



Commerce in the Shadow of the Dutch Recomba: NV. Marba and Arab-Hadrami Capitalism in Semarang, 1946-1954

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Abstract: The development of NV. Marba in Semarang during the period 1946–1954 demonstrates a significant transformation in the pattern of Arab-Hadrami capitalism. The company was founded by Arab wholesale entrepreneurs from Surabaya with the support of strong social networks, as a response to post-independence economic constraints and an effort to resist the influence of the Dutch Recomba. This study examines the history of NV. Marba's establishment and its role in the social and economic life of Semarang, focusing on the characteristics of Arab-Hadrami capitalism amid their position as a second-class group within the colonial stratification system. The research employs historical methods, including heuristics, source criticism, interpretation, and historiography, to trace the social networks and business activities of Faradj Martak and his associates. The findings show that NV. Marba was more than a trading office. It played a strategic role in local economic development through kapok trading, export-import activities, and the strengthening of industrial innovation. Socially, NV. Marba contributed through the recruitment of educated workers, sports activities, and participation in charitable initiatives, gaining public recognition. The study concludes that Arab-Hadrami capitalism evolved from simple commercial practices into industrial capitalism that supported economic stability and social sustainability in the post-independence period.

Keyword: Arab-Hadrami; capitalism; NV. Marba; Semarang

Abstrak: Perkembangan NV. Marba di Semarang pada periode 1946–1954 menunjukkan transformasi penting dalam praktik kapitalisme Arab-Hadrami. Perusahaan ini lahir dari inisiatif pengusaha grosir Arab asal Surabaya dengan dukungan relasi sosial yang kuat untuk menghadapi keterbatasan ekonomi pascakemerdekaan serta menentang pengaruh *Recomba* Belanda. Studi ini membahas proses pendirian NV. Marba, perannya dalam dinamika sosial ekonomi Semarang dengan menyoroti corak kapitalisme Arab-Hadrami, dan mundurnya Marba sebagai kantor dagang Arab-Hadrami di tengah posisi mereka sebagai golongan kedua pada masa kolonial. Metode yang digunakan adalah penelitian sejarah yang meliputi heuristik, kritik sumber, interpretasi, dan historiografi guna menelusuri relasi sosial serta aktivitas bisnis Faradj Martak bersama mitra bisnisnya. Temuan penelitian memperlihatkan bahwa NV. Marba tidak hanya berperan sebagai kantor dagang. Perusahaan ini turut mendorong pertumbuhan ekonomi lokal melalui perdagangan kapuk, kegiatan ekspor-impor, dan pengembangan inovasi industri. Peran sosial juga tampak melalui perekrutan tenaga terdidik dan dukungan terhadap kegiatan olahraga, sehingga mampu memperoleh penerimaan masyarakat. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan kapitalisme Arab-Hadrami berkembang dari pola perdagangan sederhana menuju kapitalisme industri yang menopang stabilitas ekonomi dan keberlanjutan sosial pada masa awal kemerdekaan. Simpulan menegaskan pentingnya jaringan sosial, kemampuan beradaptasi terhadap kebijakan ekonomi, dan komitmen sosial dalam keberhasilan perusahaan non-Eropa.

Kata Kunci: Arab-Hadrami; kapitalisme; NV. Marba; Semarang



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Introduction

Between the 15th and 16th centuries, Semarang emerged as a significant port city along the northern coast of Java. Its strategic location made it a busy stop for traders from various regions, including Europe, China, Arab, India, and Persia (Purwanto, 2005). The high level of trading activity encouraged the growth of settlements around the mouth of the Semarang River, creating a socially diverse, multiethnic environment. This area became a hub where economic interests converged, while also serving as a center for cultural exchange that shaped the city's development.

Semarang evolved into a colonial city as the authority of the *Vereenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie* (VOC) strengthened in 1677. This transition was marked by the construction of the *Vijfhoek* Fortress of Semarang. The presence of this fort signaled the beginning of Semarang's transformation into a city structured under formal administrative and military systems (Sari, 2012). In the following period, Semarang's role grew increasingly significant under VOC control. For nearly two centuries, it ranked as the third-largest port on the northern coast of Java, after Batavia and Surabaya. This status highlights Semarang's strategic importance within the trade and maritime networks of the Indonesian archipelago since the early colonial era.

By the late 18th century, Semarang's designation as a VOC administrative and military center further reinforced its position as a key commercial hub. Infrastructure developments during Daendels' administration—most notably the construction of the Great Post Road—improved connectivity between cities across Java. Colonial policies such as the forced cultivation system also reshaped local practices, placing greater emphasis on coastal cities as primary centers for commodity export (Boomgard, 2004). Administrative development reached its peak when Semarang was officially designated as a *stadsgemeente* under *Staatsblad* 1906 No. 120 on February 21, 1906, in *Buitenzorg* (Bogor). This decree acknowledged Semarang's growth into a major urban center and marked the beginning of a modern municipal governance system (Tripartono, 2010). Semarang's recognition as a major city stimulated the expansion of public facilities and created broad economic opportunities. These conditions attracted waves of urbanization and migration from various regions. Among the immigrant groups that played a significant role in shaping the city's dynamics was the Arab-Hadrami community.

