



LUND UNIVERSITY

**Between Admiration and Resistance: Postcolonial Legacies
and Indonesian Public Perceptions of the European Union**

By

Verel Pranidino Kadarusman

January 2026

Master of Science in European Affairs

Department of Political Science

STVM23

Autumn 2025

Supervisor: Catarina Kinnvall

Abstract

Relations between the European Union (EU) and Indonesia have expanded significantly in recent decades, yet public perceptions of the EU in Indonesia are shaped not only by contemporary policies but also by enduring postcolonial legacies. In postcolonial societies, global actors are often interpreted through historically grounded narratives that influence how authority, legitimacy, and partnership are understood. Indonesia, with its long experience of Dutch colonial rule and strong traditions of anti-colonial nationalism, offers a particularly relevant context for examining these dynamics. This is because colonial histories continue to inform public sensitivities toward external authority and shape how European power and norms are interpreted in the present.

This research examines how postcolonial legacies influence Indonesian public perceptions of the EU as a global actor. Drawing on postcolonial theory, cultural memory theory, and the concept of Normative Power Europe, it analyzes how historical experience and symbolic memory mediate contemporary interpretations of EU engagement. A qualitative, literature-based approach is employed, relying on secondary sources such as academic literature, public opinion surveys, and Indonesian media coverage. These materials are analyzed thematically to identify recurring patterns, narratives, and symbolic framings in Indonesian public discourse.

The findings indicate that Indonesian perceptions of the EU is characterized by postcolonial ambivalence. The EU is frequently associated with modernity, technological advancement, and institutional sophistication, generating admiration and selective cooperation. At the same time, EU regulatory practices, trade conditionalities, and normative claims are often interpreted as paternalistic or coercive, evoking memories of colonial hierarchy and external control. Rather than reflecting passive acceptance or outright rejection, Indonesian public perceptions reveal active negotiation, in which Indonesians assert agency through selective cultural adoption, strategic non-alignment, and emotional distancing from EU geopolitical narratives.

Overall, postcolonial legacies remain structurally embedded in how EU global authority is interpreted in Indonesia, despite processes of globalization. Understanding these perceptions highlights the importance of historically sensitive and societally grounded approaches to external engagement and contributes to broader debates on EU global actorness in postcolonial contexts.

Keywords: Euroscepticism, European Union, Indonesia, Postcolonialism, EU–Indonesia relations, EU global actorness.

Words: 19,893

Acknowledgements

Writing this thesis has been a long and reflective journey, shaped not only by academic inquiry but also by personal history and identity. As a Dutch-Indonesian, I have always been aware that the EU and Indonesia are connected by a shared and contested past. This awareness has continually informed my curiosity about how power, memory, and history shape contemporary relationships between the EU and formerly colonized societies. What began as an academic interest gradually became a deeper engagement with questions that are both scholarly and personal, making this research journey particularly meaningful. This process would not have been possible without the guidance, support, and encouragement of many people who accompanied me along the way.

First and foremost, I would like to express my sincere gratitude to my supervisor, Professor Catarina Kinnvall. Her intellectual guidance, critical insights, and patience were essential throughout the research process. She consistently challenged me to think more deeply, write more clearly, and engage more critically, while also allowing space for my own analytical voice to develop. Her support played a crucial role in shaping both this thesis and my academic confidence.

I am deeply grateful to my mother, whose unwavering support made this journey possible. Her constant belief in me, encouragement during moments of uncertainty, and sacrifices throughout my education have been a source of strength and motivation. This work would not exist without her support, care, and trust in my path.

I would also like to sincerely thank the lecturers of the European Affairs programme. Without their teaching, guidance, and dedication, I would not have been able to understand the theoretical debates, historical contexts, and analytical frameworks that form the foundation of this thesis. Their lectures, discussions, and feedback helped me develop the critical perspective necessary to engage with complex concepts such as global power and European integration. I am equally thankful to the study advisors, whose guidance and support helped me navigate the programme and stay on track throughout my studies.

Finally, I would like to thank my best friends, whose support extended far beyond academic life. Their encouragement, patience, and constant presence helped me through moments of stress and uncertainty. They provided perspective, balance, and reassurance, reminding me that this journey was not one I had to undertake alone. To all those who supported me, directly or indirectly, thank you.

Table of Contents

Abstract	2
Acknowledgements.....	4
1.Introduction	7
1.1 Research Gaps, Aims and Research Question.....	9
1.2 Study Significance.....	10
2. Previous Research.....	11
2.1 The European Union as a Global Actor.....	11
2.1.1 Scholarly debates on EU “actorness” and reputation abroad	12
2.2 What Colonialism Did to Postcolonialism Society in Asia	14
2.3 EU-Indonesia Relationship.....	15
3. Theoretical Framework.....	16
3.1 European Union vs Europe	17
3.2 Post-colonialism.....	18
3.3 Cultural Memory	21
3.3.1 Defining Cultural Memory.....	21
3.3.2 Cultural Memory and Postcolonial Perceptions of EU.....	23
3.4 Normative Power.....	26
3.4.1 Defining EU Normative Power.....	26
3.4.2 EU Normative Power in Postcolonial Contexts.....	27
3.5 Integrating the Theories.....	29
4. Methodology	31
4.1 Research Design.....	31
4.2 Research Approach.....	32
4.3 Sampling.....	33
4.4 Data Collection.....	35
4.5 Data Analysis	35
4.6 Delimitation	37
4.7 Ethical Consideration.....	38
5. Analysis.....	38
5.1 European Union as a Symbol of Modernity and Progress.....	39
5.1.1 Material and Institutional Modernity.....	39
5.1.2 Cultural and Normative Modernity	42
5.2 Postcolonial Ambivalence and Historical Memory	46
5.2.1 Public Suspicion of EU Motives.....	46

5.2.2 Everyday Agency and Subtle Forms of Resistance.....	51
6. Discussion.....	55
6.1 Reflections of the findings and theory.....	55
6.2 Role of Previous Studies and Practical Implications of the Findings.....	57
6.3 Study Limitations and Future Research.....	58
7. Conclusion.....	59
Bibliography.....	61
Appendix A.....	69

1. Introduction

Relations between the European Union (EU) and Indonesia have expanded significantly over the past two decades, shaped by growing economic interdependence, multilateral cooperation, and shared interests in regional stability (Adriaensen & Postnikov, 2022). The EU engages Indonesia through a wide range of instruments, development cooperation, trade negotiations, diplomatic initiatives, and security partnerships, implemented via its Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) and the European External Action Service (EEAS) (Keukeleire & Delreux, 2022). These mechanisms reflect the EU's ambition to act as a coherent and capable global actor, promoting principles such as democracy, human rights, and multilateral governance in its external relations (Sjursen, 2006; Manners, 2015). Indonesia, recognised as a significant middle-power in Southeast Asia due to its economic weight and centrality in ASEAN, has become an increasingly important partner for the EU's Indo-Pacific engagement, particularly through cooperation shaped by trade, regulatory, and sustainable development issues highlighted in the EU-CEPA negotiations (Juned & Sutiono, 2024).

Yet the EU's external engagement does not occur in a political vacuum. Public perceptions of EU in Indonesia are shaped not only by contemporary diplomacy but also by deeper historical memories and cultural narratives (Pattynama, 2012). Although today's interactions are conducted with the EU as a supranational political institution, Indonesian public consciousness often connects the EU with "Europe" more broadly. Survey evidence from Indonesia's Ministry of Foreign Affairs (2024) illustrates this conceptual overlap, showing that many Indonesians refer to "Europe" and "the EU" interchangeably. In this sense, the EU is frequently understood not as a novel political creation but as the contemporary embodiment of European power, inheriting its symbolic privileges as well as the stigma of its colonial past.

The persistence of colonial legacies in shaping Southeast Asian views of the EU has been widely noted in postcolonial scholarship. Colonial histories do not simply recede after independence; they continue to influence how formerly colonized societies interpret contemporary global actors, particularly when those actors present themselves as moral authorities or promoters of universal values (Bhambra, 2007; Kinnvall, 2021). In Indonesia, narratives of anti-colonial resistance, national dignity, and struggles for sovereignty remain central to collective identity and public discourse (Utami et al., 2024). These historical experiences inform how European actors are judged in the present, often producing

ambivalence—where admiration for Europe’s exists alongside skepticism toward perceived paternalism or asymmetry.

Cultural memory further reinforces these dynamics by shaping how colonial experiences are transmitted across generations. As Assmann (2011) argues, cultural memory is not a static archive but an active process through which communities interpret and reinterpret the past in response to contemporary concerns. In the Dutch–Indonesian context, memories of racial hierarchy, segregation, and colonial violence continue to circulate through education, public commemorations, stories, and cultural production (Pattynama, 2012). Even myths or symbolic narratives—such as the infamous “Dogs and natives not allowed” sign—retain significance because they crystallize collective perceptions of European authority and exclusion. These memories provide a powerful interpretive lens through which Indonesian publics make sense of European political behaviour today (Pattynama, 2012).

EU–Indonesia relations therefore unfold in a complex discursive environment where historical memory intersects with contemporary geopolitics. While the EU presents itself as a normative power committed to universal principles, external observers often question the sincerity or consistency of these claims (Nessel, 2025). Moreover, recent political and economic tensions—such as disputes over palm oil sustainability standards, trade conditionalities, and regulatory measures—have reinforced perceptions that EU norms may function as instruments of protectionism or external pressure rather than as neutral principles of global governance. Such issues tap into longstanding sensitivities surrounding sovereignty and equality, shaping how Indonesian publics interpret the motives and legitimacy of the EU’s global role (Adriaensen & Postnikov, 2022).

Against this backdrop, understanding Indonesian perceptions of the EU requires moving beyond policy analysis to consider the historical, cultural, and symbolic dimensions of the relationship. Contemporary EU actions are filtered through narratives deeply rooted in Indonesia’s colonial past and its ongoing negotiation of postcolonial identity. These narratives do not merely colour diplomatic relations; they structure the way Indonesians imagine EU and evaluate the EU’s claims to leadership, morality, and global authority.

1.1 Research Gaps, Aims and Research Question

Although scholarly interest in Asian perceptions of the EU has grown in recent years, research focusing specifically on Indonesia remains limited and fragmented. Much of the existing literature concentrates on the EU's strategic partners in Northeast and South Asia—particularly China, Japan, and India—while Southeast Asia has received comparatively little sustained attention (Chaban & Holland, 2014). This regional imbalance has left Indonesia—the world's third-largest democracy and one of the most influential societies in Southeast Asia—underrepresented in broader debates on how postcolonial legacies shape popular interpretations of the EU's authority and legitimacy (Camroux & Srikandini, 2013). Given Indonesia's demographic weight, geopolitical relevance, and leadership role in ASEAN, overlooking Indonesian perceptions creates a major blind spot in understanding how the EU is viewed across the wider Asian region.

Existing studies on EU–Indonesia relations have largely focused on governmental and diplomatic discourse rather than on Indonesian public perceptions as shaped by historical memory and everyday postcolonial experience (Camroux & Srikandini, 2013). While recent work has begun to examine how colonial legacies influence Asian interpretations of the EU's normative and regulatory power, Indonesia is typically mentioned only in passing or treated as part of a broader Southeast Asian category (Nessel, 2025). Consequently, there remains limited empirical understanding of how Indonesian publics specifically interpret the EU as a global actor through the lens of Dutch colonial history, nationalism, and contemporary economic disputes.

More broadly, the literature on EU–Asia relations still tends to treat the region as a single analytical category, often overlooking the diversity of colonial trajectories and national experiences within it (Acharya, 2014). Indonesia's case is distinct because its encounter with Europe was shaped by one of the world's longest and most intrusive colonial administrations, producing a uniquely deep imprint on social hierarchies, economic structures, and national identity (Harari & Wong, 2025). Dutch colonial rule institutionalized centuries of racialized governance, economic extraction, and centralized bureaucratic control, all of which continue to inform Indonesian public sensitivities toward foreign authority (Camroux & Srikandini, 2013). Consequently, Indonesia offers a critical empirical setting for examining how colonial legacies shape contemporary interpretations of the EU. Addressing these gaps, this study aims to analyze and answer the following research question:

How do postcolonial legacies influence Indonesian public perceptions of the European Union as a global actor?

By shifting the analytical focus from elite diplomacy to societal interpretations shaped by memory, nationalism, and symbolic narratives, the study offers a more grounded understanding of how the EU's global role is received and contested. The study will focus on secondary sources including academic literature, public surveys, media reports and opinion pieces as the primary dataset for identifying how Indonesian public discourse constructs perceptions of the EU. These materials function as naturally occurring expressions of societal narratives shaped by historical memory and postcolonial perceptions and are therefore suitable for answering the research question.

1.2 Study Significance

The significance of this research is threefold. First, it addresses a clear empirical gap in existing scholarship, which has tended to privilege Northeast and South Asian perspectives while treating Southeast Asia as analytically secondary. By focusing specifically on Indonesia, the study offers insight into how the EU is perceived within one of the most influential societies in the region (Camroux & Srikandini, 2013), thereby contributing to a more balanced understanding of Asian views of the EU.

Second, the study demonstrates how public perceptions of international actors cannot be separated from historical experience. Indonesian interpretations of the EU continue to be shaped by memories of Dutch colonial rule, narratives of resistance and national identity, and ongoing sensitivities about sovereignty and equality. Examining these dynamics provides a deeper explanation for the ambivalence that characterizes Indonesian attitudes toward the EU, where admiration for EU modernity coexists with skepticism regarding the EU's authority, normative claims, and regulatory practices.

Third, the research contributes to broader debates on the EU's global actorness by showing that its external identity is co-constructed through the perceptions of external audiences. Understanding how Indonesian publics interpret the EU's behaviour, values and legitimacy enriches theoretical discussions about normative power and highlights the limitations of EU self-representation when viewed from postcolonial contexts. The findings therefore have

relevance not only for EU–Indonesia relations but also for wider discussions on how postcolonial societies negotiate contemporary engagements with European actors.

Taken together, the significance of this study lie in its contribution to a more historically grounded, culturally sensitive and societally informed understanding of how the EU is perceived beyond Europe. Through this perspective, the research offers analytical insight into how global actors are interpreted through the enduring legacies of empire, and how these interpretations continue to shape international relationships in the present.

2. Previous Research

This chapter reviews key previous research on EU global actorness, postcolonial legacies, and EU–Indonesia relations. Together, these strands provide the foundation for analyzing how postcolonial legacies shape Indonesian public perceptions of the EU as a global actor.

2.1 The European Union as a Global Actor

The EU has become a significant global actor with a complex institutional and policy framework, enabling it to exert influence beyond its borders. From early integration, external relations were crucial to the EU project, with treaties already establishing joint trade policies and development cooperation as shared competences (Keukeleire & Delreux, 2022). This role expanded after the Cold War, as globalization and security dynamics prompted the EU to collectively address challenges like environmental risks, migration, and international peace (Keukeleire & Delreux, 2022).

Treaty reforms have reinforced the EU’s global role, such as the Maastricht Treaty’s introduction of the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP), followed by the Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP), which enabled military and civilian missions (Keukeleire & Delreux, 2022). The Lisbon Treaty established the High Representative for Foreign Affairs and the European External Action Service (EEAS), the EU’s diplomatic arm, which coordinates policy and represents the Union internationally (Blom & Vanhoonacker, 2015). These steps have solidified the EU’s status as an international presence with capabilities traditionally held by sovereign states.

The EU's global influence is also evident in its economic and development efforts. As the largest trading bloc and leading provider of humanitarian aid, the EU has substantial structural and normative influence in external relations (Keukeleire & Delreux, 2022). The EU's security operations, such as peacekeeping and capacity-building in Africa, the Balkans, and the Middle East, emphasize cooperative security and crisis management over offensive military actions (Keukeleire & Delreux, 2022).

Diplomatically, the EU also advocates for multilateral solutions through organizations like the UN, addressing global challenges in climate change, health, energy security, and counterterrorism (Keukeleire & Delreux, 2022). Henökl (2020) argues that the EU reflects a shift in international politics towards global policy issues. Its external action is embedded within its internal governance system, influencing global policy through norms and standards (Henökl, 2020). For example, the EU's leadership in climate diplomacy, through the European Green Deal and Paris Agreement, demonstrates its "normative power," exerting influence globally through values and policy models rather than coercion (Manners, 2002; Keukeleire & Delreux, 2022). While coordination between the EU and member states remains challenging due to differing national interests, EU external initiatives have strengthened collective foreign policy capacity by improving communication networks, information sharing, and diplomatic expertise (Furness, 2013, cited in Bauer & Trondal, 2015). These EU's combination of supranational governance and intergovernmental diplomacy allows for unique global influence.

