Leiden collection, the British Library, the Staatsbibliothek Berlin, and various Southeast Asian collections reveal the presence of copies of works by Nusantara scholars in locations widely distributed beyond the authors' original regions (Erasiah & Zain, 2025). Information from colophons, ownership records, marginalia, and manuscript transmission markers demonstrates the movement of texts through networks of students, traders, Hajj pilgrims, and Islamic educational communities. Each copying process creates opportunities for annotations, comments, and editorial adjustments that enrich the social life of a work. The sociology of texts perspective positions manuscripts as social objects that actively participate in shaping intellectual relationships between communities of readers (Gleadle & Rodgers, 2022). The function of manuscripts, therefore, served as a connecting link in scholarly networks, enabling the continuous exchange of ideas across time and generations.

The circulation of manuscripts also generated interpretive communities that established scholarly authority through collective reading practices. Copies of a work gained legitimacy when used in ḥalaqah, book study sessions, or the curricula of reputable educational institutions. This mechanism explains why a text's success is determined by the capacity of the network of readers who reproduce and teach it. Abd al-Samad al-Palimbani's work on Sufism, for example, gained widespread influence because it was read in various Islamic educational settings along the Indian Ocean (Azra, 2004b). The relationship between text and community of readers created a form of distributed authority, that is, authority spread through the network of book users, rather than concentrated in a single individual. This characteristic demonstrates the movement of Islamic knowledge through interactions among works, readers, teachers, students, and educational institutions, all of which mutually reinforced each other's legitimacy.

A significant transformation occurred when printing technology began to integrate into Islamic intellectual networks from the late 19th century. The printing presses of Mecca, Cairo, Bombay, Singapore, and Penang developed as distribution hubs, accelerating the reproduction of works by Indonesian scholars to a broader intellectual market (Laffan, 2003). Printed editions of Nawawi al-Bantani's works demonstrate how books that had previously circulated in manuscript reached readers across regions through mass-production mechanisms (Bruinessen, 1999). The advent of printing not only increased the number of copies but also transformed the structure of knowledge transmission through text standardization, content editing, editorial stabilization, and expanded reader access. These changes generated new scholarly communication networks connecting authors, publishers, distributors, teachers, and readers on a much broader scale than in the manuscript era. Printing ultimately served as a material infrastructure that strengthened the intellectual connectivity of the Islamic world and accelerated the exchange of ideas across regions.

The expansion of the print network gave rise to new dynamics in the formation of scholarly legitimacy. Recognition of a work increasingly depended on its capacity to be distributed across centers of Islamic education. Books that were repeatedly printed had a greater chance of becoming curricular references, being adopted as new texts, or entering academic debates across regions (Vermij, 2023). This situation demonstrates the close relationship between text reproduction and the reproduction of authority. Scholarly legitimacy developed through a social process involving acceptance by the reading community, pedagogical use, and recognition by other scholars of a work's methodological quality. The intellectual influence of Nawawi al-Bantani and Ahmad Khatib al-Minangkabawi cannot be explained solely through personal reputation, as the dissemination of their works played a crucial role in establishing academic recognition across regions. Texts served as

representations of intellectual presence, enabling authority to continue operating even when the authors were not physically present in specific reading spaces.

The phenomenon of translation and linguistic adaptation expanded the circulation of knowledge to Muslim communities with diverse linguistic backgrounds. The use of Arabic, Malay-Jawi, and specific local variations reflects intellectual strategies that enabled a work to reach readers with varying levels of scholarly competence. The translation process resulted in the recontextualization of concepts to suit the readers' social needs. This tradition is evident in various works on Islamic jurisprudence, Sufism, and theology, which underwent terminological adaptations when used in educational settings in the Malay region (Azra, 2013). Linguistic change demonstrates that knowledge does not remain static but undergoes interpretive transformation throughout the migration process. The mobility of texts through translation expanded the readership community while strengthening the connection between global intellectual traditions and the evolving local needs of various Muslim regions.