The Arab-Hadrami community in Semarang was subjected to discriminatory colonial policies, particularly through the social stratification imposed by the colonial administration. Despite these constraints, such limitations did not prevent them from contributing significantly to the economic, social, and religious spheres, which in turn shaped the distinctive character of their capitalism (Nafisah, 2024). The trade networks they established facilitated the circulation of capital, goods, and cultural influences between the Indonesian archipelago and the Middle East, thereby shaping the character of Arab-Hadrami capitalism. The emergence of nation-state ideas in the early 20th century prompted a shift in the community's orientation, particularly in fostering a stronger sense of national identity in the diaspora. This growing national consciousness among Arab descendants was reflected in Sumpah Pemuda Arab (The Arab Youth Pledge), held on October 4-5, 1934 (Safira & Haidar, 2014). The outcome was a declaration affirming Indonesia as the homeland of Arab descendants, while also signaling their commitment to move beyond insular community life and to engage actively in the broader national sphere. This event represented a crucial milestone in the social integration of the Arab-Hadrami community in Indonesia, including in Semarang.

The role of Arab descendants became increasingly prominent following Indonesia's independence. In the context of the struggle to defend sovereignty, their contributions extended beyond physical resistance or political diplomacy to include economic activity. Non-indigenous merchants played a crucial role in maintaining economic stability and preventing the resurgence of colonial dominance through the capitalist practices of the Arab-Hadrami community. A notable example of their engagement in Semarang was the establishment of *NV. Algemeene Import-Export de Handel Marba* (NV. MARBA) in 1946 by Faradj Martak and Ali Badjened (ANRI, 1948).

Faradj Martak and Ali Badjened utilized a vacant building to establish a trading office that provided shipping services and supported port operations. The use of the empty premises at Letjen Suprpto Street No. 33, Semarang, was a strategic measure aimed at preventing the takeover of assets by the Dutch government through the Recomba (*Regerings Commissaris voor Bestuursaangelegenheden*), or Government Commissioner for Administrative Affairs (Yuliati, Susilowati, and Suliyati, 2020). The utilization of economic assets for the nation's benefit reflects a collective consciousness and a willingness to make sacrifices for the shared future. This approach aligns with a conception of nationalism that views the nation as a bond of collective will, forged through historical experience and shared responsibility. Analyzing such actions requires historical, social, and economic perspectives to understand the underlying significance of the decisions made. From a historical standpoint, as proposed by Ernest Renan, nationalism theory is essential for interpreting these collective actions, exemplified by the Arab-Hadrami community's patriotic spirit as reflected in the conduct of Faradj Martak and Ali Badjened (Iramadhan, 2017). The perspective of value-rational social action, as articulated by Max Weber, is employed to understand their behavior as guided by religious and social values (Weber, 1921). An economic approach grounded in Maxime Rodinson's theory of industrial capitalism helps explain the behavior of these Arab merchants, who acted as business owners capable of implementing capitalist practices based on machinery, factories, and wage labor (Rodinson, 1973).

This study aims to examine one of the trading offices established by the Arab-Hadrami community within the socio-economic dynamics of Semarang during the early post-independence period. The research is expected to enrich national historiography by highlighting the contributions of diaspora figures through the distinctive capitalist practices of the Arab-Hadrami community in Indonesia's struggle to defend its independence. Such understanding is crucial for fostering historical awareness and recognizing the rightful place of diaspora figures within the broader narrative of Indonesian nationhood.

Research Methods

This study seeks to reconstruct past events through systematically conducted historical research. The research employs the historical method as outlined by Kuntowijoyo, encompassing the stages of heuristics, source criticism, interpretation, and historiography (Kuntowijoyo, 2013). His method was selected for its ability to reconstruct the development of Arab-Hadrami capitalism through the Marba trading office in Semarang between 1946 and 1954. The year 1946 was chosen as the starting point, marking the inception of the idea to establish NV. Marba in Semarang, while 1954 was designated as the endpoint to represent the decline of Marba's influence as a trading office in the city.

The heuristic stage involved collecting sources relevant to the research topic, including both government archives and previous references. The primary sources utilized were the *Staatsblad* published by the *Algemene Politiek Batavia Hoofdcommissariaat* (Central Office of General Politics in Batavia), the *Secretaris van Staat voor Binnenlandse Veiligheid* (Secretary

of State for Domestic Security), and the *Procureur Generaal Bij Het Hooggerechtshof van Nederlands-Indie* (Attorney General at the Supreme Court of the Dutch East Indies) in 1948, as well as the Government of the Republic of Indonesia's Statement of Appreciation No. 5.1/26/10 dated August 14, 1959, issued in Yogyakarta.

The source criticism stage was conducted to assess the authenticity and credibility of the archives, ensuring their scholarly reliability. The research process concluded with interpretation and the writing of historiography, organized chronologically to illustrate the manifestation of Arab-Hadrami capitalism through the role of NV. Marba as a trading office within the socio-economic dynamics of Semarang during the early years of Indonesia's independence.

Research Result

The Emergence of the Idea to Establish NV. Marba in Semarang

In 1946, Indonesia had just achieved independence and lacked the capacity to comprehensively rehabilitate its infrastructure. These limitations prompted the idea of establishing a trading office with expedition services capable of competing with those previously operated by the Dutch government. This initiative originated from the Arab-Hadrami merchant community, which possessed extensive experience in trade activities. A key figure in this effort was Faradj Martak, a well-known merchant in the Surabaya region. His presence is traceable through his family, the Martak lineage, recognized as Hadrami wholesale merchants with an established business network in Surabaya (Khasanah, 2020).

Faradj Martak's involvement in industry aligns with the observations of Austin Gareth in his book *Industrial Growth in the Third World 1870–1990: Depressions, Intra-Regional Trade, and Ethnic Networks*. Gareth notes that in 1934, Faradj Martak participated in establishing the first weaving factory in Surabaya. This entrepreneurial activity continued in 1935 through a collaboration with his brother, Ahmad Martak, to establish a second weaving factory in Kesono, Mojokerto, East Java. The Martak family's success in the textile industry laid the foundation for the creation of *NV. Handelmaatschappij Antara-Asia*. This company, structured as a limited liability corporation, was founded after World War II as a joint-stock company engaged in trade (Austin, 1998).