In sum, these developments show the EU's evolution into a versatile global actor, engaging in global governance and security through a blend of institutions, shared policies, and normative influence, shaping international affairs beyond the interests of its member states. The EU now actively shapes international outcomes through policies, resources, and strategic global partnerships.

2.1.1 Scholarly debates on EU "actorness" and reputation abroad

Previous research shows that the EU's status as a global actor depends on both its institutional capabilities and how it is perceived internationally. A dominant view in the literature holds that the EU's international identity is grounded in civilian and normative power. Duchêne (1972) argues that Europe's influence comes from persuasion, rule-based cooperation, and developmental tools rather than coercion, portraying the EU as a positive international force. According to this view, its global reputation stems from the attractiveness of its market, support

for multilateral institutions, and ability to shape global rules diplomatically (Keukeleire & Delreux, 2022). The EU's power is considered legitimate because it aligns with widely endorsed principles, allowing it to present itself as a partner rather than a threat.

Moreover, Blom and Vanhoonacker (2015) argue that institutional developments like the EEAS enhance the EU's diplomatic visibility and coordination, helping to increase its recognition as a credible global actor. The EEAS reduces fragmentation between national and EU-level policies, allowing the EU to communicate more effectively and consistently abroad, thus strengthening its global position (Blom & Vanhoonacker, 2015).

However, research also indicates that this positive perception is not universal. Critical scholars question the assumption that EU values are inherently attractive. Onar and Nicolaïdis (2013) argue that the EU's promotion of universal norms often reflects implicit civilizing claims that overlook its colonial past. Del Sarto (2015) shows that in the Middle East, the EU's promotion of democracy and governance is often seen as external discipline rather than partnership, with local actors perceiving EU conditionality as a form of neo-colonialism. In this view, EU "norm diffusion" may be interpreted as paternalism, reflecting memories of Europe's imperial history.

Furthermore, Chaban et al. (2013) argue that negative perceptions frequently arise in regions where the EU is viewed as imposing its economic interests or development priorities in ways that reinforce unequal power relations, leading publics to see the Union less as a cooperative partner and more as a dominant external actor. This dynamic is evident, for instance, in the EU's development policy toward African, Caribbean, and Pacific (ACP) countries, particularly through instruments such as the European Development Fund (EDF) and Economic Partnership Agreements (EPAs). Although these frameworks are presented as partnerships, they often make aid and market access conditional on adopting EU trade norms and liberalization measures. Consequently, ACP states remain dependent on exporting raw materials and importing manufactured goods from Europe, while their policy autonomy is constrained by EU-defined priorities (Langan & Price, 2020). In this way, the EU replicates colonial economic hierarchies that privilege European interests and maintain structural inequalities between Europe and its former colonies (Langan & Price, 2020).

These continuities between past and present forms of governance fuel skepticism in the Global South, with negative images of the EU reflecting concerns about the persistence of Eurocentric behavior in international relations. Thus, the EU's global image depends not only on its actions but also on whether external actors accept its claims to legitimate authority. Overall, EU

actorness and reputation are not fixed but contested, shaped by historical context, regional experiences, and perceptions of power asymmetry, highlighting the importance of external viewpoints in understanding the EU's position in global politics.

2.2 What Colonialism Did to Postcolonialism Society in Asia

Previous research shows that European colonialism left lasting social structures that continue to shape postcolonial Asia. Colonial administrations reorganized societies by introducing new divisions of labour, identity classifications, and cultural hierarchies, which became deeply embedded in postcolonial societies (Chatterjee, 1993; Booth, 2007). These transformations help explain why colonialism remains relevant in modern Asian societies.

One key insight is that colonial economies institutionalized unequal class relations. In Malaysia, for instance, British recruitment of Indian and Chinese workers for plantations and mining created a racialized labour division, with Malay populations primarily in agriculture and migrants relegated to low-status work (Hirschman, 1986). These divisions became structural due to limited mobility and unequal access to wages, housing, and education, contributing to ongoing economic inequality (Hirschman, 1986; Booth, 2007). Thus, colonial economic practices reshaped social stratification in lasting ways.

Colonial administrations also used ethnic and religious classifications for population control, elevating some groups over others and influencing access to education, employment, and social recognition (Mamdani, 2012). European-style schooling, often limited to select groups, created long-term disparities in literacy and cultural capital. For example, in Vietnam, education was concentrated among urban elites fluent in French, leading to significant inequalities post-independence (Goscha, 2016). These educational systems were designed to entrench social hierarchies, and the impact is still visible in many postcolonial societies, where access to quality education and economic opportunities remains unequal.

Colonial urban planning further entrenched social divisions. Colonial powers designed cities to reflect racialized hierarchies, separating European areas from indigenous settlements and labour compounds (King, 2004). In Indonesia, for instance, Dutch planners ensured European zones had superior infrastructure, while indigenous areas were neglected, and these spatial inequalities persist in the city's modern layout (King, 2004). These divisions continue to reinforce urban–rural inequalities in many former colony countries.

Across this scholarship, a common conclusion emerges: colonial rule reshaped Asian societies in ways that continue to influence who benefits and who is marginalized (Chatterjee, 1993; Mamdani, 2012). Colonialism is seen not just as a historical event but as a set of enduring social legacies that shape identities, social relations, and inequalities in postcolonial Asia. These insights are crucial for understanding how postcolonial societies view foreign authority today, framing contemporary actors like the EU through the lens of historical Western dominance, hierarchy, and intervention.

2.3 EU-Indonesia Relationship

The EU–Indonesia relationship has developed under the strong shadow of colonial legacies, which continue to shape expectations and public interpretations of EU as a global actor. Historically, Indonesia’s experience of colonization by the Netherlands created not only political domination but also social competition at multiple levels of society, where Europeans were seen as unfair rivals in employment and administration, producing long-term resentment rather than admiration (Camroux & Srikandini, 2013). This colonial memory limits the symbolic authority of “Europe” as a unified civilizational model, unlike in Northeast Asia where Europe was encountered as a broader Western entity (Camroux & Srikandini, 2013). These postcolonial sensitivities feed directly into contemporary media framing, where the EU is alternately portrayed as a benevolent and predatory hegemon in Indonesian discourse, especially in trade-related conflicts (Nessel, 2025). At the same time, the EU’s growing use of trade policy as an instrument of geo-economic power reinforces Indonesian suspicions that economic cooperation is inseparable from strategic dominance (Adriaensen & Postnikov, 2022).

Since the democratic transition after the fall of Suharto, EU–Indonesia relations have intensified, yet they remain dominated by economic pragmatism rather than deep political trust. Camroux and Srikandini (2013) argue that the bilateral relationship is characterized by “low expectations” on both sides, producing limited political ambition despite expanding trade ties. This restrained engagement aligns with Indonesia’s *Bebas Aktif* foreign policy, which promotes strategic autonomy and rejection of rigid alliances (Juned & Sutiono, 2024). Within Indonesian media, this stance contributes to a framing of the EU as a powerful but negotiable actor, respected for market access and development potential, yet resisted when EU regulations are

perceived as discriminatory or protectionist, particularly in the palm oil and environmental standards disputes (Nessel, 2025).

At the structural level, the EU's broader shift toward a geopolitical trade strategy further complicates perceptions, as free trade agreements are now tools to reshape global economic dependencies rather than neutral instruments of cooperation (Adriaensen & Postnikov, 2022). These tensions are clearly reflected in the ongoing Indonesia–EU Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (I-EU CEPA), which has been under negotiation since 2016 without final resolution. For Indonesia, CEPA functions as an economic extension of *Bebas Aktif*, allowing Jakarta to diversify partnerships while maintaining strategic flexibility in the Indo-Pacific (Juned & Sutiono, 2024). For the EU, CEPA is embedded in its Indo-Pacific Strategy and wider ambition to secure a foothold in what it defines as the new global economic center (Adriaensen & Postnikov, 2022).

However, persistent disputes over state-owned enterprises, subsidies, and regulatory alignment reveal deep structural asymmetries and revive postcolonial anxieties over sovereignty and external control (Camroux & Srikandini, 2013). Indonesians reinforce this tension by framing CEPA negotiations as both an opportunity to challenge the “old guard” and a struggle against perceived European economic dominance (Nessel, 2025). Consequently, EU–Indonesia relations remain suspended between cooperation and resistance, shaped simultaneously by historical memory, nationalist identity, and contemporary geo-economic rivalry.

3. Theoretical Framework

This study employs a multi-layered theoretical framework to examine how postcolonial legacies shape Indonesian public perceptions of the EU as a global actor. It first clarifies the distinction between Europe as a historical idea and the EU as a political institution, before outlining the main theoretical perspectives guiding the analysis: postcolonial theory, cultural memory theory, and the concept of Normative Power Europe (NPE). Together, these approaches provide the analytical foundation for the study.

3.1 European Union vs Europe

A clear conceptual distinction between the EU and the broader notion of Europe is essential for understanding how the EU is studied as a global actor. Europe represents a cultural–historical formation, strongly associated with its imperial expansion and colonial domination over other regions of the world (Bigo et al., 2020). These historical experiences still frame how Europe is imagined globally. Meanwhile, the EU is a contemporary political entity, established through supranational treaties with the aim of institutionalizing cooperation between its member states and preventing renewed conflict (Bigo et al., 2020).

Despite this analytical distinction, public perceptions outside Europe often conflate the two. In many postcolonial contexts, the EU is understood not as a new political creation but as the latest embodiment of European power, inheriting its geopolitical privileges and its colonial stigma (Bigo et al., 2020). For countries, like Indonesia, whose national histories are shaped by European imperialism, the term “Europe” is therefore heavily charged with meaning.

While Indonesia’s historical interactions occurred with European colonial powers rather than with the EU itself, contemporary relations take place primarily with the EU as an institutional actor. The EU engages directly in diplomacy, trade policy, development cooperation, and security initiatives in Southeast Asia through instruments established under the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP), the Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP), and the European External Action Service (EEAS) (Keukeleire & Delreux, 2022). The EU also deploys crisis management missions globally and collaborates extensively with multilateral organizations, reinforcing its ambitions to be seen as a capable and credible global actor (Keukeleire & Delreux, 2022).

Consequently, although “Europe” and “the EU” are not synonymous, the EU now speaks and acts internationally in Europe’s name. Thus, postcolonial societies like Indonesia may perceive Europe and the EU as similar. This can also be seen from the survey of the Indonesian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (2024), where respondents frequently mention Europe as EU. This overlap in perception is reinforced by the fact that Indonesians associate EU mainly with broad cultural and historical references, as well as public awareness of the EU as a distinct political entity remains limited. Consequently, the EU is often viewed as the contemporary representative of “Europe” as a whole in Indonesian public consciousness (Indonesian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2024).

Therefore, for the purpose of this research, the EU and Europe are treated as the same conceptual reference insofar as Indonesian public perceptions do not clearly differentiate between them. This analytical choice does not deny the institutional specificity of the EU but acknowledges that the empirical context collapses the two categories. Accordingly, references to “Europe” in Indonesian perceptions are interpreted as implicitly encompassing the EU as an international actor.

3.2 Post-colonialism

Postcolonial theory provides a critical lens for analyzing how perceptions of the EU as a global actor among people in formerly colonized societies, such as Indonesia, are shaped by enduring legacies of empire, cultural encounters, and contested narratives of identity. In Indonesia, these legacies influence how the EU is imagined, discussed, and evaluated within public discourse. Europe’s integration narrative often obscures its colonial entanglements, presenting itself as a postwar peace project while masking its complicity in histories of domination and ongoing global asymmetries (Bhambra, 2007). Central to postcolonial thought is the recognition that colonial histories do not simply end with political independence; rather, they persist through discursive structures that shape how both Europe and its former colonies understand themselves and one another (Bhambra, 2007; Kinnvall, 2021). These structures inform Indonesian perceptions of Europe, where narratives of authority, universality, and civilizational superiority coexist with ambivalence, mimicry, and resistance.

Homi Bhabha’s concepts of mimicry and hybridity are central to understanding these dynamics. Mimicry describes how colonial discourse produces subjects who are “almost the same, but not quite” (Bhabha, 1994). This double vision destabilizes colonial authority because the repetition of European norms—whether in governance, education, or culture—both resembles and estranges the colonizer’s influence. In Indonesia, mimicry is visible in the selective adoption of Western political and cultural forms such as liberal democracy, human rights, and supranational governance embodied by the EU (Bhabha, 1994; Onar & Nicolaïdis, 2013). While the EU may be regarded as a model of integration or moral power, its universalist claims are often seen as contingent and partial. Such discourses reproduce Eurocentrism by measuring “others” against European standards, echoing imperial logics that survived decolonization (Hooper & Kramersch, 2007). Consequently, Indonesian perceptions of the EU fluctuate between admiration for its normative ideals and suspicion toward its paternalism.

Hybridity further complicates this relationship by producing cultural forms that are neither purely European nor purely local, but ambivalent and transformative (Bhabha, 1994). In Indonesia, European legacies are interwoven with indigenous traditions and postcolonial aspirations. Political and intellectual elites often invoke European concepts such as democracy and human rights but reinterpret them within local frameworks of sovereignty, values, and cultural authenticity. These hybrid articulations influence how citizens perceive the EU: as both a symbol of cosmopolitan modernity and a reminder of colonial hierarchies (Onar & Nicolaïdis, 2013). The EU's promotion of human rights and democracy may be welcomed as aligning with nationalist struggles for dignity, yet also viewed as paternalistic when tied to Eurocentric conditionality (Diez, 2005; Behr & Stivachtis, 2017). Hybrid narratives within postcolonial discourse thus acknowledge Europe's influence while questioning the legitimacy of its moral authority.

If Bhabha highlights ambivalence within colonial discourse, postcolonial approaches to identity formation reveal how collective self-definitions are shaped in response to domination. Identity, as Skorczewski (2020) argues, is not a fixed essence but a discursive construction reproduced through memory, political struggle, and education. In Indonesia, the colonial past continues to circulate within public discourse, shaping how people imagine both their community and the wider world. Narratives of resistance against Dutch rule, taught in schools and reinforced through independence commemorations, sustain a collective awareness of subjugation while affirming agency and dignity (Utami, et al., 2024). These recollections influence how Indonesians engage with Western actors today, including the EU. This collective memory continues to shape how Indonesians interpret Europe's global role, infusing present perceptions of the EU with echoes of past hierarchies and domination.

Public narratives of the EU is therefore filtered through these enduring legacies of empire. The Union may be perceived as a modern and progressive actor, yet this image remains entangled with memories of Europe as colonizer. In media and popular discourse, EU's moral authority and universalist claims often evoke both admiration and caution. Such ambivalence shapes how Indonesians interpret the EU's promotion of democracy, human rights, and good governance—principles seen as both empowering and patronizing (Diez, 2005). This shows that despite globalization and cosmopolitan rhetoric, public consciousness remains anchored in notions of sovereignty, dignity, and recognition (Skorczewski, 2020). From this perspective, perceptions of the EU as a global actor are mediated by lived historical experience as much as by contemporary ideals, producing an image of the Union as both partner and paternal power.

Kinnvall (2021) extends this critique by situating the EU itself within postcolonial analysis. She argues that Europe frequently erases its colonial past by projecting a narrative of “virgin birth,” presenting itself as a postwar peace project untainted by empire. Yet this erasure sustains colonial hierarchies that continue to influence how non-European publics perceive Europe’s global role. From a postcolonial standpoint, the EU’s claim to universality—whether as a defender of democracy, human rights, or integration—risks reproducing Eurocentrism by positioning Europe as the standard against which others are measured (Hooper & Kramsch, 2007; Behr & Stivachtis, 2017). For Indonesian observers, this may generate skepticism about whether EU norms are genuinely universal or whether they perpetuate colonial authority under new forms.