The interactions between manuscripts, printing, translation, and educational networks form what can be called transregional textual networks. This framework demonstrates the movement of Islamic knowledge through interconnected intertextual connections, not solely through the mobility of scholars. Each work entered a series of processes of copying, reading, teaching, printing, translation, and intellectual reproduction that extended its social life beyond the author's lifetime. This approach shifts historiographical attention from a one-way diffusion model to an understanding of multidirectional circulation. The works of scholars from the archipelago interacted with traditions from Arabia, India, East Africa, and various other regions through complex distribution networks. This relationship produces a collaborative knowledge-production space because the formation of meaning involves many actors dispersed across different locations and connected through textual media.

Reconstruction of the Role of Nusantara '*Ulamā*' in Global Islamic Intellectual History

Studies of Islamic intellectual history for decades have tended to be built on geographical assumptions that position the Middle East as the sole center of knowledge production, while other Muslim regions are positioned as spaces for the reception of ideas (Chande, 2023). This pattern of reading is evident in various classical narratives that portray the journeys of Southeast Asian scholars to Mecca, Medina, Cairo, or Hadramawt as a one-way transfer of knowledge. Findings regarding the Nusantara scholar network instead reveal a more complex configuration. Scholarly correspondence, teaching activities, the production of Arabic-language works, and the involvement of Jawi scholars in the international academic community demonstrate a circulative relationship. The perspectives of connected histories and global intellectual history open up new interpretative

spaces that view the Islamic world as an arena for interaction between knowledge nodes. This framework shifts the historiographical focus from a diffusion model to a knowledge co-production model, thus enabling Southeast Asia to emerge as an active participant in shaping the dynamics of Islamic intellectualism across regions.

Salem's (2021) study on the mobility of Islamic scholarship positions networks as a more relevant unit of analysis than the categories of center and periphery. The network approach demonstrates the movement of scholarly legitimacy through the interconnected relationships between teachers, students, texts, *sanads*, and educational institutions. Historical evidence of Nusantara scholars serving as permanent teachers in the Haramayn, compiling Arabic reference works, and mentoring multiethnic students demonstrates their capacity beyond that of local mediators. This position positions Nusantara scholars as intellectual nodes participating in the production of scholarly authority in the Islamic world. The significance of this finding can be a correction to the long-held assumption that links intellectual influence solely to specific geographic locations. Scholarly authority is better understood as the result of network recognition, making the ability to produce knowledge, develop students, and influence curricula a key factor in the formation of cross-regional legitimacy.

Critique of the center-periphery paradigm requires more than simply acknowledging scholars' mobility. Historiographic reconstruction demands evidence of intellectual contributions that influenced the development of the broader Islamic scholarly tradition. The work of Nawawi al-Bantani provides a crucial example, as his works were used in various Islamic educational institutions far beyond his region of origin (Kusbiantoro et al., 2025). A similar phenomenon is evident in Ahmad Khatib al-Minangkabawi's influence on a generation of scholars who later played a crucial role in shaping twentieth-century Islamic discourse (Firdaus, 2022). This influence demonstrates that knowledge did not flow through a single Arab route to the archipelago, but rather through a reciprocal process that produced new authorities. This historical reality supports the argument that Islamic intellectual geography was shaped by the interaction among multiple nodes with varying capacities to produce, disseminate, and legitimize knowledge.

The international debate on knowledge production from the margins provides an important conceptual foundation for repositioning the archipelago within Islamic intellectual history. Studies of the Indian Ocean, the circulation of Hadrami scholars, and the mobility of transregional Muslim communities demonstrate the emergence of various centers of knowledge that developed through maritime connectivity (Awass, 2026; Bahl, 2020; Balachandran, 2023). The archipelago experience strengthens this argument and adds a new dimension: the ability of non-Arab actors to establish scientific authority that gained international recognition. The evolving scholarly tradition did not function as a passive reproduction of Middle Eastern heritage, but rather produced an epistemological articulation influenced by the

social needs, educational structures, and historical experiences of Southeast Asian Muslim societies. This position demonstrates the archipelago's contribution to expanding the horizons of global Islamic historiography by providing empirical evidence of centers of knowledge production that flourished outside the Arab region.