Faradj Martak was the son of Said bin Awad Martak, an entrepreneur who owned the firm Al-Said bin Awad Martak in Mojokerto and was recognized as one of the prominent legal firms of his time. Born in Hadramaut in 1897 as the third of four siblings, Faradj Martak grew up in a family environment closely tied to commerce, shaping his business perspective and experience from a young age. His engagement in trade became increasingly evident when, together with his brothers Yuslam, Muhammad, and Ahmad, he established NV. Marba in 1946. This company functioned as a trading office responsible for the distribution of goods, acting both as a distributor and as a branch of *NV. Handelmaatschappij Antara-Asia*. In this role, Marba became a significant component of the trading network during the early years of Indonesia's independence.

Faradj Martak was recognized as a successful entrepreneur in East Java, with his influence extending beyond the economic sphere to include support for the political activities of Abdurrahman Baswedan. Both were involved in a community called *Al-Irsyad*, which served as a platform for the Hadramaut diaspora in Indonesia. Founded in 1911, Al-Irsyad was categorized as a "minor Arab community," a classification intended to distinguish it from *Al-Katariyah*, a group of prophetic descendants who held a privileged social status. Through *Al-Irsyad*, members sought to build solidarity in opposition to the *divide et impera* policies implemented by the Dutch colonial government, which aimed to fragment the Arab-descendant population to maintain colonial control. The movement drew the attention of H. Agus Salim, a

prominent figure in the Sarekat Islam Party, who showed considerable interest in the community's direction of struggle. Their primary resistance against Dutch policies focused on rejecting the exclusive use of titles such as "*sayid*" for prophetic descendants and fostering a sense of national identity as Indonesians among the Arab-descendant population.

The background of this movement is closely linked to Dutch colonial political policies, which implemented a system of social stratification. The population of the Dutch East Indies was divided into three groups: Europeans, Foreign Orientals, and Indigenous peoples. This division created social disparities and reinforced discrimination. *Al-Irsyad* emerged as a platform to resist such injustices while also affirming unity within an Indonesian national identity. The movement's mission was carried out through the publication of Arabic-language newspapers, namely *Al-Miskah* and *Arabische Verbond*. These media outlets served as channels for disseminating political ideas that supported both Arab descendants and Arab totok. The content emphasized the importance of fostering collective awareness as part of the Indonesian nation. The movement further evolved with the organization of the Arab Youth Pledge of Indonesia, which took place on October 4–5, 1934, in Semarang, marking a crucial moment in the political consolidation of the Arab-Hadrami community. This event resulted in the Arab Youth Pledge Declaration and led to the establishment of Partai Arab Indonesia (the Indonesian Arab Party) as a political platform for their struggle. The Arab Youth Pledge (Amaruli et al., 2018) included three key points that were particularly highlighted as follows:

“Tanah Air Peranakan (Keturunan) Arab adalah Indonesia; Peranakan Arab harus meninggalkan kehidupan menyendiri; dan Peranakan Arab harus memenuhi kewajibannya terhadap tanah air dan bangsa Indonesia.”

The issue of national consciousness among Arab descendants and Arab totok traces back to cultural differences formed during their time in Hadramaut. These distinctions were carried to Indonesia and shaped their perspectives on national identity. A. R. Baswedan viewed this condition as a social malady with the potential to undermine the unity of the Arab community in Indonesia. One prominent problem was the dominance of an individual named Alamudi, whose ideas were considered contrary to the original goals of Arab-descendant nationalism, which emphasized a diplomatic approach. His ambition to control one of *Al-Irsyad*'s media outlets, *Arabische Verbond*, further intensified internal conflicts. This move received support from his followers, who argued that the Dutch colonial government did not provide opportunities for Arab totok to participate in political governance. Although of Arab-descendant status, Alamudi was known to receive financial backing from the Arab totok group. Consequently, his actions did not reflect the broader interests of the Arab community in Indonesia. The Arab-descendant faction that remained loyal to A. R. Baswedan largely consisted of ordinary members without strong political or economic influence. In this context, Faradj Martak's presence became a crucial support for the Partai Arab Indonesia's movement. His role strengthened the party's efforts to hold Alamudi accountable, as Alamudi was deemed to have harmed the organization and obstructed the political struggle of the Arab community in Indonesia through the practice of *buigyzeling*. This practice emphasized providing a form of guarantee for a debtor until the debt could be fully repaid.

The Partai Arab Indonesia (PAI) received crucial support from the press outlet *Sin Tit Po* in advancing its political objectives. This newspaper was founded by Tjoa Tjie Liang, who also served as the secretary of the Partai Tionghoa Indonesia (PTI). As a Chinese descendant, Tjoa Tjie Liang was engaged in a discursive rivalry with *Pewarta Surabaya*, a media outlet owned by other Chinese entrepreneurs. *Sin Tit Po*'s support for PAI was motivated by a shared sense of marginalization experienced by Chinese descendants in facing the dominance of Chinese

totok groups, which tended to align with the Dutch colonial government. This common experience fostered political solidarity between Arab descendants and Chinese descendants in resisting colonial influence.