At the same time, postcolonialism is not only about exposing domination but also about illuminating alternative imaginaries of global belonging. Bhabra (2009) argues that postcolonial critique fosters “vernacular cosmopolitanisms,” meaning locally rooted forms of global belonging that emerge from the histories of the colonized, rather than from Eurocentric universalism, enabling colonized societies to imagine global connections without ignoring past violence. In Indonesia, such vernacular cosmopolitanisms appear in cultural, academic, and civic discourses that combine openness to cooperation with awareness of historical inequality. Postcolonial narratives therefore allow both critique and re-articulation: they expose exclusions in European self-understandings while offering alternative visions of global engagement (Bhabra, 2009; Kinnvall, 2021). Indonesian perceptions of the EU is not wholly oppositional; they are shaped by simultaneous desires for recognition, modernization, and partnership that coexist with memories of colonial subjugation.

Taken together, postcolonial theory demonstrates that postcolonial public perceptions of the EU as a global actor are structured by ambivalence, hybridity, and contestation. The EU’s self-presentation as a universal normative power is destabilized by postcolonial imaginaries that both acknowledge Europe’s influence and provincialize its claims. This framework underscores that Europe’s colonial legacies remain central to understanding how the EU is perceived within Indonesian society, where admiration, skepticism, and historical memory converge to shape perceptions of the EU’s role in the world.

3.3 Cultural Memory

3.3.1 Defining Cultural Memory

In the previous section, postcolonial theory highlighted the enduring legacies of empire, hybridity, and ambivalence in shaping postcolonial societies' perceptions of the EU as global actor. In this chapter, cultural memory theory is introduced as a complementary lens to analyze how these legacies are socially and culturally transmitted, stored, and activated within communities. Cultural memory theory is also used to complement postcolonialism because it illuminates the mechanisms through which historical experiences—such as colonial domination—become part of collective consciousness, shaping identity, political attitudes, and perceptions of contemporary Western actors like the EU.

In this study, cultural memory is understood not as a passive repository of information about the past but as an active, socially mediated process that enables communities to construct, negotiate, and contest collective identities. It differs fundamentally from individual memory in that it is externalized, institutionalized, and transmitted through cultural forms that exceed the lifespan of individuals (Assmann, 2011). This means that memory is never simply an inner mental act but always a socially organized practice, grounded in material supports such as monuments, texts, rituals, and images. As Pattynama (2012) stresses in her study of Indo-Dutch identity, the significance of cultural memory lies in its ability to transform experiences of the past into symbolic resources for identity in the present. It is this transformative capacity that makes cultural memory another central theoretical lens for examining how colonial pasts continue to shape communities perspectives long after decolonization. This is because cultural memory does not preserve the past as it “really was” but continually reinterprets it in light of current needs, silences, and political contexts, thereby turning history into a living, contested field of meaning.

A crucial dimension of cultural memory is its dual structure: *functional memory* and *storage memory*. *Functional memory* is living, selective, and identity-forming; it consists of the narratives and representations that communities actively maintain and mobilize to make sense of themselves in the present (Assmann, 2011). This means in the postcolonial context that functional memory manifests in commemorations, rituals, and cultural productions through which formerly colonized or diasporic groups articulate belonging and negotiate their position in the nation. *Storage memory*, by contrast, comprises the vast archive of historical traces—documents, artifacts, records—that exist but do not necessarily hold present significance. This

means in the postcolonial setting that much of the colonial past may remain in silence, archived in official documents or in marginalized family recollections, until new cultural or political demands call it into public discourse (Assmann, 2011). The two modes are not fixed: elements of *storage memory* may be reactivated and integrated into *functional memory* when present circumstances make them meaningful (Assmann, 2011).

For example, Pattynama's (2012) analysis of Indo-Dutch communities illustrates how this theoretical distinction operates in practice. For decades after migration from the former Dutch East Indies, many Indo-Dutch families transmitted their experiences privately, within domestic spaces, while public culture in the Netherlands largely ignored colonial violence (Pattynama, 2012). These memories existed in a liminal space, meaning they were preserved within families and archives but remained disconnected from wider public narratives, thereby functioning more as *storage memory* than *functional memory*. Over time, however, novels, films, and public festivals began to bring these memories into wider circulation. The adaptation of Hella Haasse's *Oeroeg*, for example, reframed colonial history by visually inserting segregation and military violence, transforming what was once muted into an active part of cultural memory (Pattynama, 2012). This example demonstrates how cultural products can reactivate *storage memory*, shifting it into the functional domain where it becomes an active resource in shaping perspectives, identity, and political debate. Thus, cultural memory is a dynamic process of activation and deactivation, in which communities continually decide what to remember and what to forget.

The operation of cultural memory, however, is not merely a matter of community practice; it is also deeply embedded in relations of power. Andreeva et al. (2024) show this clearly in their study of Belgian memory politics. They argue that "colonial amnesia" has long structured Belgium's approach to its violent history in the Congo, with official silence, euphemism, and selective commemoration shaping what could be remembered (Andreeva et al., 2024). Only under recent political and social pressure did the state begin to acknowledge colonial crimes, through apologies, museum reforms, and debates about statues of Leopold II. Yet even these gestures were highly circumscribed, often framing responsibility in moral rather than legal or reparative terms (Andreeva et al., 2024). This case underscores that cultural memory is not neutral: it is always subject to institutional framing, which determines which versions of the past are authorized and which remain excluded.

These perspectives highlight interrelated features of cultural memory. First, it is selective. Communities cannot remember everything, and thus memory necessarily involves processes of

inclusion and exclusion. Pattynama's (2012) analysis illustrates this: whether or not the sign ever existed is less important than the fact that it persists in memory as a symbol of colonial racism. Its endurance reflects not the accuracy of *storage memory* but the moral work of *functional memory*, which uses the story to articulate identity and injustice in the present. Second, cultural memory is mediated. Pattynama (2012) also shows that Indo-Dutch festivals and novels perform precisely this role, transforming lived experience into repeatable, communicable practices. This is in line with Assmann (2011) arguments, explaining that cultural memory depends on stabilizers—monuments, museums, media, cultural events—that give form to recollection and allow it to be transmitted across generations. Third, cultural memory is political. As the Belgian case demonstrates, the state plays an active role in shaping the boundaries of collective remembrance, either through suppression (amnesia) or selective recognition (apologies, curated exhibitions) (Andreeva et al., 2024).

Thus, the theoretical implication of these combined insights is that cultural memory cannot be defined merely as the sum of individual recollections or as a fixed archive of historical facts. Instead, it must be conceptualized as a contested field of symbolic and institutional struggle, where *functional* and *storage* memories are continually reconfigured by communities, cultural producers, and political institutions. This framework therefore understands cultural memory as both a resource—providing narratives, symbols, and myths that sustain collective identity—and a terrain of conflict, where the legitimacy of those narratives is negotiated.

3.3.2 Cultural Memory and Postcolonial Perceptions of EU

Building on the theoretical discussion in the previous section, this section examines how cultural memory mediates the influence of postcolonial legacies on Indonesian public perceptions of the EU as a global actor. Cultural memory shapes these perceptions by filtering contemporary European discourses through long-standing narratives of colonial power. For example, Pattynama (2012) highlights the enduring circulation of stories such as the “Verboden voor honden en inlanders” (“Dogs and natives not allowed”) signs from the Dutch colonial era. Their persistence reveals a symbolic truth: European colonial society was structured around racial exclusion. When such cultural myths are invoked in Indonesian debates about foreign intervention or trade asymmetries, they influence how the EU is imagined, as an actor whose universalist rhetoric may conceal paternalism or inequality. The persistence of these myths

demonstrates how *stored memory* can be reactivated into *functional memory* when present-day circumstances render it politically salient.

Moreover, the EU's own handling of memory politics significantly influences how it is perceived by ex-colonial states. Critical European Studies scholars argue that the EU has largely constructed its identity around the narrative of overcoming internal conflict through integration, while downplaying or externalizing its colonial past (Bhambra, 2007). This selective memory—sometimes described as “colonial amnesia”—creates a dissonance for post-colonial societies, which remember Europe primarily as an imperial power (Andreeva et al., 2024). In the Dutch case, debates about colonial violence in Indonesia were long silenced and only began to surface in the late 1960s, when veterans like J.E. Hueting publicly exposed war crimes. Scholars argue that the Netherlands has still not undertaken a critical and systematic reflection on the political, historical, and cultural consequences of its colonial past (Pattynama, 2012). From an Indonesian perspective, this prolonged silence reinforces the perception that the EU has yet to fully acknowledge its historical responsibilities, which may lead to persistent mistrust in the EU's self-presentation as a normative power and complicate efforts to build genuinely equal postcolonial partnerships.

A further dimension is the fragmentation of memory communities, which complicates the way perceptions are formed. Pattynama (2012) observes that post-colonial immigrant groups in the Netherlands—such as those from Indonesia, Suriname, and the Antilles—did not form a single unified community, but maintained distinct memory practices. This means that perceptions of Europe are not homogeneous but shaped by multiple overlapping narratives: nationalist memories of resistance, diasporic recollections of hybrid belonging, and localised experiences of violence. Nevertheless, these diverse memory communities converge in their awareness of historical asymmetries, which conditions how European influence is interpreted in contemporary relations.

Importantly, cultural memory does not only produce suspicion; it also generates ambivalence. On one hand, memories of colonial subordination might underpin resistance to external interference. On the other hand, cultural memory also sustains transnational connections that allow for dialogue (Bhambra, 2007). For example, Indo-Dutch festivals, novels, and films continue to circulate between the Netherlands and Indonesia, creating shared cultural spaces that complicate a purely antagonistic relationship (Pattynama, 2012). These hybrid memory practices illustrate how cultural memory can both problematize and enable relations with EU, depending on which elements are activated in particular contexts.

This ambivalence becomes particularly visible when comparing how different postcolonial societies mobilize cultural memory in their engagements with the EU. Maricocchi (2024) argues that colonial violence lingers in cultural memory, creating a “latent consciousness of subjection,” where historical experiences are continually reactivated in national narratives. Nessel (2025) shows how these memories shape views of the EU, such as in Vietnam, where the EU-Vietnam Free Trade Agreement is seen as proof of Vietnam’s equality with former colonial powers. The EU is portrayed as a “benevolent hegemon,” meaning a powerful actor that can dominate but chooses to cooperate under the language of partnership (Nessel, 2025). However, this benevolence is domesticated: European rules on labour and sustainability are reinterpreted as instruments for Vietnam’s self-strengthening rather than as moral instruction (Nessel, 2025). The colonial memory of resilience against domination thus becomes a narrative resource that allows cooperation with EU without conceding subordination. This is because postcolonial societies use engagement with the EU to demonstrate their sovereignty, showing that they can participate in global governance as equals rather than as dependents (Nessel, 2025).

However, not all postcolonial societies view European engagement in empowering terms. In Indonesia, for example, the EU’s behavior is seen as a continuation of economic tutelage. Coverage of the Indonesia-EU Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA) depicts the EU as a “predatory” hegemon, which means that Europe presents itself as benevolent in rhetoric, regulatory in practice, and protectionist in effect (Nessel, 2025). For example, EU restrictions on palm-oil exports under the Renewable Energy Directive II are portrayed as neocolonial constraints on Indonesia’s sovereignty and developmental autonomy. These representations do not merely recall colonial exploitation; they translate historical hierarchies into contemporary trade disputes, suggesting that Europe continues to set global standards while expecting others to comply (Nessel, 2025).

Moreover, in India, similar tensions arise from the coexistence of pragmatic engagement and postcolonial sensitivity. Chaban and Holland (2014) observe that Indian elites and media tend to value Europe’s technological expertise and economic cooperation but question its political coherence and moral authority. For many Indian observers, the EU’s conditionalities on trade and governance recall earlier hierarchies of instruction and reform under colonial rule, creating a perception that Europe continues to speak from a position of civilizational superiority. Consequently, the EU is viewed as a useful economic and educational partner but an unreliable or even intrusive political actor (Chaban & Holland, 2014).

Thus, cultural memory functions as a dynamic framework through which Europe's colonial past is continuously renegotiated in the present. It not only conditions suspicion toward European claims of universality and equality but also provides resources for dialogue, hybridity, and shared cultural production. In this sense, cultural memory is neither a static archive nor a simple obstacle to postcolonial relations; rather, it is a living field of negotiation that shapes how the EU is imagined, contested, and redefined in formerly colonized societies.

3.4 Normative Power

3.4.1 Defining EU Normative Power

The concept of Normative Power Europe (NPE) theory explained that the EU exercises power not primarily through military force or economic coercion, but by shaping what is considered "normal" in international politics. Normative power, in this sense, refers to the EU's ability to define and diffuse norms and values such as democracy, human rights, and the rule of law in its external relations (Manners, 2002). Unlike traditional hard or soft power, normative power emphasizes the EU's distinctive role in promoting ethical principles and universal values beyond its borders (Sjursen, 2006; Manners, 2015).

A central aspect of NPE is the EU's self-presentation as a global actor guided by universal principles. Foundational documents such as the EU Treaties and the Charter of Fundamental Rights enshrine democracy, human dignity, human rights, and the rule of law as core commitments that shape its external action (Sjursen, 2006). For example, the Lisbon Treaty explicitly embeds these principles into the EU's Common Foreign and Security Policy, underscoring the Union's obligation to prioritize human rights and democratic governance in its dealings with third countries (Keukeleire & Delreux, 2022).

Empirically, this self-understanding is reflected in specific EU policies and initiatives. The Union's consistent emphasis on human rights has been regarded as a defining element of its global role (Kissack, 2015). Initiatives such as the EU's campaign against torture and the death penalty since 1998, raised in both bilateral and multilateral contexts, illustrate how the EU seeks to universalize these standards (Manners, 2002). Similarly, the EU has linked its enlargement policy and neighborhood relations to conditions of democratic governance and respect for human rights, as seen in Greece's accession debates in the 1960s and the post-communist enlargements of Central and Eastern Europe (Schimmelfennig, 2001).

Moreover, the EU portrays itself as a defender of multilateralism. Drawing on principles of justice as impartiality and non-domination, the Union has promoted the strengthening of multilateral institutions, arguing that cooperative internationalism ensures equal treatment among states and supports global justice (Mikalsen, 2017). In this respect, the EU positions itself as a counterweight to unilateralism and power politics, preferring to resolve global challenges through collective frameworks.

Thus, NPE theory conceptualizes the EU as an international actor whose influence rests on its ability to project norms rather than material capabilities. By framing democracy, human rights, and multilateralism as universal values, the EU legitimizes its external action and seeks to shape global political order. However, this study situates NPE within postcolonial and cultural memory perspectives, emphasizing that the EU's universalist claims are not received in a vacuum but are filtered through historical experiences of colonialism and collective memory. In the context of postcolonial societies, this may render normative claims ambivalent or contested, highlighting gaps between EU self-perception and external reception. Building on this understanding, the next section examines how NPE is interpreted in postcolonial contexts.

3.4.2 EU Normative Power in Postcolonial Contexts

A central challenge for understanding the EU as a NPE is the discrepancy between its self-proclaimed role as a promoter of democracy, human rights, and multilateralism and the perceptions of these claims by external actors, especially in postcolonial contexts such as Indonesia and Africa. While the EU presents itself as a benign actor motivated by universal values, external perceptions frequently frame its policies as self-interested, neo-colonial, or inconsistent (Onar & Nicolaïdis, 2013). These divergent perceptions explain why the EU's projected values often fail to resonate in ex-colony countries.

This tension directly challenges Ian Manners' original conception of NPE. Manners (2002) argues that the EU's distinctiveness lies in its ability to shape conceptions of what is considered "normal" in international relations through the diffusion of core norms such as peace, democracy, human rights, and the rule of law. Crucially, this normative influence is not grounded in coercion or material incentives, but in the EU's self-understanding and presentation as a value-based polity. However, Manners (2006) also emphasizes that normative power must be approached reflexively and cannot be understood as neutral or context-free, as it emerges from the EU's own historical and political conditions. Building on this insight, postcolonial

perspectives highlight that in postcolonial contexts the EU's claim to normative legitimacy is weakened when its norms are perceived not as universal standards but as historically contingent and Eurocentric (Onar & Nicolaïdis, 2013). This reflects Europe's own historical experience, institutional preferences, and asymmetrical position in the global order.

Historical legacies therefore play a crucial role. In regions shaped by colonialism, EU discourse on universal values is not necessarily perceived as neutral but as a continuation of Eurocentric power relations. As Behr and Stivachtis (2017) notes, the EU is often accused of “governing from a distance,” reproducing imperial patterns by projecting norms globally without sufficient sensitivity to local contexts. Such practices, from enlargement conditionality to development aid, are framed as part of a “modern form of empire” rather than altruistic norm diffusion (Behr & Stivachtis, 2017). For postcolonial societies like Indonesia, these dynamics resonate with memories of European colonial domination, reinforcing suspicion towards EU initiatives that appear prescriptive.