The epistemological contributions of Nusantara scholars are evident in the methodological reinterpretation of the traditions of Islamic jurisprudence, Sufism, and Islamic education. The adaptation of authoritative texts to the pesantren environment, the development of teaching methods tailored to the characteristics of local communities, and the compilation of works that connect classical traditions with regional social issues demonstrate creative intellectual activity. The significance of this phenomenon lies in its ability to produce forms of knowledge that remain connected to global authority yet remain responsive to local contexts. The perspective of traveling knowledge helps explain how the transfer of knowledge is always accompanied by a transformation of meaning (Heever, 2022). The Nusantara experience demonstrates that this process does not diminish the legitimacy of a tradition but rather expands its capacity to address diverse social realities. This characteristic demonstrates that the development of Islamic scholarship occurs through ongoing negotiations among interacting cultural spaces.

Historiography that positions Southeast Asia as the recipient of Islamic tradition is limited in explaining why the works of Nusantara scholars have gained widespread influence within the international scientific community. The distribution of manuscripts and printed books, the use of Jawi scholars' works in the curricula of various educational institutions, and the continuity of intergenerational student networks demonstrate a mechanism for knowledge reproduction that transcended regional boundaries. This historical fact indicates the presence of multidirectional intellectual flows that a one-way transfer model cannot explain. The focus of analysis needs to shift toward examining the interactions, exchanges, and formation of shared authority among network nodes. This shift yields a more accurate reading of Islamic history by recognizing the involvement of diverse Muslim communities in shaping a global scholarly tradition throughout the early modern period and into the early twentieth century.

Conclusion

The transnationalism of Nusantara '*ulamā*' scholarship in the 18th–20th centuries demonstrates the formation of a cross-regional intellectual network that functioned as a mechanism for the production, legitimacy, adaptation, and distribution of Islamic knowledge through teacher-student relations, academic mobility, the tradition of *halaqah*, manuscript networks, and the development of print media. Key findings demonstrate a reciprocal pattern of knowledge circulation among Nusantara, Haramayn, and Hadramawt, thereby positioning Nusantara '*ulamā*' as crucial connectors, translators, developers, and disseminators of Islamic

scholarly authority. Historical dynamics over three centuries also demonstrate a shift in the means of knowledge transmission from manuscript-based networks to print-publication-based networks, which expanded the reach of Nusantara *'ulamā'* intellectual influence. These findings reinforce the global historical and Islamic historiographical approach, which places knowledge mobility as a crucial element in the formation of scholarly authority across regions. Practical implications lie in strengthening efforts to document the works of *'ulamā'*, developing Nusantara Islamic studies, and preserving Islamic intellectual heritage. Limitations of this study include the dominance of written sources, limited biographical data on several figures, and a focus on scholarly networks concentrated in Mecca, Medina, and Cairo. Future research agendas should focus on mapping intellectual networks in the digital humanities, analyzing the circulation of manuscripts and print media, and conducting comparative studies of scholarly networks across regions of the Muslim world to broaden understanding of the mobility of global Islamic knowledge.

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Author Contribution Statement

ABP developed the research idea, designed the study, performed the data analysis, wrote the main draft, revised the manuscript, and approved the final version. AAS contributed to data collection and verification, literature search, analysis refinement, and critical review of the manuscript. MNS contributed to the interpretation of the results, editing the language and formatting of the manuscript, evaluating the consistency of the argumentation, and final review before submission. All authors have read, approved, and are accountable for the content of the published manuscript.

Conflict of Interest

All authors declare that the research, preparation, and publication of this manuscript were not influenced by any financial, commercial, institutional, or personal interests or relationships that could affect the objectivity, integrity, or interpretation of the results. All authors have reviewed potential conflicts of interest and confirm that none exist relevant to this manuscript.

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AI is used only to a limited extent to help improve language quality, correct grammar, refine writing style, and format manuscripts. It is not used to generate scientific ideas, formulate research questions, develop methodologies, conduct analyses, interpret data, construct arguments, draw conclusions, or generate research findings. All concepts, results, interpretations, analyses, discussions, and conclusions in this article are solely the result of the author's own research and responsibility. The author has reviewed, verified, and takes full responsibility for the entire content of the manuscript.

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