Attention to both parties also came from Dr. Sutomo, who at the time served as Director of *Soeara Oemoem*. When the influence of *Sin Tit Po* began to wane, support was redirected through the *Soeara Oemoem* media. This action reflected Dr. Sutomo's inclusive nationalism, which did not narrowly define the national identity of figures such as A.R. Baswedan, Tjoa Tjie Liang, and Faradj Martak. This open stance drew attention from the national press, which recognized that the nationalist movement was willing to include non-indigenous groups as part of Indonesia's struggle. The involvement of prominent central figures further elevated PAI's position within the national movement. Through PAI, Faradj Martak became known as the entrepreneur behind the party's success in resisting Dutch influence among the Arab-descendant community.

The collaboration between PAI and PTI was also evident in the establishment of NV. Marba. The idea of founding NV. Marba is documented as having been discussed during a meeting held by Faradj Martak with his confidant, The Boen Liang (Secret Advisor of the Indonesian Chinese Party). This is corroborated by Geheim-Rapport No. 484/V.I.D/R.II dated March 17, 1948. The report states that the meeting between Faradj Martak and Boen Liang in Surabaya took place in February 1946 and that further discussions were planned to continue in Batavia (ANRI, 1948). The outcome of these discussions determined that Semarang would serve as one of the trading offices, officially established in 1946 and located at *Heerenstraat* 33. This is documented in the *De Locomotief* 1946 edition of February 9, under the title '*N.V. Alg. Import & Export Handel Mij. Marba*' (De Locomotief, 1946).

Semarang was selected as one of NV. Marba's trading offices due to its situation under newly implemented regulations by the Dutch Recomba. In 1946, the Dutch government established rules for assessing the rental value of land and buildings in the regions of Java and Madura (De Locomotief, 1947). This aligns with Semarang's location, as it was part of the regions affected by these regulations. In determining rental rates, the Dutch government held the authority to set the maximum rent for each building located in Java and Madura. Beyond rental assessments, the government prohibited activities in restricted areas for non-military personnel, as stipulated by the Recomba Decree. The return of the Dutch to Semarang in 1946 was accompanied by efforts to revitalize the city's economy and infrastructure. Recomba policies were aimed at restoring the functions of the colonial city while reinforcing political control through the economic sector.

The presence of Marba as a distributor in Semarang was closely linked to the dire conditions at the Semarang port in 1946. According to reports from KPM (*Koninklijke Paketvaart Maatschappij*), the harbor waters experienced significant silting due to the accumulation of mud, which was difficult to manage because no dredging machine (*baggarmolen*) was available. In addition, the quay walls and port lighting markers suffered substantial structural damage. These conditions not only affected the functionality of supporting infrastructure but also disrupted port operations. In response, Faradj Martak took the initiative to provide services related to port operational support by establishing an expedition service on Letjen Suprpto Street, Semarang.

The building later utilized as Marba's trading office originally served a different purpose. Before being occupied by NV. Marba, the structure functioned as a grocery store named Zikel, owned by a German entrepreneur. This business was forced to cease operations following bankruptcy in 1932, resulting in the clearance of all stock. Long before that, the building had even been used as a military engineering workshop in the early twentieth century. Changes in

ownership of such historic buildings were closely connected to the enforcement of the Recomba Decree, which encouraged several Arab-Hadrami entrepreneurs to acquire disused heritage properties. The founders of NV. Marba are also known to have maintained close relations with Abdurrahman Baswedan, a prominent figure and founder of the Partai Arab Indonesia (Suratmin, 1989). This close relationship ensured that the business initiatives undertaken were not perceived as a threat by the Government of the Republic of Indonesia, but rather as legitimate and acceptable economic activities (ANRI, 1959).

As the process of establishing Marba progressed, further discussions regarding the selection of the company's office location were conducted on Faradj Martak's private property. These discussions took place at one of his properties located at Pegangsaan Barat Street No. 41 (ANRI, 1948). This was necessary to continue the meeting with Ali Badjened, a business partner of the Martak family. The establishment of NV. Marba was influenced by recommendations from the Director of Bank Indonesia, R. M. Margono Djojoadidjaja, and by the urging of Drs. Moh. Hatta to participate in the American-Indonesian Concern. This initiative functioned as a workshop introducing export-import activities through the trading office, conducted in both Semarang and New York. The report was submitted not only to the Director of the Far East and the Minister of Foreign Affairs for Domestic Security, but also to the Supreme Court of the Dutch East Indies in the same year (ANRI, 1948). This demonstrates that the establishment of NV. Marba caused concern for the Recomba Government. This apprehension arose because NV. Marba, as a trading company owned by the Arab-Hadrami community, became a key asset for the Government of the Republic of Indonesia and gained increasing recognition within the international community.

The dispute between the Government of the Republic of Indonesia (RI) and the Dutch Government over the claim of unoccupied buildings remained tense. Upon his return from exile to Yogyakarta, Bung Karno summoned Ahmad bin Said Martak and Ali Muhammad Badjened as representatives of NV. Marba, which had purchased buildings that the Recomba authorities planned to auction. He entrusted Marba because they were nationalist figures who did not align with the colonial government. The Government of the Republic of Indonesia promised to reimburse all costs for the building purchases once state funds were available. However, Marba did not agree to the reimbursement plan, as they intended the acquisition to serve as a grant to the NKRI (Negara Kesatuan Republik Indonesia). Faradj bin Said Martak, as the President Director of the company, received an official statement of appreciation from the Government of the Republic of Indonesia in 1959.