Concrete cases underline these tensions. Indonesian representatives, for example, have openly criticized the EU's incoherence and double standards in global forums. During UN debates, Indonesia highlighted the inconsistency between the EU's promotion of human rights and its own domestic shortcomings or selective targeting of countries (Lucarelli & Fioramonti, 2009). Such critiques reflect a broader frustration in the Global South that the EU's invocation of “universal norms” is highly contextual and often aligned with European economic or strategic interests. For example, the EU's environmental and trade policies, which impose standards that disadvantage developing countries, further exacerbate this perception. This is because they are seen to privilege European producers through protectionist measures, while placing costly regulatory burdens on exporters from developing states like Indonesia, thereby reinforcing unequal economic structures rather than fostering fair global cooperation (Lucarelli & Fioramonti, 2009). Thus, rather than being embraced as a normative leader, the EU is frequently seen as self-interested and hypocritical.

Moreover, Văetiși (2018) also shows that despite rhetorical celebrations of a “shared values” partnership, Latin American elites and publics often perceive the EU less as a normative power and more as a liberal or even neo-imperial actor. Official EU discourses emphasize democracy, human rights, and rule of law in Latin American partnerships, but local interpretations reveal a gap: while Latin America does share some values with Europe, the tools and strategies to pursue them differ, and EU conditionality is perceived as intrusive (Văetiși, 2018). Brazil, for instance, aligns with Western standards internally but rejects the notion of the EU as a global normative

authority. This is because Brazilian elites view the EU as inconsistent, fragmented, and lacking real power projection capacity—an actor that often speaks in normative terms but fails to act coherently when values conflict with its material interests (Văetiși, 2018). Furthermore, critics also argue that the EU’s active promotion of regional integration in ex-colony countries often resembles “imperial aspirations.” For example, the EU’s encouragement of Mercosur to emulate European integration structures has been viewed not as support for Latin American autonomy but as an attempt to export its institutional model as a universal standard, disregarding the unique political and social dynamics of the region (Văetiși, 2018). This perception undermines the legitimacy of the EU’s self-portrayal and reveals how colonial histories still frame Latin American responses to European models.

A similar skepticism can be found in African Union perceptions of the EU. As Sicurelli (2009) shows, African leaders often interpret EU trade liberalization policies not as tools for mutual development but as mechanisms for perpetuating structural inequalities inherited from colonialism. This is because African policymakers perceive EU demands for market opening as continuing the dependency of African economies on European markets, limiting opportunities for local industrialization (Sicurelli, 2009). For example, Economic Partnership Agreements (EPAs), framed by the EU as vehicles of modernization, are criticized for undermining African sovereignty and local industries since they restrict the use of protectionist tools and expose fragile economies to unfair competition with European producers (Sicurelli, 2009). Furthermore, expectations that Europe would assume a special historical responsibility because of colonial legacies have largely been disappointed, reinforcing the perception that the EU uses its normative rhetoric to disguise self-interest (Sicurelli, 2009).

Bringing these strands together, a coherent picture emerges: the EU’s normative claims might fail to resonate in post-colonial contexts because they are interpreted not as universal values but as extensions of Eurocentric power. They are undermined by inconsistencies between rhetoric and practice, and they clash with credible local models of governance and democracy. As such, instead of being perceived as a neutral normative power, the EU is often received through the prism of historical domination, contemporary inequalities, and competing visions of order.

3.5 Integrating the Theories

Rather than treating the theories as separate explanatory models, this study conceptualises them as complementary lenses that operate at interconnected levels of meaning-making. Together,

they enable the analysis to examine Indonesian perceptions of the EU not as isolated or policy-specific reactions, but as interpretations shaped by colonial experience.

Postcolonial theory provides the foundational lens for understanding how enduring power asymmetries between Europe and formerly colonised societies continue to shape contemporary perceptions. It highlights how colonial hierarchies, discourses of universality, and civilisational narratives persist beyond formal decolonisation. Concepts such as ambivalence, mimicry, and hybridity explain why perceptions of the EU is neither uniformly positive nor negative, but fluctuate between admiration for EU modernity and suspicion toward EU authority. In the analysis, postcolonial theory is used to interpret Indonesian perceptions of the EU as historically conditioned frameworks of meaning rather than immediate reactions to specific policies.

Cultural memory theory complements this perspective by explaining how colonial legacies are socially transmitted and activated in the present. Cultural memory theory clarifies how experiences of colonial domination remain available as symbolic resources that can be reactivated when contemporary EU actions resonate with past patterns of authority or exclusion. In the analysis, cultural memory functions as the mediating mechanism through which EU policies and public narratives are interpreted through historically sedimented associations with Europe.

NPE provides a third analytical layer by capturing the EU's self-presentation as a value-based global actor that promotes norms such as democracy and human rights. In this study, NPE is not treated as an objective description of EU power but as a discursive claim that is subject to external interpretation. Analytically, NPE serves as the point of reference against which Indonesian perceptions of EU legitimacy, authority, and consistency are formed and contested.

Together, these perspectives enable a layered analytical approach. Postcolonial theory explains the historical sensitivity toward EU authority, cultural memory explains how this sensitivity is activated and sustained, and NPE provides the normative content that is being interpreted. The framework therefore allows the analysis to trace how Indonesian perceptions of the EU shift across contexts, while remaining structured by historical experience, cultural transmission, and ongoing normative contestation.

4. Methodology

This chapter outlines the methodological framework used in this study. It explains the research design, qualitative approach, sampling strategy, data collection procedures, and methods of analysis applied in this study. The chapter also addresses delimitation and ethical considerations to ensure transparency.

4.1 Research Design

This study focuses on Indonesian societal perspectives rather than state views to capture lived experiences, historical consciousness, and collective identity that differ from official narratives. It examines how the EU as a global actor is socially and culturally interpreted in Indonesia, particularly in relation to colonial legacies. To address how postcolonial legacies shape Indonesian public perceptions of the EU, the study adopts a qualitative, literature-based approach using secondary sources such as academic works, media reports, opinion pieces, commentaries, and existing public survey data (e.g., Indonesian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and ASEAN studies). These materials are treated as discursive artefacts that convey public attitudes and cultural narratives shaped by broader historical and social contexts.

A secondary analysis is chosen because examining postcolonial perspectives requires significant time and resources to capture complex societal narratives. Due to limited time and access, primary data collection such as interviews or surveys is not feasible. Secondary sources offer a rich and accessible dataset for identifying recurring themes, discursive patterns, and public sentiments across different contexts. This is because these sources already contain naturally formed societal perspectives shaped by historical memory and cultural interpretations of the EU. Consequently, this captures how Indonesian people collectively construct and express their perceptions of the EU as a global actor. Qualitative analysis is suitable here, as Creswell and Poth (2013) note that it seeks to understand how groups ascribe meaning to social or human issues. This aligns with the study's aim to reveal how historical memory, collective identity, and postcolonial discourse shape Indonesian public perceptions of the EU.

By relying on secondary sources rather than direct participant engagement, this study applies an unobtrusive research method, allowing for the analysis of naturally occurring public discourse without influencing its production and preserving the authenticity of societal narratives (Babbie, 2014). These sources reveal how Indonesian attitudes toward the EU is

expressed and shaped by historical experiences and cultural norms rather than institutional framings.

Secondary sources also provide a wider temporal and thematic scope across Indonesia–EU relations, enabling the tracing of perception shifts over time. The texts are treated as sites of meaning-making where EU perceptions are produced, reinforced, or contested. The analysis distinguishes between manifest content (direct statements) and latent content (underlying assumptions and framings) (Babbie, 2014), allowing deeper exploration of trust, skepticism, admiration, and resistance shaped by postcolonial legacies. This is because examining both manifest and latent content allows the study to capture not only explicitly stated opinions and attitudes but also the deeper assumptions, values, historical sensitivities, and identity constructions that continue to shape how the EU is interpreted in Indonesian public discourse.

4.2 Research Approach

This study applies an iterative and inductive form of qualitative analysis guided by Creswell and Poth's (2013) approach. Secondary texts are examined in cycles, with initial readings identifying recurring themes, metaphors, framing strategies, and representations of the EU within Indonesian discourse. Subsequent readings refine and reorganize emerging patterns so that interpretations remain grounded in the material rather than predefined assumptions. This circular movement between data and interpretation supports a flexible understanding of how meanings develop across texts.

The analysis pays attention to how discourse reflects collective memory, historical consciousness, and value positions related to Indonesia's postcolonial experience. The focus is on how language, symbolic references, and narrative choices contribute to public interpretations of the EU as a global actor. Attention is given to both explicit commentary on the EU and the more implicit cultural and historical cues that signal how the EU is positioned within the Indonesian social imagination.

Through this approach, the research interprets how public perceptions are socially constructed and mediated through discourse rather than measured numerically. The goal is to uncover the interpretive processes that shape how Indonesians evaluate, perceive, and position the EU within their historical and contemporary context. To support this analytical approach, the selection of materials must align closely with the aim of understanding how postcolonial

legacies shape Indonesian perceptions of the EU. The following section explains the sampling strategy used to identify texts that reflect public discourse and provide meaningful insight into the societal narratives examined in this study.

4.3 Sampling

This study employed a purposeful sampling strategy, meaning that the selection of materials was carried out intentionally to include data sources that could best illuminate the phenomenon under investigation (Creswell and Poth, 2013). Rather than human participants, the sample consisted of secondary texts, survey results, and media artefacts, including academic articles, opinion pieces, and news publications that expressed, interpreted, or analyzed Indonesian public sentiment toward the EU. These sources functioned as representations of societal discourse, demonstrating how perceptions are constructed through language, memory, and postcolonial narrative formations.

According to Creswell and Poth (2013), purposeful sampling requires clear criteria to ensure the selected data meaningfully contribute to answering the central research question. In line with this requirement, the study applied three inclusion criteria. First, each source explicitly or implicitly addressed the EU in relation to Indonesia. Second, it reflected public or societal perspectives rather than official state or diplomatic positions. Third, it originated from credible platforms, including academic journals, national surveys, and established national media such as CNBC-Indonesia and Antara News. Texts focused solely on technical trade issues, institutional negotiations, or statistical reporting without reference to public attitudes were excluded, as they did not align with the study's interpretive focus.

Moreover, the study also used mixed English and Indonesian news media sources and academic research, as well as Indonesian public surveys, to capture perceptions as articulated within the local sociopolitical and cultural context. This mix of English and Indonesian secondary data was chosen because it allows the analysis to capture both locally grounded public discourse and internationally framed interpretations of Indonesia–EU relations, thereby strengthening the contextual depth and analytical balance of the study. Additionally, as a native Indonesian speaker, I conducted the initial reading, coding, and interpretation in the original language to preserve nuance, and translated relevant excerpts into English with careful attention to maintaining discursive tone and meaning for an academic audience.

To capture the diversity of public discourse, criterion sampling was combined with maximum variation sampling. Criterion sampling ensured that all selected materials met the inclusion requirements and maintained analytic consistency (Creswell and Poth, 2013). Maximum variation sampling enabled broader representation by capturing differing genres, perspectives, and publication periods (Creswell and Poth, 2013). This combination allowed myself to trace shared patterns in how Indonesians interpret EU while also recognizing diverging viewpoints influenced by generational histories, media framing, and differing engagements with colonial memory. This was important because postcolonial perceptions do not form a uniform narrative. They emerge through contested and plural interpretations of the past and present.

Regarding sample size, Creswell and Poth (2013) note that qualitative studies prioritize depth over quantity. Sample size is guided by the principle of saturation, meaning the point at which additional materials no longer produce new insights (Creswell and Poth, 2013). In this research, 25 secondary texts were analyzed. This number enabled recognition of recurring metaphors, linguistic framings, and symbolic constructions linked to Indonesia's colonial past, while still allowing detailed interpretive analysis of each text. A larger corpus risked superficial engagement with individual narratives, while a smaller one might have overlooked important variations in how postcolonial legacies inform societal views of the EU. The chosen range therefore maintained both depth and diversity, which Creswell and Poth (2013) recommend for qualitative inquiry.

Sampling in this study was also iterative, meaning that selection evolved alongside the interpretive process. Creswell and Poth (2013) emphasize that qualitative researchers refine data sources as themes emerge. In this project, new texts were added when fresh patterns appeared during coding, such as unexpected references to Europe's colonial past, power dynamics, or normative claims about the EU as a global actor. This analytical flexibility strengthened the study's rigor because it ensured the dataset fully reflected the complexity of Indonesian postcolonial discourse.

The sampling design was ultimately justified not by numbers but by the analytical purpose of examining how Indonesian society constructs meaning about the EU through historical memory and contemporary representation. By selecting diverse, information-rich texts grounded in public discourse, the dataset captured both continuity and variation in postcolonial narratives and perceptions.

4.4 Data Collection

Since the study relied on secondary data, the data collection process focused on locating and compiling existing documents that articulate Indonesian public perceptions of the EU in relation to historical and postcolonial experiences. The data were gathered through academic databases, media archives, official government websites, and open access repositories. Scholarly texts were accessed through platforms such as Google Scholar, ResearchGate, LubCat, LubSearch, and SpringerLink. Public discourse materials were collected from the digital archives of major Indonesian news outlets, such as Anantara News, CNBC, Mongabay, Tempo, CNN Indonesia, and Detik. Additional analytical commentaries were included when available through official government websites, credible online publications, or institutional repositories discussing EU–Indonesia relations.

Each document identified during the search was first logged and then assessed based on its relevance to the study focus. To maintain organisation and ensure traceability throughout the research process, every text was catalogued by publication date, source type, and thematic emphasis. This systematic documentation allowed efficient retrieval during analysis because it ensured that interpretive claims could be consistently checked against original sources.

Following Creswell and Poth’s (2013) guidance for qualitative rigor, data collection was conducted as an iterative and reflexive process. Preliminary readings were carried out while materials were being gathered. When early interpretation revealed new thematic directions related to postcolonial perceptions of the EU, additional documents were searched to refine and expand those areas. This cyclical approach ensured that the dataset developed in response to emerging understanding and avoided restricting the data before thematic saturation was reached. Additionally, all collected documents were stored digitally in structured folders, with each file receiving a unique name to support clear links between source data and analytical findings.

4.5 Data Analysis

The study employed thematic analysis as its main analytical framework, following Creswell and Poth’s (2013) concept of the qualitative “data analysis spiral.” This approach emphasizes repeated engagement with the data through stages of reading, coding, interpreting, and representing findings. Rather than a linear procedure, the analysis evolved through recursive cycles in which interpretations deepened over time. This method was selected because it allows

for a flexible yet systematic engagement with qualitative data, enabling patterns, themes, and meanings to emerge inductively while remaining sensitive to context and my own reflexivity.

The analysis was carried out through systematic, manual coding and careful documentation practices. I worked closely with the data at every stage, segmenting the texts into meaningful units and assigning initial codes that reflected key ideas, recurring phrases, and patterns within the discourse. Written memos recorded my reflections, analytical decisions, and emerging insights. This ensured transparency, strengthened reflexivity, and reduced the risk of bias by making interpretive choices explicit and traceable over time. Visual mapping techniques such as thematic clustering and comparison tables were also used to track the development of ideas and relationships across the dataset.

The Gioia methodology structured the thematic development (see Gioia table in Appendix A). The first stage involved identifying first-order codes grounded in direct expressions found in the data (Gioia et al., 2012). These codes represented authentic elements of Indonesian public discourse, including remarks such as “The EU is seen as economically and technologically advanced” and “EU regulations are interpreted as self-interested.” These reflected how the EU’s global role is perceived through the lens of continuing postcolonial sensitivities.

The second stage organized these first-order codes into second-order themes that revealed shared meanings and deeper implications across the dataset (Gioia et al., 2012). This interpretive process exposed how postcolonial memories shape evaluations of EU influence. For example, praise for the EU formed the theme “Material and Institutional Modernity.” Meanwhile, reminders of colonial exploitation and concerns about unequal global power relations were grouped under “Public Suspicion of EU Motives.”

The final stage consolidated these themes into broader aggregate dimensions at the highest level of abstraction (Gioia et al., 2012). This means that the analysis moved beyond individual viewpoints to reveal the underlying conceptual structures that organize Indonesian perceptions of the EU as a global actor. Two overarching dimensions emerged:

1. European Union as a Symbol of Modernity and Progress – reflecting how the EU is seen as powerful global actors representing advancement and development, yet not always viewed uncritically.