The dispute between the Government of the Republic of Indonesia and the Dutch Government over the claim of unoccupied buildings continued after independence. This issue arose due to the Recomba authorities' plan to auction several buildings previously abandoned by the colonial administration. Upon returning from his exile to Yogyakarta, President Bung Karno directed government attention to this matter. He summoned Ahmad bin Said Martak and Ali Muhammad Badjened as representatives of NV. Marba, a company that had purchased the buildings intended for auction by Recomba. The government's trust in NV. Marba was based on the management's reputation as nationalist figures, whose stance was considered independent of Dutch colonial interests. On this basis, the Government of the Republic of Indonesia promised to reimburse the full costs of the building purchases once state finances improved. However, the reimbursement plan was not approved by Marba, as the acquired buildings were intended as a grant to the NKRI (Negara Kesatuan Republik Indonesia). In connection with this grant, President Sukarno personally expressed his gratitude to Faradj Martak during a meeting in Jakarta and presented him with a gift of Arab honey. This gesture

was recorded in an official note of appreciation issued by President Sukarno, signed in 1953, as follows:

“Saja mengutjap banjak-banjak terima kasih atas kiriman saudara, madu Arab jang baik sekali buat kesehatan saja. Karena saja menderita sedikit beri-beri, maka dokter menganggap madu itu baik sekali buat saja di samping vitamin D3.”

This decision reflects the company's commitment to the national struggle and the interests of the state. Faradj bin Said Martak, as President Director of NV. Marba, once again received an official expression of gratitude, this time conveyed by Ir. Mananti Sitompul, Minister of Public Works and Transportation, on behalf of the Government of the Republic of Indonesia in 1959. This recognition served as a symbol of the state's appreciation for Marba's contribution to safeguarding national assets during the early years of independence.

The Character of NV. Marba's Capitalism in Social and Economic Life

The development of Arab-Hadrami capitalism in Semarang exhibited distinctive new characteristics. These traits no longer centered solely on the role of the Arab community in ways that reinforced negative societal stereotypes (Safira and Haidar, 2014). Initially, their economic activities were primarily associated with semi-commercial trading practices and the application of *riba* systems. With the emergence of entrepreneurs involved in NV. Marba, the character of capitalism within the community underwent a transformation, producing positive impacts on the economic dynamics of Semarang society.

According to Rodinson in his study *Islam and Capitalism*, Islamic civilization inherently exhibits a strong affinity with the principles of capitalism (Huda, 2016). Max Weber's sociological framework, which he adapted, demonstrates that the development and emergence of capitalism can be shaped by Protestantism. Weber analyzed capitalism through his study of German society, which emphasized ascetic Protestant religious values. These values manifested in disciplined lifestyles, frugality, and a strong work ethic. Material success was perceived as the result of diligence and self-control, rather than a means to satisfy personal pleasures. Rodinson extended this argument, asserting that in subsequent stages, capitalism itself plays a crucial role in shaping the very dynamics of religion.

In his classification, Rodinson distinguishes capitalism into three categories: commercial capitalism, financial capitalism, and industrial capitalism. Within the context of Arab societies, Rodinson categorized them primarily under commercial capitalism, largely due to financial transactions still relying on the *riba* system. This classification was employed by Rodinson to trace economic patterns among the Quraysh community residing in Mecca, as well as Arab communities settled in Surabaya. In contrast to this form of capitalism, the Hadrami entrepreneurs of Marba in Semarang demonstrated a more advanced stage of capitalist development, which had begun to strengthen industrial aspects. The capitalism practiced by Marba's founders no longer relied on loan-based systems for debtors, as had been assumed by the Government of the Republic of Indonesia.

To understand the capitalism of the Arab-Hadrami community as narrated through official documents and the press from the colonial period to post-independence, the analysis is organized according to sectors consistently highlighted in newspapers and advertisements. This categorization aims to reveal the structure of capitalism manifested through NV. Marba's engagement in social and economic spheres. In the social domain, the discussion addresses capitalist products such as the emergence of the labor class and community social activities involving government, private institutions, and the public. In the economic domain, the analysis

examines Marba's role as an intermediary, reflecting a characteristic form of Arab-Hadrami capitalism that supported the economic functioning of Semarang.

1. Social Dimension

In conducting its business activities, NV. Marba was closely intertwined with the Semarang community, notably through the recruitment of labor. The backgrounds of the employees joining the company constituted a crucial factor, as they influenced NV. Marba's position and role within the socio-political context of the time. The designation of Marba as a provider of expedition services for trading offices by the Government of the Republic of Indonesia created strategic opportunities for the company. This status reinforced Marba's role within distribution networks while enhancing its business credibility amid the post-independence economic competition. Faradj Martak's relationships with Indonesian political figures were leveraged as a supporting factor in the company's development. These connections were strategically utilized to strengthen Marba's competitiveness, particularly against the colonial government-owned *Koninklijke Paketvaart Maatschappij* (KPM) and other private firms offering similar services. This is evidenced by the joining of Mr. M. Hermani and Ir. Dermawan Mangunkusumo in July 1947. Ir. Dermawan Mangunkusumo, a nephew of Mr. Tjipto Mangunkusumo, was recognized for his political engagement. Hermani was recorded as an active politician affiliated with the Partai Indonesia Raya. Similar to Hermani, Dermawan Mangunkusumo had political experience, including serving as Minister of Prosperity in the Sjahrir I Cabinet in November 1945 and the Sjahrir II Cabinet in March 1946. The involvement of these politically experienced figures positioned NV. Marba not merely as an economic actor but also as a significant influencer within the social and political dynamics of the era (Soedjito, 1954).

NV. Marba required candidates to be assigned to Singapore and India, as the company had extended its network to these countries. According to the *Algemeen Handelsblad* edition of 14 August 1947, NV. Marba sought candidates who had completed at least five years of HBS (*Hoogere Burgerschool*) or HIS (*Hollandsch Inlandsche School*) education, to be placed in administrative and secretarial positions. These criteria reflected NV. Marba's emphasis on credibility and preference for employees with formal educational backgrounds.