2. Postcolonial Ambivalence and Historical Memory – showing that colonial history still shapes contemporary attitudes, leading to complex blends of respect, skepticism, and resistance toward EU global authority.

Throughout the analysis, interpretation remained iterative and reflexive. I continuously moved between the data, emerging themes, and theoretical concepts related to postcolonial influence and global power. This ensured that meanings stayed grounded in the evidence while allowing conceptual understanding to expand. Detailed memos maintained a clear audit trail and supported methodological rigor.

Overall, the integration of thematic analysis with the Gioia methodology enabled a coherent and robust interpretation of how Indonesian discourse constructs perceptions of the EU. This approach uncovered how public narratives reflect ongoing negotiations of modernity and historical memory, demonstrating that postcolonial legacies continue to shape Indonesian views of the EU as a global actor.

4.6 Delimitation

This study applies four main delimitations to define its analytical scope and ensure methodological feasibility while maintaining alignment with the research question on how postcolonial legacies shape Indonesian public perceptions of the EU as a global actor.

First, the study focuses exclusively on Indonesian publics residing within Indonesia and excludes the Indonesian diaspora. This is because perceptions within Indonesia are formed primarily through national education, domestic media, political discourse, and lived postcolonial experiences in the local sociocultural context. Including diaspora perspectives could introduce external political environments, transnational identities, and different media systems, potentially altering perception structures and reducing contextual consistency.

Second, this study applies qualitative content analysis rather than full critical discourse analysis (CDA). This choice is based on the study's aim to identify themes and patterns in Indonesian public perceptions rather than to conduct micro-level linguistic power analysis. Content analysis enables the systematic examination of both manifest and latent meanings across diverse secondary texts and is well suited to literature-based research. While CDA could offer deeper insight into power relations in language, it requires more intensive analysis beyond the scope and time constraints of this study.

Thirdly, this study focuses on secondary analysis rather than collecting primary data. This is because limited time and access made interviews or surveys impractical for analysing the complexity of postcolonialism, which requires extensive engagement with historical narratives and culturally embedded meanings. Thus, secondary materials already provide rich, naturally occurring expressions of public discourse that align with the study's qualitative and interpretive aims.

Lastly, this study does not use NVivo or other qualitative data analysis software. The main reason for this limitation is technical accessibility, as some of the data sources, particularly online news articles and opinion pieces, could not be downloaded in compatible formats for NVivo processing. Consequently, all coding and thematic analysis were conducted manually. Manual coding was chosen as a practical and reliable alternative that still allows for close engagement with the data, careful interpretation, and detailed memo writing while maintaining methodological standards.

4.7 Ethical Consideration

In line with Creswell and Poth's (2013) emphasis on ethical qualitative practice, all materials used in this study were publicly available and properly cited. No private communications or unpublished data were included, thus avoiding potential ethical concerns related to confidentiality or consent. The reliance on publicly accessible materials allowed the study to focus on naturally occurring discourse, ensuring that the voices and narratives examined remained authentic representations of Indonesian public perception rather than responses shaped by researcher interaction.

5. Analysis

The analysis of the secondary materials shows that Indonesian public perceptions of the EU is deeply shaped by postcolonial legacies that continue to inform how Indonesians interpret the EU's position and behaviour as a global actor. Across surveys, media representations and academic studies, consistent patterns emerge in which historical memories, symbolic associations and sensitivities toward external authority shape how the EU is understood in Indonesian society. These findings reveal that Indonesians perceive the EU simultaneously as a model of modernity and as an actor whose interventions evoke memories of unequal power

relations. The themes presented in this chapter therefore trace how postcolonial experiences structure the frameworks through which Indonesians evaluate, negotiate and respond to the EU today.

5.1 European Union as a Symbol of Modernity and Progress

The first theme that emerged from the analysis of the secondary data concerns the way the EU appears in Indonesian public consciousness as a symbol of modernity and progress. Across public opinion surveys, media studies, and literatures, the EU consistently occupies a position associated with advancement, refinement, and institutional maturity. This chapter shows that Indonesians perceive the EU not simply as a political entity but as a representation of higher living standards, technological capability, and institutional sophistication. Therefore, it is divided into two subchapters that distinguish between the material–institutional dimensions and the cultural–normative dimensions of EU modernity through which Indonesian people interpret, evaluate, and symbolically construct their perceptions of the EU advancement. This pattern remains stable even where detailed knowledge of EU structures is limited among Indonesian people. Consequently, the EU is imagined less as an immediate geopolitical actor and more as a horizon of development where economic, cultural and normative progress appear to be concentrated.

5.1.1 Material and Institutional Modernity

Across the materials, the EU consistently appears as a reference point for higher levels of development and social organisation. The sources reveal an image of the EU associated with prosperity, technological achievement, cultured lifestyles and advanced governance. Public opinion survey from the Indonesian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (2024) offers one expression of this pattern. Respondents evoke the EU through familiar symbols of modern life, including orderly urban landscapes, sophisticated cultural production and high living standards. Moreover, the Indonesian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (2024) survey explicitly notes that Indonesians most commonly associate the EU with “developed countries”, reinforcing the symbolic link between the EU and modernity in the popular imagination.

This also resonates strongly with postcolonial articles showing that Western modernity continues to function as a benchmark of progress in Indonesian society, where the West is

positioned as a model to be imitated in terms of cities, lifestyle, government, language and culture (Efriyadi & Liliani, 2018). Even when respondents are uncertain about the workings of the EU, the perception of the EU as socially and economically advanced remains unambiguous. The result is a symbolic image of the EU that is clear, stable and intuitive, rooted in common social representations rather than technical information (Indonesian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2024; Efriyadi & Liliani, 2018). This symbolic construction directly reflects the postcolonial dynamic of mimicry outlined by Bhabha (1994), where the formerly colonized subject comes to perceive Western institutional and material modernity as the benchmark of progress. The EU's association with order, prosperity, and advanced lifestyles mirrors what postcolonial theory identifies as the internalization of Eurocentric standards of development. As discussed in the theoretical framework, such perceptions do not simply arise from contemporary policy knowledge but emerge from long-standing historical structures in which Europe was positioned as the civilizational model (Bhabha, 1994). This shows how Indonesia's perception of EU modernity is not value-neutral but rooted in colonial hierarchies of progress that continue to shape collective imagination.

This symbolic clarity gains further shape through the expectations Indonesians form about cooperation with the EU. The desire for partnership in areas such as education, sustainable development, economic growth and human security reflects a belief in EU capability (Lisbonne de Vergeron et al., 2025). These areas are associated with institutional sophistication, scientific expertise and long-term planning, which means they presuppose that the EU is well equipped to support complex developmental goals (Sugiono & Haris, 2025). The pattern appears even where the EU is not seen as the most strategically influential global actor. For example, the Indonesian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (2024) survey shows that many Indonesians rank the EU as less strategically central than other major powers, yet they express confidence in the EU's ability to contribute meaningfully in fields linked to progress and institutional quality, such as sustainable development. This tendency also aligns with broader Southeast Asian surveys, in which the EU is consistently valued for its governance capacity, regulatory standards, and long-term development expertise (Mun et al., 2019). This shows that Indonesians relate to the EU not through assessments of power competition but through representations of the EU as a partner associated with advanced systems that can help address long-term developmental priorities. This finding aligns with the concept of Normative Power Europe (NPE), which holds that the EU exerts influence primarily through the promotion of governance, sustainability, and institutional norms rather than through hard power (Manners,

2002; Sjørusen, 2006). Indonesian confidence in the EU's role in development and governance reflects the internalization of this self-image.

Institutional interactions further contribute to this symbolic framework. EU engagement with Indonesia is frequently articulated through programs that emphasise governance, economic reform, education, environmental protection and technical cooperation. From the articles' findings, these institutional exchanges reflect a self-presentation by the EU that aligns with Indonesian perceptions of European advancement. The EU is consistently presented as a partner capable of offering structured support in complex policy areas such as governance reform, sustainable development, regulatory cooperation and capacity-building, and this framing resonates strongly with existing Indonesian public and elite imaginaries (Nessel 2020; Sugiono & Haris, 2025). Indonesian interpretations of these engagements often reinforce the belief that the EU brings advanced institutional experiences and technological know-how to bilateral cooperation. Lisbonne de Vergeron et al. (2025) also highlight in their study how the EU's cooperation portfolios in Indonesia prioritise capacity-building, regulatory support, and long-term development initiatives, presenting the EU as a provider of technical expertise and structured governance assistance that closely corresponds with how Indonesians tend to imagine EU competence. This alignment between data strengthens the stability of the EU's symbolic modernity within Indonesian society. This reflects Keukeleire and Delreux's (2022) view that the EU's global role rests on its sophisticated institutional architecture—like the CFSP, CSDP and EEAS—which projects coherence and competence abroad. Thus, Indonesian perceptions of EU institutional advancement mirror the EU's own mode of actorness.

This perception of institutional and technological superiority is also reinforced indirectly through technical sectors such as defence and industrial cooperation. Indonesian policy discussions identify several EU member states as important partners in the development of aerospace capabilities and defence technologies, presenting the EU as possessing advanced scientific and industrial expertise (Joshi et al., 2024). Although such cooperation occurs at the governmental and technical level, it contributes to a broader social imaginary in which the EU is associated with high technology and institutional sophistication. Indonesians do not need to be familiar with the specific mechanisms of European defence structures to recognise these collaborations as evidence of EU advancement. The presence of European technology in Indonesian strategic industries aligns with wider cultural and media cues that portray the EU as technologically capable and organisationally mature, a pattern that is also reflected in public survey data (Indonesian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2024). In this way, elite-level cooperation

indirectly reinforces public perceptions of the EU as a modern global actor. Such visible instances of technological partnership enter public discourse as signs of European capability, strengthening broader symbolic associations that position the EU as advanced and competent (Lisbonne de Vergeron et al., 2025). This echoes Chaban and Holland's (2014) observation that Asian publics often evaluate the EU through visible indicators of technological and developmental capacity rather than its political coherence, leading them to associate the EU with scientific expertise and high standards even when its global influence is otherwise perceived as limited.

Media depictions further solidify this institutional and material modernity. A recurring pattern in Indonesian news is the portrayal of the EU as a technologically advanced partner in the country's energy transition. Savitri (2025), for instance, describes the EU as contributing pumped-storage and low-emission technologies designed to make Indonesia's electricity system "modern and sustainable." Although these projects are highly technical, what the public sees is not the regulatory details but rather the association between the EU and advanced, future-oriented energy solutions. Such reportage reinforces pre-existing perceptions of EU as a global actor that brings cutting-edge knowledge and modern engineering, reflecting survey findings that link EU with progress, high standards and institutional excellence (Mun et al., 2019). This process reflects what Assmann (2011) describes as *functional memory*: contemporary events activate pre-existing symbolic associations—in this case, the longstanding representation of Europe as modern and technologically superior—which then shape how new information about EU cooperation is interpreted.

Across the analysis, material and institutional modernity remains a coherent and widely shared Indonesian public perception of the EU. Indonesians recognise the EU primarily as a technologically capable, institutionally reliable and development-oriented partner, even when they lack detailed understanding of its political structures or internal mechanisms.

5.1.2 Cultural and Normative Modernity

Alongside the material and institutional imagery, a parallel but distinct dimension of modernity emerges in cultural, educational and normative representations of the EU. The association between the EU and modernity is also expressed through educational aspirations. Indonesian people interest in European universities appears grounded not in exhaustive knowledge of specific institutions but in the symbolic value attached to European education. The EU is

imagined as a producer of advanced knowledge, academic excellence and cultural capital. These associations make the EU appear as a place where one can access intellectual refinement and global exposure. Mun et al., (2019) mirror this pattern, observing that Europe remains a preferred study destination for Southeast Asian students, including Indonesia, despite linguistic and geographical distance.

This is further reinforced by findings from articles explaining that European quality assurance systems have become the preferred reference model over the world, including Indonesia, due to their perceived technical sophistication and global academic legitimacy (Grek & MacDonogh, 2025). Educational aspirations thus act as an important mechanism through which the EU's symbolic modernity is recognised and reproduced, contributing to a broader perception of Europe as a region defined by progress, quality and global relevance (Sugiono & Haris, 2025; Balfour et al., 2022). This symbolic appeal reflects what postcolonial and cultural memory scholars describe as the persistence of Europe as a civilizational reference point: even when Indonesians lack direct interaction with the EU's political structures, Europe's long-standing association with knowledge, refinement and elite education—rooted in colonial-era hierarchies of cultural capital—continues to shape contemporary imaginaries (Assmann, 2011; Pattinama, 2012). Because colonial histories positioned European knowledge as superior, educational desire becomes a modern expression of this inherited symbolic hierarchy, illustrating how cultural memory transforms historical power relations into present-day aspirations.

The cultural products intersect with media portrayals that emphasise European urban beauty, artistic heritage, technological innovation, and social systems. Media often highlight aesthetic and cultural elements that evoke European sophistication and high living standards, offering idealised images that reinforce narratives of refinement and progress. Comparative Indo-Pacific perception research shows that the EU is widely associated with orderly governance, urban cleanliness, and social welfare efficiency, even among Indonesian audiences who often view EU trade behaviour critically (Lisbonne de Vergeron et al., 2025; Balfour et al., 2022). Similarly, news media report similar perceptions. For example, a France24 report quoting young Indonesians describes Europe as offering a “better system” and higher living standards, in contrast to Jakarta's pollution, traffic, and declining quality of life (France24, 2025). Such representations circulate widely in mainstream media and social platforms, shaping an image of EU as both culturally refined and socially well-organised. These portrayals strengthen the symbolic link between EU and high living standards, making European modernity appear

desirable and credible. Together, these mediated images construct the EU as refined and modern, familiar even to those with limited exposure to its political institutions. This reflects *functional cultural memory*, in which selective representations of Europe (its architecture and social order) remain active because they serve present identity needs (Assmann, 2011).

Normative expectations also shape Indonesian views of the EU as a modern actor. ASEAN public survey shows that people saw the EU as a reliable actor in global governance and a predictable partner in peace and stability (Mun et al., 2019). This evaluation is echoed in Indo-Pacific perception studies showing that Indonesians view the EU as a stable, technocratically competent and low-risk partner compared to the more confrontational styles of the US (Lisbonne de Vergeron et al., 2025). These findings highlight the EU's role as an institutionally competent actor rather than a militarily assertive one. Trust in EU positions on human rights, environmental issues and the rule of law contributes to perceptions of the EU as normatively advanced. This normative dimension complements the economic and cultural representations found in other data, where public opinion, media framing and institutional messaging converge on similar assumptions about EU capability (Sugiono & Haris, 2025; Balfour et al., 2022). Even when people view other powers as more dominant, the EU retains a reputation for responsible governance and high regulatory standards.

These normative perceptions are reinforced by humanitarian expectations expressed in public opinion surveys. Indonesians frequently attribute to the EU a capacity for ethical leadership, peaceful engagement and constructive involvement in international affairs. Indonesian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (2024) survey shows that Indonesians expect the EU to contribute to humanitarian assistance, peacebuilding and support for Palestinian self-determination, which demonstrates that the EU is imagined as an actor with moral responsibility in global affairs. Similar findings appear in the Southern Mirror study, where Indonesian respondents continue to associate EU with humanitarian diplomacy and rights-based engagement despite growing scepticism over trade and migration policy (Balfour et al., 2022). In this sense, modernity is conceived as a composite of material conditions, institutional competence and moral commitment. Indonesians' expectation that the EU can contribute positively to humanitarian issues and conflict resolution reflects an understanding of the EU as a partner whose progress carries global responsibilities. These perceptions align closely with NPE, which conceptualises the EU as an actor that projects universalist values such as human rights and rule of law (Manners, 2002).