In addition to functioning as a trading office, NV. Marba also demonstrated its involvement in social activities. Such engagement was considered essential for sustaining the company, including through word-of-mouth advertising strategies supported by the Semarang government. This support was documented in *De Locomotief* newspaper, edition of 31 January 1948, under the headline "*Verbroederingswedstrijd in het Stadion*," which translates to "*Fostering Friendship at the Stadium*." The article reported on a football event organized jointly by NV. Marba and government officials, with participants drawn from company employees. This informal gathering served a dual purpose. Firstly, it introduced NV. Marba to the broader public, enhancing the company's social visibility. Secondly, it sought to mitigate circulating rumors regarding a strained relationship between the company and local authorities. The event included representatives from the government, specifically from the sports editorial office and the regional prosecutor's office, while the private sector was represented by NV. Marba, with referees drawn from the Army. The composition of the organizing committee reflected the involvement of multiple stakeholders. Although the match served as a positive step in fostering relations between private enterprise and government, attendance was limited due to insufficient dissemination of information about the football event.

A harmonious relationship between the government and private sector could be fostered through NV. Marba's sports initiatives. Various sports served as important platforms for

informal diplomacy and social interaction, such as in the tennis matches organized by both parties. Learning from the previous football event, the involved stakeholders subsequently publicized the upcoming tennis tournament in *De Locomotief* edition of 16 April 1948, scheduled for 23 April 1948. This edition featured the headline “*Tafeltennis Stertournooien en Burgerstertournni*” (Star Table Tennis Tournament and Military Star Tournament).

The participants included civilians as well as members of the Semarang and Pekalongan Army, supported by the Indonesian Ministry of Welfare and several prominent companies in Semarang, namely Ong Yong Wie, Tels & Co, Guntzel & Schuhmacher, and Hagemeyer & Co. or Hoppenstedt. The tournament was conducted in three sessions from 08:30 to 22:00, with participants required to use open-hand serves in accordance with international rules. The planning of this event serves as evidence that NV. Marba was accepted by diverse societal groups through its role as an intermediary between the government, private sector, and community. Marba further demonstrated its commitment to maintaining public confidence by offering full insurance coverage for all products and services provided by NV. Marba. This measure served as a necessary guarantee to ensure the comfort and security of its consumers (Java Bode, 1951). These activities serve as evidence that NV. Marba made a significant contribution to social engagement.

2. Economy Dimension

The significant role of Marba as a trading office is also evident in various commercial activities that shaped the daily life of the Semarang community. In 1950, the majority of Dutch residents working in Semarang maintained the practice of sending flower albums from the Dutch East Indies to their families in the Netherlands. These flower albums were sent as a means of updating their families on local conditions or simply to exchange news. For instance, *De Locomotief* reported on April 21, 1950, that a child named Zeebloem Meermin received an album of Dutch East Indies flower collections from their parents. The album served as both a birthday gift and a way to convey familial joy, expressed through accompanying messages. The happiness reflected a sense of pride in the child’s employment at a company. Beyond expressing joy, the Dutch East Indies flower album functioned as a medium to convey hopes and expectations. The same report continued, highlighting the parents’ desire to visit their child once the holiday season arrived.

The practice of exchanging news through flower albums became a marketing strategy for NV. Marba in promoting its commercial products. The strategy relied on engaging activities designed to cultivate children’s appreciation of nature. Reported in the *Java Bode* newspaper on January 15, 1951, under the headline *Kent U de Schoonheid van de Indonesische Flora?* (“Do You Know the Beauty of Indonesian Flora?”), NV. Marba, in collaboration with NV. Honey Brand, introduced this initiative through an advertisement for Van Dorp’s Album Indische Tuinbloemen (Van Dorp’s Dutch East Indies Flower Album). Marba leveraged the habits of Dutch workers residing with their families in Semarang to expand its market reach. This initiative demonstrated that the company’s products were not only aimed at adults, but also engaged children as active consumers. Consumers could participate by purchasing 50 packs of Honey Brand candies and submitting 10 photographs found inside the candy wrappers to NV. Honey Brand or NV. Marba for a fee of Rp. 2.50. Involving NV. Honey Brand as the candy producer was a strategic decision, as the public could acquire the Dutch East Indies flower albums without paying the full price for standalone albums. The pricing remained competitive compared to flower album sales in other stores, thereby increasing accessibility and market penetration.

The collection activity known as Bunga Taman Hindia (Dutch East Indies Garden Flowers) became a prominent attraction introduced by NV. Marba, positioning the company as a pioneer in innovative advertising. This approach was subsequently emulated by other stores, offering similar trends, as reported in the *Java Bode* edition of June 24, 1953, under the headline *Indische Tuinbloemen*. The album, created by M. L. A. Bruggeman, was sold at Van Soest Bookstore for Rp. 7.50 and contained 107 illustrations of flowers. Compared to NV. Marba's offerings, this price was significantly higher. This demonstrates NV. Marba's business strategy of leveraging product quality and competitive pricing to maintain market leadership.

Marba's business strategy was also manifested through its export activities. Semarang Port ranked as the third-largest port in Java. Cargo traffic reached 50,000 tons per month before the war, while the previous year recorded an increase to 24,000 tons per month. Exports experienced stagnation due to the port's operational halt. Although the port was visited annually by ships from various countries, vessels attempting to enter Semarang encountered difficulties because of shallow waters caused by continuous sedimentation (Maulida, 2024). This situation rendered vessels exceeding 500 tons unsuitable for docking at Semarang Port. This condition was reported during a consular conference of the Central Java Economic Council by H. van der Zaag, secretary of the Dutch Trade Association in Semarang, concerning Central Java's position within the economic sector.