Media coverage strengthens this normative dimension. For instance, the EU's Climate Diplomacy Week, widely discussed in Indonesian-language press releases and news reports, presents Europe as a normative and technological leader in global climate action (Delegasi Uni Eropa, 2022). At the same time, palm oil framing studies show that even when Indonesian media criticise EU environmental regulations as discriminatory, they still position the EU as the primary global rule-setter in sustainability governance (Rahmadan & Setiawati, 2021; Kettunen & Pratiwi, 2025). This means that Indonesian audiences recognise EU technological–regulatory leadership even while contesting its fairness. This is because Indonesian media routinely frame the EU's climate activities in terms of global leadership, highlighting the EU's ambitious emissions targets, investment in renewable energy, and support for international climate cooperation. Thus, this reinforces the idea that the EU is at the forefront of both ethical governance and technological progress (Kettunen & Pratiwi, 2025). This finding also aligns closely with public expectations visible in survey data, where the EU is perceived not only as materially advanced but also as normatively responsible (Indonesian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2024). Media coverage thus becomes another channel through which the symbolic modernity of the EU is encountered and internalised by Indonesian readers. This reflects the dual mechanism identified by cultural memory theory: contemporary media reactivate stored narratives of Europe as technologically progressive and civically responsible, integrating them into *functional memory* whenever global challenges like climate change make such associations salient (Assmann, 2011).

Indonesian perceptions of European cultural and normative modernity are also influenced by public narratives. Many Indonesian media outlets describe EU as a hub of research excellence, technological innovation and high educational standards, often in contrast to domestic challenges in these sectors (Nessel, 2025). These narratives align with evidence from higher education governance and expert knowledge studies showing that Indonesian education policymakers now embed European governance models directly into national and ASEAN higher education systems (Grek & MacDonogh, 2025).

Rochman (2025) also quoted President Prabowo describing EU as “a leader in science, technology, and finance.” Although voiced by a political figure, the message's circulation through mainstream media transforms it into a public narrative about the EU's global standing. This is because statements by national leaders, when amplified by major news organisations, are interpreted by audiences as authoritative assessments of global hierarchies. They function as simplified cues that signal where EU stands in relation to Indonesia and other powers

(Lisbonne de Vergeron et al., 2025; Balfour et al., 2022). Consequently, this repetition across public media reinforces cultural imaginaries of EU as a centre of knowledge, prestige and intellectual advancement, strengthening the association between the EU and modernity in the Indonesian imagination. This illustrates hybrid admiration from postcolonialism theory, where Europe symbolizes progress while remaining tied to postcolonial ambivalence (Bhabha, 1994), a dynamic that also underlies Indonesian scepticism toward EU authority, which will be examined in the following subchapter.

Together, these cultural and normative perceptions form an important basis for understanding how Indonesians interpret EU modernity. Indonesians perceive the EU not only as technologically advanced but also as culturally refined and ethically progressive, occupying a symbolic space that blends sophistication, cosmopolitan identity and moral leadership.

5.2 Postcolonial Ambivalence and Historical Memory

In the previous subchapter, the analysis demonstrated that Indonesian people often view the EU through a symbolic lens of modernity, progress, and cultural advancement. However, the complexity of Indonesian public perceptions becomes more apparent when examining situations in which the EU's actions directly intersect with Indonesian interests, livelihoods, and national self-understanding. In these contexts, the positive symbolic image identified earlier becomes destabilised by sentiments of suspicion, irritation, and defensiveness.

Another emerging theme therefore concerns the way Indonesian people respond to the EU when EU is perceived not as an abstract model of development but as an active global actor whose decisions have tangible effects on Indonesian society. This theme can be categorised into two interrelated dimensions: public suspicion of EU motives and everyday agency and subtle forms of resistance. Together, these dimensions reveal that Indonesian public perceptions of the EU is shaped not only by admiration for European progress but also by historically conditioned sensitivities that influence how Indonesians interpret European behaviour in the present.

5.2.1 Public Suspicion of EU Motives

A striking pattern across the data concerns the depth of Indonesian public suspicion toward the EU, particularly when EU actions are perceived as regulating or constraining sectors that are tightly connected to national livelihoods. The pattern emerging from the articles' analysis is that

Indonesian public suspicion is triggered when the EU is perceived to act not as a distant symbol of progress but as a powerful external actor enforcing standards on a country that has historically experienced European intervention (Nessel, 2020; Nessel, 2025). This suspicion reflects not merely contemporary policy disagreements but carries a distinctly postcolonial tone: a sense that European actors continue to exercise disproportionate influence over Indonesian affairs, accompanied by a lingering wariness toward Western intervention rooted in the country's historical experience of European domination (Immler, 2022; Efriyadi & Liliani, 2018). The findings show that when the EU moves from being an admired symbol of progress to an external authority imposing standards, Indonesians frequently interpret its actions through a lens shaped by memories of unequal power, exploitation, and civilisational hierarchy.

The pattern emerging from the data is that Indonesians do not merely disagree with the EU; they interpret EU actions as part of a long historical continuum in which Europe has exerted authority over Indonesian political and economic life. This means that suspicion is not a spontaneous emotional reaction but a postcolonial meaning-making process. Based on the article analysis, Indonesians interpret the EU's behaviour through historically sedimented assumptions about how European powers operate: prioritising their own interests, asserting normative superiority, and imposing external standards without sufficient sensitivity to local realities (Sugiono & Haris, 2025). This interpretive logic persists even when the issue at stake is framed as a technical trade dispute. In other words, Indonesians are responding not only to the content of EU actions, but also to what the EU historically represents to them (Rahmadan & Setiawati, 2021).

This becomes clear in the way Indonesians decode EU environmental regulations. For example, EU policies surrounding palm oil are rarely interpreted as being environmentally motivated. The study by Kettunen and Pratiwi (2025) found that, instead, these policies are read as attempts by a powerful European bloc to reassert control over a strategic sector that directly sustains millions of Indonesians. The recurring interpretation is that European actors, under the guise of sustainability, are once again dictating terms to a former colony (Kettunen & Pratiwi, 2025). This phenomenon is also evident in Indonesian news coverage, which, for example, describes the EU's restrictions as "discriminatory" or even as an attempt to "kill Indonesian farmers" (Rizky, 2023; Sandi, 2023). Although such statements are hyperbolic, their function is interpretive rather than literal. They signal that Indonesians perceive EU actions as mirroring the historical logic of European domination: policies that privilege European interests while undermining the economic independence of postcolonial societies. In this interpretive field, the

EU's regulations become symbolic acts of power, echoing earlier eras when European countries controlled access to markets and resources.

Furthermore, this interpretive suspicion can be understood as a meaning-making framework that transforms contemporary EU measures into reminders of past hierarchies. Indonesians do not simply see regulatory intervention: they perceive patterns that resemble earlier forms of Western control over trade, resources, and standards. This dynamic is clearly reflected in several studies, for example, those by Rahmadan and Setiawati (2021) and Sugiono and Haris (2025), which show that Indonesian newspapers consistently frame EU policies using narratives of “unfairness,” “bias,” and “discrimination,” along with other negative judgments, ultimately producing a “negative tone” across coverage. These framings mirror wider Indonesian concerns about being subjected once again to external moral authority. This shows that EU is portrayed as positioning itself as a universal arbiter of standards, implicitly placing Indonesian people in a subordinate or corrective position (Lisbonne de Vergeron et al., 2025). This perception aligns with postcolonial theory's argument that universalist discourses of governance often function as instruments of symbolic domination, reproducing the colonizer–colonized hierarchy under the guise of neutrality and progress (Bhabha, 1994; Bhabra, 2007).

Moreover, the interpretive link to colonial memory is even clearer when examining Indonesian smallholder reactions. Indonesian news reports that Indonesian farmers describe EU rules as “not making sense” or as “ignoring the real conditions faced by farmers” (Barahamin, 2023; Jong, 2023; Phalevi, 2022). These comments are not only practical concerns about bureaucratic burdens; they reveal an interpretive assumption that Europeans are again imposing standards that disregard the lived realities of Indonesians (Rahmadan & Setiawati, 2021). This is because smallholders perceive EU rules as emerging from European knowledge frameworks that have historically excluded local experiences, privileging Western definitions of sustainability, expertise, and legitimacy (Phalevi, 2022). This mirrors a postcolonial memory in which European actors historically assumed epistemic authority, deciding what counted as legitimate knowledge, best practices, and acceptable behaviours for colonised populations (Andreeva et al., 2024). The farmers' interpretations therefore enact a form of postcolonial recognition: the intuitive sense that European actors continue to act as if their own standards are universally valid while Indonesian experiences are peripheral or invisible.

Moreover, another study also shows that the Indonesian public and elites interpret the EU's behaviour as “coercive,” “self-interested,” and “insensitive to the Indonesian context,” describing how the EU “prioritizes material gains over normative objectives” (Sugiono & Haris,

2025). These interpretations resonate exactly with postcolonial critiques of European engagement in Asia, in which Western powers are understood to impose universalistic norms while ignoring the specificity of local political and social realities (Behr & Stivachtis, 2017). What matters here is not whether the EU intends coercion; what matters is that Indonesians interpret EU actions as reproducing the logic of colonial hierarchy. Publics and elites explicitly describe the EU as deploying a one-size-fits-all approach that ignores Indonesia's social and political specificities, precisely the pattern through which colonial authorities once dismissed local knowledge and experience (Sugiono & Haris, 2025; Nessel, 2025). Thus, public and elite suspicion is not separable from historical consciousness; it is an interpretive extension of it. Importantly, however, this historical consciousness is not uniform, as colonial memory in Indonesia is "multi-voiced," shaped by overlapping generational and familial experiences that produce different degrees of sensitivity, ambivalence, and pragmatism toward European power (Immler, 2022).

Furthermore, the patterns above are also observable and strengthened in Indonesian survey data, which reinforce this postcolonial suspicion by showing that Indonesians do not attribute meaningful global leadership or strategic relevance to the EU. The Indonesian Ministry of Foreign Affairs survey (2024) indicates that although EU retains a generally positive cultural image, Indonesians rank the EU as less significant than other major powers, including Russia, China, and Japan. This evaluation reveals that Indonesians do not perceive the EU as a consequential global actor capable of shaping international outcomes in ways that align with Indonesian interests. Instead, the EU is interpreted as a distant and selectively influential power whose visibility in Indonesia becomes most pronounced when it imposes regulatory burdens, such as restrictions on palm oil (Indonesian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2024). The fact that Indonesians view the EU as marginal in strategic terms, yet simultaneously capable of exerting intrusive influence, intensifies the sense that its authority is not grounded in partnership but in a hierarchical legacy that outlives formal colonial rule.

The survey findings also show that Indonesians associate the EU primarily with issues that restrict Indonesia's economic agency. Palm oil appears as the defining feature of public awareness regarding EU–Indonesia relations, consistently identified by respondents as the central problem shaping interactions with the EU (Indonesian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2024). This concentration on regulatory conflict functions as an interpretive anchor through which Indonesians assess the EU's broader global role. When the EU's most visible presence in Indonesia is tied to forms of constraint, respondents read the EU not as a collaborative global

institution but as an external actor whose power manifests through limitation and surveillance (Indonesian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2024). This reinforces the postcolonial perception that European actors engage not as equal partners in development but as arbiters of permissible behaviour, continuing the civilisational hierarchy that once justified colonial governance (Onar & Nicolaïdis, 2013).

These interpretations are further supported when considering how Indonesians judge the EU's economic relevance. Despite the EU's wealth and technological advancement, only around half of Indonesian respondents believe that the EU brings economic benefits to Indonesia (Indonesian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2024). This suggests that Indonesians do not view the EU's global role as materially advantageous, which deepens scepticism toward its normative claims. If the EU is not perceived as economically valuable, yet frequently asserts normative expectations regarding sustainability or governance, Indonesians are more likely to interpret those expectations as intrusive or self-serving rather than mutually beneficial. Thus, the survey results align with the article's analysis and another survey's data, which also explain that admiration for European development coexists with mistrust toward European power, producing a sceptical perception of the EU's place in global politics (Efriyadi & Liliani, 2018; Mun et al., 2019).

Thus, all of the findings here align with postcolonial theory's argument that contemporary perceptions of the EU is co-constructed through historical hierarchies that continue to shape how non-European societies interpret European authority. As scholars such as Onar & Nicolaïdis (2013) and Kinnvall (2021) explain, Europe's present-day actions are often filtered through memories of domination, disciplinary governance, and civilisational superiority, meaning that European behaviour is not interpreted in isolation but as part of a longer imperial genealogy. Likewise, cultural memory theory clarifies why these interpretations remain active: colonial experiences—whether through symbolic artefacts, narratives of exclusion, or family stories—persist as *functional memory* that shapes present political attitudes, enabling Indonesians to read EU actions as contemporary echoes of Europe's colonial past (Assmann, 2011; Pattynama, 2012). Additionally, the findings highlight the mismatch between the EU's self-representation as a universal normative power and Indonesia's perception of these claims as paternalistic or coercive, reinforcing a sense of hierarchical continuity rather than partnership. This emphasised what postcolonial scholars argued that European normative claims often reproduce older civilisational hierarchies rather than overcome them (Onar & Nicolaïdis, 2013; Kinnvall, 2021).

Taken together, the thematic analysis demonstrates that Indonesians also perceive the EU through a distinctly postcolonial interpretive structure. Suspicion is the outcome of how Indonesians read EU action: as repetition, continuation, or transformation of earlier forms of Western domination. This interpretive lens leads Indonesians to perceive the EU's global role not as one of partnership or collaboration, but as one characterised by constraint, surveillance, and the imposition of external norms. In this sense, the EU's contemporary presence is understood as extending historical patterns of European control, reinforcing scepticism toward its legitimacy as a global actor.

5.2.2 Everyday Agency and Subtle Forms of Resistance

While the section 5.2.1 highlighted how Indonesian people frequently interpret EU actions through a historically sedimented suspicion of European motives, another pattern also emerges across the data that reveals a more active and agentic dimension within Indonesian public perceptions. Rather than functioning only as recipients of European influence or as communities reacting defensively to perceived European dominance, Indonesian people also exhibit forms of agency that reshape, reinterpret and resist the EU's symbolic and regulatory power. This pattern illustrates a second layer of postcolonial ambivalence: Indonesians do not merely feel suspicion toward the EU; they also engage in subtle forms of everyday resistance that assert autonomy, identity, and interpretive control over the meaning of the EU's presence in contemporary life (Nessel, 2020). These responses show that Indonesian people are not passive subjects reacting to EU actions; instead, they negotiate and transform what the EU represents to them, exercising agency within the asymmetrical relations inherited from the colonial past (Immler, 2022).

From an interpretative standpoint, this agency takes several forms. One dimension concerns the ways Indonesians selectively adopt or reject European cultural and normative symbols. While earlier sections demonstrated the strong association between Europe and modernity, this does not imply unquestioned acceptance of European models. Instead, Indonesians filter European cultural images through their own values, appropriating some elements while distancing themselves from others (Efriyadi & Liliani, 2018; Sugiono & Haris, 2025).

A second dimension involves Indonesian efforts to strategically reposition themselves vis-à-vis European political influence. Seah et al. (2021) data shows that Indonesians prefer non-alignment, regional autonomy and self-reliance over accepting external guidance. This

preference reflects a historically shaped desire to avoid dependence on powerful external actors whose interventions might revive memories of hierarchical colonial relations, aligning with scholarly analyses which explain that Indonesian society continues to interpret foreign intervention through a post-colonial lens (Rahmadan & Setiawati, 2021). Taken together, these patterns suggest that Indonesian ambivalence is not a static emotional stance but an active process of meaning-making, in which people mobilise historical consciousness and cultural identity to assert interpretive agency. This represents an important shift from viewing Indonesian public perceptions as reactions to EU behaviour toward understanding them as dynamic expressions of postcolonial agency in which Indonesians work to define the terms of engagement.

A first illustration of this pattern can be found in cultural and social expressions of Indonesian public life. While Indonesians often associate the West with cosmopolitanism and modernity, this does not translate into cultural subordination. Instead, the findings of this research shows that Indonesians simultaneously admire and contest Western cultural symbols. The articles' analysis shows that European cities, lifestyles, and languages appear as aspirational references for Indonesian characters, but these references do not amount to uncritical mimicry (Efriyadi & Liliani, 2018). Indonesians often frame Western cultural elements as desirable yet also distant, foreign and inappropriate for everyday Indonesian realities. This creates a form of cultural agency: Indonesian individuals adopt Western elements only insofar as they can be incorporated into existing social values, and often reinterpret them through local norms (Nessel, 2020; Nessel, 2025). Efriyadi and Liliani (2018) argue that this selective engagement reflects a “superior stereotype” associated with the West, but it also demonstrates an implicit resistance to allowing Western models to dictate Indonesian cultural identity. Indonesians exercise interpretive sovereignty by choosing how Western images enter their imaginaries, resisting the automatic acceptance of European cultural superiority that colonial regimes once attempted to impose. The result is not rejection nor imitation, but selective adoption shaped by Indonesian value frameworks (Efriyadi & Liliani, 2018; Immler, 2022). This form of cultural agency reveals that Indonesians actively negotiate the symbolic power of EU instead of submitting to it.