In 1950, Semarang Port had lost much of its strategic significance, since the majority of commodities that were formerly in demand on the global market were now predominantly used for domestic consumption (Algemeen Indisch Dagblad, 1951). Sugar, which had previously been a major commodity, lost its prominence. Tobacco, copra, and corn also disappeared from exports due to postwar domestic food needs, which rendered Semarang unable to sustain export activities. In response, exporters decided to rely on kapok and peanuts as primary export commodities. Kapok production in Semarang in 1950 experienced a decline. This reduction was caused by extensive kapok tree felling during the Japanese occupation and was further exacerbated by post-independence clothing and food challenges. The harvest of kapok in 1950 was additionally hindered by adverse climatic conditions, with excessive rainfall delaying harvest preparations. Paradoxically, this situation contributed to a significant increase in local income due to the implementation of an export certification system that came into effect on March 13, 1950. Toward the end of 1950, demand for kapok seeds from Japan increased substantially. The prices offered by the Japanese market were considerably higher than those previously obtained in Europe, which had been the primary destination for this commodity. Marba leveraged this situation to gain opportunities in the global market, responding to the postwar demand for kapok.

In kapok production, NV. Marba acted as a trading partner for kapok producers across Central Java. NV. Marba was also one of the founding members of an exporters' organization called *Organisatie Verenigde Exporteurs van Indische Producten* (OVEIP). This organization consisted of trading companies specializing in the export of Indies products. NV. Marba's involvement in this trade organization positioned it as a key commercial partner within OVEIP. The presence of this organization had a positive impact on economic activity in Semarang, particularly in marketing regional production. This is evident from a report in *De Locomotief* newspaper, dated February 4, 1953, under the title "*Semarang producten*," which noted that through OVEIP, Semarang products could be marketed at Rp. 67.50 for every net kilogram, compared to 1949, when the government could only sell kapok at Rp. 0.50 for every kilogram through Marba. This situation illustrates the organization's role in enhancing product value and expanding Semarang's commercial networks.

The issues concerning kapok were also evident in the changes to quality standards implemented by OVEIP during kapok production in Central Java. Inevitably, the previous grade B classification was downgraded to grade C, which naturally disappointed the producers. In response to this situation, P. Notoprodjo took the initiative to voice his concerns through the radio of the Lembaga Urusan Kapuk (Kapok Affairs Agency). He advocated for government intervention as a mediator among the disputing parties: OVEIP as the major organization, kapok producers who still required protection, and the kapok farmers, who were the most vulnerable. Unfortunately, the government at that time merely acted to ensure that the three parties cooperated without oppressing one another. This situation prompted P. Notoprodjo to take further action by establishing a stronger association.

Kapok production from Java has long been recognized for its consistently high quality in the global market. The quality standards established by OVEIP were understood by Notoprodjo as necessary to ensure that Java's kapok would not lose its international market value due to perceived inferior quality. He argued that it would be preferable for all stakeholders to jointly assess the quality of kapok. This proposal was accompanied by the establishment of a kapok fund analogous to the copra fund. Following this unilateral decision, a meeting was convened in Semarang under the auspices of the Asosiasi Perdagangan Tionghoa (Chinese Trade Association) on Monday, 20 October 1953. The meeting involved various relevant parties, including kapok producers and representatives from the Lembaga Urusan Kapuk, namely P. Notoprodjo and Djokomono. The discussion focused on OVEIP's actions, which had caused disappointment among kapok producers due to the quality classification assigned. According to OVEIP, the kapok was categorized as grade C based on the standards set by the Lembaga Urusan Kapuk, a classification considered unsuitable for trade in the market. To address this dissatisfaction, NV. Marba, through OVEIP, collaborated with Chinese businessmen associated with the Asosiasi Perdagangan Tionghoa to jointly resolve the kapok quality issue. The association's secretary, Tan Siang Swie, explained that prior to the independence war, there were three bodies consisting of exporters, brokers, and producers that had attempted to manage kapok quality. This arrangement changed after the war, when OVEIP assumed the dual role of exporter and purchaser, thereby becoming directly involved in determining quality standards (De Locomotief, 1953). The outcome of the discussion resulted in the deployment of a delegation consisting of H. M. Sulehan, Tan Siang Swie, Oei Kiem Hie, Tan Liat Tiong, and Sie Kok Kien to draft proposals for an accurate classification regarding the determination of kapok quality. From an economic perspective, NV. Marba's efforts to maintain the quality of kapok in Java exemplify the company's economic spirit as a trading office.

Phenomena related to Arab-Hadrami capitalism often emerged within a structure that positioned the Arab community as the second tier in the stratification policies of the Dutch colonial government. This stratification compelled them to devise survival strategies, often involving practices perceived negatively by the broader society. It also serves as concrete evidence that Arab-Hadrami capitalism was not limited to usury practices but could also manifest through the strategic utilization of opportunities as a second-tier group to support the Government of the Republic of Indonesia in achieving sovereign independence.

Conflict within the Arab Community in Family-Owned Enterprises

Internal conflicts within the Arab community also affected NV. Marba, contributing to a period of decline for the trading company. These issues had been visible since 1950, with several internal cases drawing public attention due to interest in a prominent Arab family. According to *De Vrije Pers* (24 February 1950) under the headline "*Directur Marba gearresteerd*" (Marba Director Arrested), referencing *Sin Po*, the director of NV. Marba, A. S.

Martak—brother of Faradj Martak—was suspected in a murder case. He was initially arrested in Jakarta and later transferred to Surabaya. Further details in *Nieuwe Courant* (26 February 1950), under the title “*Alamudi overleden*” (Alamudi Deceased), reported that one of NV. Marba’s directors, Ahmad Martak, was apprehended at Faradj Martak’s residence on Pegangsaan Timur Street, believed to be involved in the murder of Alamudi. The victim, Alamudi, was a local elite figure in Surabaya associated with KUS (*Kunst Unie Soerabaja*) and an *Al-Irsyad* politician. The motive for the murder was reportedly retaliation, as Alamudi had previously killed his nephew; Ahmad Martak allegedly enlisted a group of armed men to abduct Alamudi, which resulted in Alamudi’s death along with multiple injuries.

The NV. Marba warehouse also significantly influenced the operations of all branches of the company. According to *Nieuwe Courant* under the headline “*Marba voor ½ ton gerampokt*” (Half-Ton Disaster for Marba), published on 4 May 1950, NV. Marba guards. Witness statements indicated that textiles valued at 50,000 guilders were loaded onto a truck, and the perpetrators appeared to be in haste, leaving one of their accomplices behind.

NV. Marba also experienced challenges through one of its founders, Ali Badjened. Ali Badjened was an entrepreneur who commanded public attention, as reported in *De Locomotief* on 13 August 1953; the newspaper’s expression of condolences serves as evidence of Badjened’s prominent status in Semarang. *Indische Courant* on 2 September 1953 also reported on the assassination case of this company founder under the headline “*Verdachte in moord op Badjened ontsnapt*” (Suspect in Badjened Murder Escapes), highlighting the unfortunate fact that one of the perpetrators initially evaded capture. Ultimately, the suspects were apprehended in Semarang, as documented in *De Locomotief* on 25 September under the headline “*Bendeleiders gearresteerd*” (Two Gang Leaders Arrested). The suspects, identified by the initials O and K, were leaders of two anarchist gang groups operating in Surabaya.

The murder case of NV. Marba’s director, Ali Badjened, began to show significant progress when the Jakarta District Court convened on Tuesday morning, with Judge G. K. Liem and his deputy R. R. M. Hara presiding, to hear testimony from eleven witnesses in the case, as reported in *Java Bode* on 2 April 1954 under the headline “*De zaak Badjened Elf getuigen gehoord*” (The Badjened Case: Eleven Witnesses Heard). During this session, the court decided to postpone further proceedings until 8 April 1954, as the formal charges against the perpetrators were to be presented by the public prosecutor on that date. Coverage in *Indische Courant* on 31 July 1954, titled “*Voortzetting rechtzaak moord op A. Badjened*” (The Murder Case of A. Badjened Continues), described the court hearing testimony from five witnesses—Awab bin Ali Hadjeri, Z. Tanalepi, R. Gerke, and Salim bin Alkaf—who were witnesses as well as associates of the perpetrators, indicating that Badjened was abducted because he was a wealthy businessman who could generate ransom money. The case proceeded until the court ultimately sentenced Muhammad bin Baagil to 15 years’ imprisonment, as reported in *Pikiran Rakjat* on 20 November 1954 under the headline “*De moordzaak Badjened*” (The Badjened Murder Case). Muhammad bin Baagil was found guilty of orchestrating the abduction that led to the death of Director Ali Badjened. The abductors—Hamsah alias Kusni alias Sutarta bin Kasdut, Achmad Usman bin Anwar, and Salim bin Achmad Alkaf—were enticed by Muhammad bin Baagil with a reward of Rp. 100.000, which ultimately resulted in the fatal outcome of the kidnapping.

The various legal and personal issues experienced by the founding families of NV. Marba significantly undermined the influence of the trading office. The company’s leadership became preoccupied with addressing these cases in coordination with the police, resulting in a leadership vacuum. Compounding this situation, the Government of the Republic of Indonesia had not yet secured funds to reimburse Marba for the purchase of buildings until 1959. The

combination of leadership absence and limited government support contributed to the decline of this pioneering trading and expedition service in Semarang. In its final years, the company offered its last product: imported German typewriters in 1954, as reported in *Java Bode* under the headline “*Olympia*”. NV. Marba presented an attractive offer by arranging daily shipments of 600 typewriters, there

Conclusion

The establishment of NV. Marba in Semarang was closely linked to the socio-economic conditions of post-independence Indonesia. The idea of founding Marba emerged as a response to the limitations of national infrastructure and the persistent dominance of Dutch trading networks. Faradj Martak’s role in both business and politics was a crucial factor in creating a trading office capable of competing and adapting to colonial policies, such as those implemented by Recomba. The presence of NV. Marba in Semarang also demonstrated the ability of non-European groups to exploit available economic spaces without directly opposing the Government of the Republic of Indonesia.

In social and economic life, NV. Marba demonstrated an advanced form of Arab-Hadrami capitalism oriented toward industrial strengthening and the expansion of trade networks. The company’s involvement in recruiting educated labor, conducting social activities, and collaborating with the government reflected efforts to build public trust in the enterprise. Economically, NV. Marba’s role as a trade intermediary, particularly in the kapok commodity, highlighted its contribution to the economy of Semarang and Central Java. The story of NV. Marba illustrates that business success is determined not solely by capital, but also by the ability to establish networks, adapt to socio-political conditions, and provide tangible contributions to society. The Arab-Hadrami capitalism practiced by NV. Marba underscores the importance of integrating economic interests, innovation, and social responsibility as foundational elements for growth and for generating positive societal impact.

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