A second expression of everyday resistance emerges in Indonesian public preferences for international alignment. The survey data from Seah et al. (2021) shows that Indonesians respondents tend to avoid dependency on major powers, including the EU, and instead favour strategies that enhance regional autonomy. According to the survey, a majority of Indonesians

prefer that ASEAN “deepen cooperation with like-minded multilateralist partners” while maintaining its own unity and resilience, rather than aligning with powerful external actors (Seah et al., 2021). This pattern among Indonesian respondents reflects a desire for strategic independence that resists external influence, especially from historically dominant Western powers. These survey findings align with the articles’ analyses, which explain that even when the EU is viewed positively in certain normative or economic areas, Indonesian society shows little interest in elevating the EU to the status of a central strategic partner (Muhtadi et al., 2024). Thus, instead, the preference for strengthening ASEAN institutions and supporting regional solutions to global problems indicates a form of political agency that asserts regional autonomy over external influence (Seah et al., 2021). This inclination is partly rooted in Indonesia’s longstanding foreign policy doctrine of non-alignment, but within a postcolonial context it also functions as a collective refusal to accept EU leadership. In this sense, public alignment preferences can be interpreted as a subtle form of resistance against any re-emergence of hierarchical relations, reflecting a historically shaped refusal to let the EU define regional priorities or impose its agenda (Nessel, 2025).

Furthermore, the articles’ analysis also indicates that Indonesian ambivalence is expressed not only through suspicion or defensive sentiment, but increasingly through strategic emotional distancing that reflects a conscious effort to maintain interpretive autonomy vis-à-vis European actors. This distancing is observable in moments when the EU expects international alignment or normative solidarity, yet Indonesian respondents refrain from adopting strong emotional positions (Sugiono & Haris, 2025). Such restraint reveals a deliberate stance in which Indonesians manage their own affective orientation toward the EU, utilising emotional neutrality as a way of resisting external pressures to conform. As Lisbonne de Vergeron et al. (2025) observe that Indonesians exhibit a remarkably neutral emotional attitude toward the EU during global crises, such as the COVID-19 pandemic and the war in Ukraine. Compared to Japan, which responded positively to the EU’s support for Ukraine, Indonesia maintained a non-aligned, emotionally muted stance (Lisbonne de Vergeron et al., 2025). This neutrality reflects an active choice to avoid being drawn into European strategic narratives. Indonesians do not view the EU as a central geopolitical reference point, nor do they allow European crises to define Indonesian positions, which is also in line with the survey results showing that the EU is perceived as one of the least influential political and strategic actors in Southeast Asia (Mun et al., 2019). This pattern suggests Indonesian agency in maintaining distance and protecting national and regional priorities from external entanglement. Rather than being shaped by EU

expectations, Indonesian public attitudes reveal a deliberate effort to limit the EU's influence over domestic meaning-making processes (Nessel, 2020). In this regard, neutrality functions as a form of postcolonial resistance, protecting Indonesian identity and political autonomy from external pressures.

These findings highlight how Indonesian people actively negotiate their position in relation to the EU. Cultural selectivity and strategic neutrality demonstrate that Indonesians do not simply inherit a postcolonial ambivalence but actively produce it through everyday practices and interpretations. This is in line with postcolonial theory's emphasis on ambivalence, mimicry, and hybrid reinterpretation of European authority, where formerly colonized societies simultaneously appropriate and resist European norms (Bhabha, 1994; Bhabra, 2009). It also reflects cultural memory theory's argument that functional memories of colonial domination actively inform present meaning-making, allowing communities to draw on inherited narratives as resources for asserting agency in contemporary contexts (Assmann, 2011; Pattynama, 2012). This ambivalence is thus better understood as a dynamic process rather than a fixed attitude: Indonesians assert agency by choosing when to embrace EU symbols of modernity and when to resist the EU's claims to authority. What appears as ambivalence in findings is therefore an expression of a deeper interpretive autonomy shaped by historical consciousness and cultural identity.

This interpretative shift has important implications for understanding Indonesian perceptions of the EU. The EU may often assume that its normative power, regulatory leadership or global commitments position it as a natural reference point for other societies (Manners, 2002). However, the findings show that Indonesian public perceptions challenge this assumption by revealing that EU norms do not hold automatic authority. Instead, Indonesians assign their own meanings to these norms, drawing on memories of past domination and on contemporary priorities rooted in regionalism and cultural identity (Lisbonne de Vergeron et al., 2025). This aligns with scholarship showing that the EU's normative claims are frequently interpreted in postcolonial contexts not as universal values but as extensions of Eurocentric power, often perceived as paternalistic or neo-colonial (Behr & Stivachtis, 2017; Lucarelli & Fioramonti, 2009). This everyday agency also signals that Indonesians are not simply resisting the EU out of defensiveness or suspicion; they are actively constructing alternative frameworks through which they evaluate and engage with global actors (Nessel, 2020). This reconstruction represents a form of postcolonial autonomy where Indonesian perspectives, not EU expectations, determine the perceptions of the EU. Such dynamics demonstrate how Indonesia's

historical experiences shape its independent evaluative frameworks and challenge the EU's self-understanding as a normative power (Manners, 2002; Kinnvall, 2021).

Taken together, the findings indicate that Indonesian public perceptions of the EU is shaped by postcolonial ambivalence, in which suspicion is only one element of a broader pattern. Alongside distrust of EU motives, Indonesians demonstrate agency by selectively adopting Western cultural elements and distancing themselves from EU geopolitical influence. In this sense, Indonesian public perceptions of the EU reflect an ongoing and active engagement with the legacies of colonialism, one that blends admiration, resistance, and self-definition into a complex but meaningful form of postcolonial agency.

6. Discussion

This chapter reflects on the key findings of the analysis in relation to the theoretical framework and considers how they contribute to existing scholarly debates on public perceptions of the EU as a global actor in postcolonial contexts. In addition, the chapter outlines the practical implications of the findings and discusses the limitations of the research and potential avenues for future study.

6.1 Reflections of the findings and theory

This study was guided by a multi-layered theoretical framework combining postcolonial theory, cultural memory theory, and the concept of Normative Power Europe (NPE). Together, these perspectives were essential for interpreting Indonesian public perceptions of the EU beyond simple attitudes of approval or disapproval. Rather than treating Indonesian views as isolated reactions to specific EU policies, the theories enabled an analysis of how historical hierarchies, collective memory, and contested normative authority structure understandings of the EU as a global actor.

Postcolonial theory was crucial in explaining the dual image of the EU revealed in the findings. Different studies, survey data, and media sources often portray the EU as modern, technologically advanced, and institutionally sophisticated (Indonesian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2024; Mun et al., 2019; Lisbonne de Vergeron et al., 2025). Yet when EU actions threaten Indonesian economic interests, public narratives shift toward suspicion and resistance

(Rahmadan & Setiawati, 2021; Kettunen & Pratiwi, 2025; Sugiono & Haris, 2025). Bhabha's (1994) concept of ambivalence and mimicry illuminated these contradictions, showing that admiration for European modernity and distrust of European power can coexist as legacies of colonial encounters (Bhabra, 2007; Kinnvall, 2021). This confirms that postcolonial ambivalence toward the EU is not diminishing under globalization but remains structurally embedded in how EU authority is interpreted in large postcolonial democracies like Indonesia.

Cultural memory theory further clarified why these postcolonial interpretations remain politically influential. Drawing on Assmann's (2011) distinction between *functional* and *storage memory*, the analysis showed that colonial memories are continually reactivated in present-day debates. Media narratives describing EU palm oil restrictions as "killing farmers" or "discriminatory" (Rahmadan & Setiawati, 2021; Kettunen & Pratiwi, 2025) revive longstanding memories of European economic control. Likewise, smallholders' claims that EU standards "do not make sense" (Barahamin, 2023; Jong, 2023; Phalevi, 2022) reflect enduring distrust of European expertise. Echoing Pattynama (2012), these interpretations demonstrate how memory transforms past experiences into symbolic resources that shape national identity and political meaning today. This demonstrates that colonial memory does not merely shape symbolic narratives but actively structures how Indonesians interpret concrete EU policies in the present.

NPE was essential for explaining why EU actions generate such symbolic contestation. NPE posits that the EU seeks to shape global politics through norms such as human rights, sustainability, and good governance (Manners, 2002; Sjursen, 2006). The findings show that Indonesians recognise aspects of this normative identity; survey data indicate expectations for EU leadership in humanitarian assistance, peacebuilding, and climate action (Indonesian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2024). Yet the same findings reveal a major gap between EU self-representation and Indonesian interpretations. Environmental regulations are widely viewed as protectionist measures harming Indonesian producers (Rahmadan & Setiawati, 2021; Kettunen & Pratiwi, 2025; Sugiono & Haris, 2025). This aligns with postcolonial critiques arguing that EU normative claims often appear as extensions of Eurocentric authority (Behr & Stivachtis, 2017; Lucarelli & Fioramonti, 2009). This finding challenges core assumptions of NPE by showing that the persuasive power of EU norms is fundamentally constrained when those norms intersect with postcolonial economic asymmetries.

The findings also showed that Indonesian perceptions reflect active agency rather than passive reaction. Strong support for ASEAN centrality and strategic neutrality (Seah et al., 2021)

represents resistance to hierarchical alignment with former colonial powers. Similarly, emotional neutrality toward European crises (Lisbonne de Vergeron et al., 2025) demonstrates selective distancing from EU geopolitical narratives. Cultural memory theory helped explain how this neutrality functions as a protective strategy, allowing Indonesians to maintain interpretive autonomy over their global positioning.

Overall, the theoretical framework shaped the interpretation of findings at every stage: postcolonial theory explained the coexistence of admiration and suspicion; cultural memory showed how historical experiences remain embedded in present discourse; and NPE clarified why EU normative claims become sites of contestation. Indonesian perceptions of the EU is thus shaped not only by contemporary policies but by deeper historical and symbolic structures that continue to influence how the EU's global role is understood and challenged in postcolonial societies.

6.2 Role of Previous Studies and Practical Implications of the Findings

This study responds directly to gaps identified in earlier empirical research on Asian perceptions of the EU as global actor by providing a focused analysis of Indonesian public views shaped by postcolonial legacies. Previous studies on EU perceptions in Asia have primarily concentrated on Northeast and South Asia, especially China, Japan, and India (Chaban & Holland, 2014), while Southeast Asia—and Indonesia in particular—has received far less sustained attention. Existing work on Indonesia has focused mainly on elite diplomacy and trade negotiations rather than on how historical experience shapes public perception (Camroux & Srikandini, 2013). By centring Indonesian public opinion, media, and social narratives, this study extends previous scholarship into the societal domain that has largely been neglected.

The findings confirm earlier perception surveys showing that the EU is widely associated with development, governance quality, education, and sustainability expertise (Mun et al., 2019; Balfour et al., 2022). Indonesians' association of the EU with institutional reliability and technological advancement aligns with broader Southeast Asian trends. However, this study goes beyond earlier research by showing that these positive images coexist with deep public resistance when EU actions affect economically sensitive sectors. While earlier studies documented tensions at the policy level, particularly in trade and environmental regulation

(Adriaensen & Postnikov, 2022), this study shows that such tensions are also firmly embedded in public narratives in Indonesia (Rahmadan & Setiawati, 2021; Kettunen & Pratiwi, 2025).

In practical terms, the findings have important implications for EU engagement with Indonesia. First, they show that the EU's public image in Indonesia is currently shaped more by regulatory conflict than by cooperation initiatives (Indonesian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2024). This suggests that technical policy justifications alone are insufficient to secure public legitimacy when livelihoods are perceived to be at risk. Second, the findings indicate that the EU's strongest source of societal credibility lies in education, technology transfer, and long-term development cooperation rather than in environmental conditionality or trade discipline (Mun et al., 2019; Sugiono & Haris, 2025). Public diplomacy that prioritises student exchanges, research collaboration, and capacity-building is therefore more likely to foster trust than rule-based enforcement alone.

Overall, this study demonstrates that postcolonial legacies do not simply shape abstract attitudes toward the EU but actively condition which forms of EU engagement are perceived as legitimate or intrusive. The key implication is that effective EU–Indonesia relations depend not only on regulatory alignment but on visibly mutual, historically sensitive, and societally embedded forms of cooperation.

6.3 Study Limitations and Future Research

This study has several limitations that should be acknowledged in order to contextualize its findings. First, the research relies entirely on secondary materials, including surveys, media coverage, academic literature, and commentary. While this approach enabled the analysis of broad discursive patterns, it also means that the study is constrained by what has already been produced and published, rather than by data generated specifically for the purposes of this research. As Creswell and Poth (2013) note, the interpretations of secondary data presented here depend on the representativeness and quality of those existing sources. This reliance may obscure alternative or emerging perspectives, particularly those that circulate informally or outside mainstream publications. Consequently, public attitudes that are expressed through everyday conversations, community networks, social media subcultures, or localised forms of knowledge may not be fully captured in the available materials, meaning that certain nuances of Indonesian perceptions remain beyond the scope of this study.

A second limitation concerns the focus on public discourse rather than on disaggregated social groups. Indonesia is a highly diverse society with significant variation across regions, generations, socioeconomic classes, and educational backgrounds. Public perceptions captured through national surveys or major media outlets tend to foreground dominant voices while underrepresenting groups whose experiences with the EU may differ substantially. For example, diaspora communities may interpret the EU's global role in distinct ways that cannot be fully unpacked within the parameters of this study. The analytical emphasis on national-level discourse therefore risks flattening these internal differences and reducing the plurality of Indonesian perspectives to more general patterns.

These limitations point toward several promising directions for future research. One avenue would involve conducting primary empirical research with Indonesian participants, such as interviews, focus groups, or ethnographic observations. Such methods would offer richer insight into how individuals articulate their perceptions of the EU and how they understand the relationship between everyday experiences, historical memory, and global politics. This would allow future scholars to trace how different communities actively negotiate the EU's presence and how postcolonial consciousness is expressed in lived narratives.

Additionally, future research concerns the need to disaggregate Indonesian publics more systematically. Comparative studies examining variations across age groups, professions, regions, and educational backgrounds could provide a more detailed understanding of how perceptions of the EU differ within Indonesia. For instance, Indonesian diaspora communities may draw on lived experiences of Europe, exposure to EU institutions, or encounters with European social norms in ways that differ significantly from domestically based Indonesians. This may lead to divergent forms of ambivalence, admiration, or critique. These differences would likely reveal how mobility, transnational identity, and direct contact with European societies shape perceptions in ways that cannot be observed through national-level discourse alone. Such comparative approaches would deepen the field's understanding of how diverse memory communities shape responses to European actors.

7. Conclusion

This thesis shows that Indonesian public perceptions of the EU as a global actor are fundamentally shaped by postcolonial legacies that continue to structure how European power, authority, and legitimacy are interpreted today. The EU is not evaluated in Indonesia solely

through its current policies or institutional role, but through historically embedded frameworks that link Europe to both progress and domination. These inherited meanings decisively influence how Indonesians read the EU's global presence.

The findings reveal a persistent dual perception. The EU is widely associated with advanced governance, technological expertise, high educational standards, and ethical leadership in global affairs. These perceptions reflect the enduring symbolic status of the EU as a site of modernity and excellence. Yet this symbolic capital becomes fragile when EU actions directly affect Indonesian economic interests and sovereignty. In such moments, admiration rapidly gives way to suspicion. EU regulatory interventions are not interpreted as neutral technical measures, but as exercises of unequal power that resonate with earlier patterns of European control.

At the same time, Indonesian public perceptions are not shaped by suspicion alone. The study demonstrates that Indonesians actively manage their relationship to EU authority through selective cultural adoption, strategic non-alignment, and emotional distancing from European geopolitical conflicts. These practices express postcolonial agency rather than dependency. Indonesians engage with the EU when its presence aligns with national priorities, yet resist being positioned within European normative hierarchies. In this way, postcolonial legacies function not only as sources of critique, but as tools through which interpretive autonomy is maintained.

The EU's self-image as a normative global actor is therefore not automatically accepted in Indonesia. Its claims to universality are filtered through historical memories of exclusion, economic hierarchy, and civilizational authority. What emerges is neither outright rejection nor unconditional partnership, but a carefully calibrated perception in which European power is continuously reassessed against Indonesia's own identity, regional orientation, and historical experience.

Therefore, this study demonstrates that postcolonial legacies influence Indonesian public perceptions of the EU as global actor by shaping how Europe is remembered, how its authority is judged, and how its influence is negotiated. The EU's global role in Indonesia is not fixed by institutional reach alone, but by the long shadow of history that continues to define what European power means and how far it is allowed to go.

Bibliography

Acharya, A. (2014). *Constructing a security community in Southeast Asia* (3rd ed.). Routledge.

<https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315796673>

Adriaensen, J., & Postnikov, E. (2022). A Geo-Economic turn in trade policy? In *The European*

Union in international affairs. <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-81281-2>

Andreeva, A. A., Drozhashchikh, N. V., & Nelaeva, G. A. (2024). Memory of colonial crimes

in Belgium. *Contemporary Europe*, 2 (123), 139–151.

<https://doi.org/10.31857/s0201708324020116>

Assmann, A. (2011). *Cultural memory and Western civilization: Functions, Media, Archives*.

Cambridge University Press.

Babbie, E. (2014). *The practice of social research* (14th ed.). Cengage Learning.

Balfour, R., Bomassi, L., & Martinelli, M. (Eds.). (2022). *The Southern mirror: Reflections on*

Europe from the Global South. Carnegie Europe.

Barahamin, A. (2023). *Indonesia's oil palm smallholders need both state and EU support*.

<https://news.mongabay.com/2023/10/indonesias-oil-palm-smallholders-need-both-state-and-eu-support-commentary/>

Bauer, M. W., & Trondal, J. (2015). *The Palgrave handbook of the European Administrative*

system. Palgrave Macmillan UK eBooks. <https://doi.org/10.1057/9781137339898>

Behr, H., & Stivachtis, Y. (2017). *Revisiting the European Union as empire*. Routledge.

Bhabha, H. K. (1994). *The location of culture*. Routledge.

Bhabra, G. K. (2007). *Rethinking modernity: Postcolonialism and the sociological*

imagination. Palgrave Macmillan.

- Bhabra, G. K. (2009). *Postcolonial Europe, or understanding Europe in times of the postcolonial*. In SAGE Publications Ltd eBooks (pp. 69–86).
<https://doi.org/10.4135/9780857021045.n5>
- Bigo, D., Diez, T., Fanoulis, E., Rosamond, B., & Stivachtis, Y. A. (2020). *The Routledge Handbook of Critical European Studies*. In Routledge eBooks.
<https://doi.org/10.4324/9780429491306>
- Blom, T., & Vanhoonacker, S. (2015). The European External Action Service (EEAS), the new kid on the block. In Bauer, M. W., & Trondal, J. (2015), *The Palgrave handbook of the European Administrative system* (pp. 208–223). Palgrave Macmillan.
https://doi.org/10.1057/9781137339898_12
- Booth, A. (2007). *Colonial legacies: Economic and social development in East and Southeast Asia*. University of Hawai'i Press.
- Camroux, D., Srikandini, A. (2013). EU-Indonesia Relations: No Expectations-Capability Gap?. In: Christiansen, T., Kirchner, E., Murray, P. (eds) *The Palgrave Handbook of EU-Asia Relations*. Palgrave Macmillan, London.
https://doi.org/10.1057/9780230378704_36
- Chaban, N., & Holland, M. (2014). *Communicating Europe in times of crisis: External perceptions of the European Union*. Palgrave Macmillan.
- Chaban, N., Elgström, O., Kelly, S., & Yi, L. S. (2013). Images of the EU beyond its borders: Issue-specific and regional perceptions of European Union power and leadership. *Journal of Common Market Studies*, 51(3), 433–451.
- Chatterjee, P. (1993). *The nation and its fragments: Colonial and postcolonial histories*. Princeton University Press.

- Creswell, J.W. and Poth, C.N. (2013). *Qualitative inquiry & research design : choosing among five approaches*. Fifth edition. Sage.
- Del Sarto, R. A. (2015). Normative Empire Europe: The European Union, its Borderlands, and the ‘Arab Spring.’ *JCMS Journal of Common Market Studies*, 54(2), 215–232. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jcms.12282>
- Delegasi Uni Eropa. (2022). *Uni Eropa membuka Pekan Diplomasi Iklim 2022: Tingkatkan aksi kolaborasi untuk energi bersih*. https://www.eeas.europa.eu/delegations/indonesia/uni-eropa-membuka-pekan-diplomasi-iklim-2022-tingkatkan-aksi-kolaborasi-untuk_id.
- Diez, T. (2005). Constructing the self and changing others: Reconsidering ‘Normative Power Europe’. *Millennium: Journal of International Studies*, 33(3), 613–636.
- Duchêne, F. (1972). Europe’s role in world peace. In R. Mayne (Ed.), *Europe tomorrow: Sixteen Europeans look ahead* (pp. 32–47). Collins.
- Efriyadi, H., & Liliani, E. (2018). Colonial stereotypes in Indonesian society of multimedia era. *Atlantis Press*. <https://doi.org/10.2991/icille-18.2019.29>.
- France24. (2025). *Indonesians seek escape as anger rises over quality of life*. <https://www.france24.com/en/live-news/20250310-indonesians-see-escape-as-anger-rises-over-quality-of-life>
- Gioia, D. A., Corley, K. G., & Hamilton, A. L. (2012). *Seeking qualitative rigor in inductive research: Notes on the Gioia methodology*. *Organizational Research Methods*, 16(1), 15–31.
- Goscha, C. (2016). *Vietnam: A new history*. Basic Books.
- Grek, S., & MacDonogh, H. (2025). The Geopolitics of Expert Knowledge: Analysing the European Commission’s role and influence in Indonesian higher education. *Higher Education Policy*. <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41307-025-00429-9>.

- Harari, M., & Wong, M. (2025). Colonial legacy and land market formality. *Journal of Urban Economics*, 149, 103789. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jue.2025.103789>
- Henökl, T. (2020). An Alternative Reading of EU Foreign Policy Administration. In *The Routledge Handbook of Critical European Studies*, edited by Didier Bigo, Niilo Kauppi, and R. B. Jørgensen. London: Routledge, pp. 523–534.
- Hirschman, C. (1986). The making of race in colonial Malaya: Political economy and racial ideology. *Sociological Forum*, 1(2), 330–361. <https://doi.org/10.1007/bf01115742>
- Hooper, B., & Kramsch, O. (2007). Post-Colonising Europe: The Geopolitics of Globalisation, Empire, and Borders: Here and There, Now and Then. *Tijdschrift Voor Economische En Sociale Geografie*, 98(4), 526–534. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9663.2007.00420.x>
- Immler, N. L. (2022). The Netherlands–Indies: Rethinking post-colonial recognition from a multi-voiced perspective. *Wacana, Journal of the Humanities of Indonesia*, 23(3), 692–720. <https://doi.org/10.17510/wacana.v23i3.1007>
- Indonesian Ministry of Foreign Affairs. (2024). *Europe in the hearts & minds of Indonesians: Survey report*. Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia.
- Jong, H. N. (2023). *For Indonesian smallholders, EU deforestation rule is a threat — and an opportunity*. <https://news.mongabay.com/2023/01/for-indonesian-smallholders-eu-deforestation-rule-is-a-threat-and-an-opportunity/>
- Joshi, Y., Nishida, I., & Chaturvedi, D. (2024). *The European Union as a security actor in the Indo-Pacific*. Palgrave Macmillan. <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-97-4453-4>
- Juned, M., & Sutiono, P. (2024). Discussion of Indonesia-EU comprehensive economic partnership agreement: European interest in Indo-Pacific and Bebas Aktif foreign policy. *Cogent Social Sciences*, 10(1). <https://doi.org/10.1080/23311886.2024.2417805>.

- Kettunen, E., & Pratiwi, A. (2025). Towards collaborative EU-Indonesia bargaining on palm oil policy: Deconstructing the public discourse. *Asia Europe Journal*. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10308-025-00732-5>
- Keukeleire, S., & Delreux, T. (2022). *The foreign policy of the European Union*. Bloomsbury Publishing.
- King, A. D. (2004). *Spaces of global cultures: Architecture, urbanism, identity*. Routledge.
- Kinnvall, C. (2021). Postcolonialism. In D. Bigo, T. Diez, E. Fanoulis, B. Rosamond, & Y. A. Stivachtis (Eds.), *The Routledge handbook of critical European studies* (pp. 72–84). Routledge.
- Kissack, R. (2015). The EU and Human Rights Promotion. In K.E. Jørgensen, Å.K. Aarstad, E. Drieskens, K. Laatikainen, and B. Tonra, *The Sage Handbook of European Foreign Policy* (pp. 822–836). SAGE. <https://doi.org/10.4135/9781473915190.n57>
- Langan, M., & Price, S. (2020). *The EU's development policy: Forging relations of dependence?* In D. Bigo, T. Diez, E. Fanoulis, B. Rosamond, & Y. A. Stivachtis (Eds.), *The Routledge handbook of critical European studies* (pp. 499–509). Routledge.
- Lisbonne de Vergeron, K., Tsuruoka, M., & Angeline, M. (2025). Comparative perceptions of the EU in the Indo-Pacific: India, Japan and Indonesia. *Journal of Contemporary European Studies*. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14782804.2025.2520248>
- Lucarelli, S., & Fioramonti, L. (2009). External perceptions of the European Union as a global actor. Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203866917>
- Mamdani, M. (2012). *Define and rule: Native as political identity*. Harvard University Press.
- Manners, I. (2002). Normative Power Europe: A contradiction in terms? *Journal of Common Market Studies*, 40(2), 235–258.
- Manners, I. (2006). Normative power Europe reconsidered: beyond the crossroads1. *Journal of European Public Policy*, 13(2), 182–199. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13501760500451600>

- Manners, I. (2015). Sociology of knowledge and production of normative power in the European Union's external actions. *Journal of European Integration*, 37(2), 299–318. <https://doi.org/10.1080/07036337.2014.990141>
- Maricocchi, R. (2024). Reframing colonial amnesia: German colonialism and multilingual memory in Abdulrazak Gurnah's Afterlives. *Atlantic Studies*, 22(4), 512–533. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14788810.2024.2328464>
- Mikalsen, K. K. (2017). Equal sovereignty: On the conditions of global political justice. *GLOBUS Research Papers*, 3/2017. [https://www.sv.uio.no/arena/english/research/publications/arena-working-papers/pdf/2011-2020/wp-9-17\(1\).pdf](https://www.sv.uio.no/arena/english/research/publications/arena-working-papers/pdf/2011-2020/wp-9-17(1).pdf)
- Muhtadi, B., Lalisang, A. E. Y., Halida, R., Muslim, K., & Rahmadian, R. (2024). Indonesian public and elite perception of major power influence on regional and latest geopolitical issues. Indicator.co.id. <https://indikator.co.id/wp-content/uploads/2024/10/Indonesian-Public-and-Elite-Perception-of-Major-Power-Influence-on-Regional-and-Latest-Geopolitical-Issues.pdf>.
- Mun, T., S., Thuzar, M., Ha, H. T., Chalermphanupap, T., Thao, P. T. P., & Saelaow Qian, A. (2019). *The state of Southeast Asia: 2019 survey report*. ASEAN Studies Centre, ISEAS–Yusof Ishak Institute.
- Nessel, C. (2020). Colonialism in its modern dress: Post-colonial narratives in Europe–Indonesia relations. *Asia Europe Journal*, 19, 59–74. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10308-020-00587-y>
- Nessel, C. (2025). *Post-Colonial perceptions of the EU's trade identity in Vietnamese and Indonesian media: Friend or Foe?* Palgrave Macmillan.
- Onar, N. F., & Nicolaïdis, K. (2013). The Decentring Agenda: Europe as a post-colonial power. *Cooperation and Conflict*, 48(2), 283–303. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0010836713485384>

- Pattynama, P. (2012). Cultural memory and Indo-Dutch identity formations. In U. Bosma (Ed.), *Post-colonial immigrants and identity formations in the Netherlands* (pp. 175-192). Amsterdam University Press.
- Phalevi, A. (2022). *Menyoal aturan uji tuntas Uni Eropa bagi petani sawit mandiri*. <https://mongabay.co.id/2022/05/28/menyoal-aturan-uji-tuntas-uni-eropa-bagi-petani-sawit-mandiri/>
- Rahmadan, Y., & Setiawati, S. (2021). A framing analysis of Indonesian newspaper coverage on the issue of palm oil discrimination between Indonesia and the European Union. *Journal of International Studies*, 17, 27–52. <https://doi.org/10.32890/jis2021.17.2>
- Rizky, M. (2023). *Uni Eropa diskriminatif nih, petani sawit RI protes deh*. <https://www.cnbcindonesia.com/news/20230329130746-4-425461/uni-eropa-diskriminatif-nih-petani-sawit-ri-protos-deh>
- Rochman, F. (2025). *Indonesia dan Uni Eropa satu semboyan “bersatu dalam keberagaman”*. <https://setkab.go.id/gandeng-uni-eropa-presiden-prabowo-tekankan-peran-indonesia-di-asean-dan-dunia>
- Sandi, F. (2023). *Pakai cara ini Eropa terang-terangan bunuh petani sawit RI*. <https://www.cnbcindonesia.com/news/20230627144613-4-449725/pakai-cara-ini-eropa-terang-terangan-bunuh-petani-sawit-ri>
- Savitri, P., I. (2025). *PLN–Uni Eropa kembangkan infrastruktur listrik hijau di Sumut dan Jatim*. <https://www.antaraneews.com/berita/5248909/pln-uni-eropa-kembangkan-proyek-listrik-hijau-di-sumut-dan-jatim>
- Schimmelfennig, F. (2001). The Community Trap: Liberal Norms, Rhetorical Action, and the Eastern Enlargement of the European Union. *International Organization*, 55(1), 47–80. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3078597>

- Seah, S., Hoang, T. H., Martinus, M., & Pham, T. P. T. (2021). *The state of Southeast Asia: 2021 survey report*. ISEAS–Yusof Ishak Institute.
- Sicurelli, D. (2009). 'Regional Partners? Perceptions and Criticisms at the African Union.' In S. Lucarelli and L. Fioramonti (eds.), *External Perceptions of the European Union as a Global actor* (Routledge).
- Sjursen, H. (2006). The EU as a "normative" power: How can this be? *Journal of European Public Policy*, 13(2), 235–251. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13501760500451667>
- Skorczewski, D. (2020). 3 National identity in a postcolonial framework: Necessary clarifications and opening suggestions. In *Boydell and Brewer eBooks* (pp. 38–70). <https://doi.org/10.1515/9781787446687-005>
- Sugiono, M., & Haris, N. A. (2025). The normative power of Europe? Indonesian perspective of the EU. *Journal of Contemporary European Studies*, 1–17. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14782804.2025.2472630>
- Utami, I. W. P., Sapto, A., Leksana, G. T., & Ayundasari, L. (2024). Decolonizing Indonesian History Curriculum, 1946-1964. *Paramita Historical Studies Journal*, 34(1). <https://doi.org/10.15294/paramita.v34i1.43482>.
- Văetiși, Ș. (2018). Critical views on the EU's international relations and identity as shaped by Latin American experiences and perspectives. In *Perceptions of the European Union's Identity in International Relations* (pp. 182–203).

Appendix A

Gioia Table

Examples of First-Order Concepts	Second-Order Themes	Aggregate Dimensions
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Europe represents advanced cities and orderly social systems • The EU is seen as economically and technologically advanced • The EU is trusted in long-term development and sustainability • European technology in Indonesian signals advancement 	Material and Institutional Modernity	European Union as a Symbol of Modernity and Progress
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Europe is associated with high-quality education • Europe represents higher living standards • Europe as a leader in science and innovation • Europe is linked to cultural refinement and cosmopolitanism 	Cultural and Normative Modernity	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • EU actions are seen as threatening Indonesian livelihoods • EU regulations are interpreted as self-interested • EU authority is viewed as intrusive • EU is perceived as ignoring local knowledge and conditions 	Public Suspicion of EU Motives	Postcolonial Ambivalence and Historical Memory
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Indonesians selectively adopt Western cultural elements • Western cultural symbols are reinterpreted through local values • Neutrality functions as a form of resistance • Indonesians distance themselves from European geopolitical narratives 	Everyday Agency and Subtle Forms of Resistance	