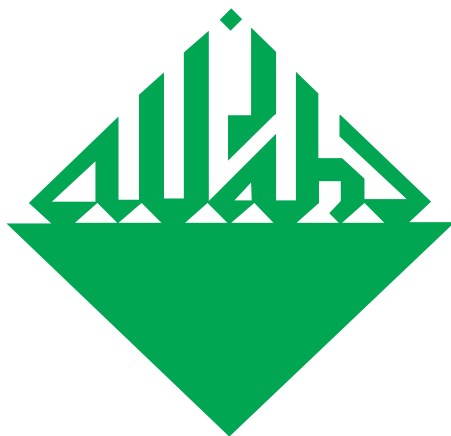


STUDIA ISLAMIKA

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THE RELIGIOSITY, NATIONALITY, AND SOCIALITY OF PANCASILA:
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Lin Hongxuan

Sickle as Crescent: Islam and Communism in the Netherlands East Indies, 1915-1927

Abstract: *This paper examines the confluence of Islam and Communism in the Netherlands East Indies from 1915-1927, by studying how Islam and Communism were theorized as compatible. It analyzes the nature of conciliatory discourses linking Communism and Islam by exploring the profuse anti-colonial print culture of the period. This paper examines four corpora of sources: the published writings of Tan Malaka; selected excerpts from two newspapers edited by Haji Misbach and his associates; Tjokroaminoto's 1924 book, Islam and Socialism; and finally, Soekarno's 1926 article, published as Nationalism, Islam and Marxism. This paper will conclude with a brief examination of Dutch reports and oral testimony regarding how Islam and Communism figured in the motivations of participants in the 1926-1927 Communist uprisings.*

Keywords: Islam, Socialism, Communism, Marxism, Tan Malaka, Haji Misbach.

Abstrak: Artikel ini membahas persinggungan Islam dan Komunisme di Hindia Belanda dari tahun 1915-1927, dengan mengkaji bagaimana Islam dan komunisme diletakkan dalam teori yang sepadan. Artikel ini menganalisis karakter wacana damai yang menghubungkan komunisme dan Islam dengan mengeksplorasi produk budaya cetak anti-kolonial yang melimpah pada periode tersebut. Artikel ini mengulas empat korpus: tulisan-tulisan Tan Malaka yang diterbitkan; kutipan-kutipan terpilih dari dua surat kabar yang disunting oleh Haji Misbach dan rekan-rekannya; Buku-buku Tjokroaminoto tahun 1924, Islam dan Sosialisme; dan terakhir, artikel Soekarno tahun 1926, yang diterbitkan sebagai Nasionalisme, Islam, dan Marxisme. Artikel ini akan diakhiri dengan pemeriksaan singkat atas laporan-laporan Belanda dan kesaksian lisan tentang bagaimana Islam dan Komunisme menggambarkan motivasi orang-orang yang terlibat dalam pemberontakan komunis tahun 1926-1927.

Kata kunci: Islam, Sosialisme, Komunisme, Marxisme, Tan Malaka, Haji Misbach.

ملخص: تبحث هذه المقالة عن التقاء الإسلام والشيوعية في جزر الهند الشرقية الهولندية في الفترة ما بين ١٩١٥ و١٩٢٧، من خلال دراسة تصور الإسلام والشيوعية على أهما متوافقان. وتقوم هذه المقالة بتحليل طبيعة الخطابات التصالحية التي تربط بين الشيوعية والإسلام عن طريق استكشاف ثقافة الطباعة الغريبة المناهضة للاستعمار في تلك الفترة. كما تبحث عن أربع مجموعات من المصادر، وهي: كتابات تان مالاكا المنشورة؛ ومقتطفات مختارة من صحفيين قام بتحريرها الحاج مصباح وشركاؤه؛ وكتاب تشوكروامينوتو عام ١٩٢٤ حول الإسلام والاشتراكية؛ ومقالة سوكارنو عام ١٩٢٦ التي نشرت بعنوان القومية والإسلام والماركسية. وستختتم هذه المقالة بإجراء دراسة موجزة للتقارير الهولندية والشهادات الشفهية حول كيفية ظهور الإسلام والشيوعية في دوافع المشاركين في الانتفاضات الشيوعية ١٩٢٦-١٩٢٧. وفي النهاية، أوافق الرأي الذي أشار إلى أن الكثير من المسلمين قد أدركوا الفرق بين الإيمان الشخصي والانتماء السياسي، بالإضافة إلى التوافق الأساسي بين أهداف الإسلام والشيوعية.

الكلمات المفتاحية: الإسلام، الاشتراكية، الشيوعية، الماركسية، تان مالاكا، الحاج مصباح.

This paper will examine the confluence of Islam and Communism in the Netherlands East Indies (NEI) in the 1910s and 1920s, by studying the ways in which Islam and Communism were theorized as compatible. Furthermore, it shows that Islam and Communism were inextricably intertwined in the motivations of participants in the 1926-1927 uprisings. This paper will examine four main strands of what I call “conciliatory discourses,” which drew on both Islam and Communism. Firstly, the autobiography and published writings of Communist Party of Indonesia (Partai Komunis Indonesia, henceforth PKI) leader Tan Malaka; secondly, excerpts from two newspapers edited by the labor organizer known to the Dutch as the Red Haji, Haji Misbach, and his associates; thirdly, Tjokroaminoto’s 1924 book, *Islam and Socialism*; and finally, Soekarno’s 1926 article, *Nationalism, Islam and Marxism*.

I argue that these sources collectively represent how pervasive, and perhaps even paradigmatic, both Islam and Communism were to anti-colonial activists in the pre-1927 period. In analyzing vernacular print culture, this analysis deliberately privileges the discursive over the organizational. Rather than focus on the existence of organizational links between Muslim activists and Communist cadres in the NEI, or the transmission of instructions, aid and expertise from the USSR to the PKI, this paper is concerned instead with the highly original and progressive arguments made by prominent anti-colonial activists of surprisingly varied backgrounds. These activists felt compelled to engage with the Islamic milieu in which they operated, as well as Marxist ideas that had been transplanted to the NEI. Their writings show that they emphasized the importance of social justice in Islam, and interpreted Communism or Socialism as effective vehicles for the achievement of Islamic goals within the framework of anti-colonial resistance.

This paper makes no specific conceptual distinction between Communism and Socialism, because discrete Communist and Socialist factions did not emerge until the Indonesian Revolution. For the activists whose work is surveyed here, Communism and Socialism were both articulated in opposition to the colonial extractive capitalist economy, and did not constitute distinct discourses or self-consciously differing approaches to achieving a post-capitalist utopia. The distinction between Communist and Socialist revolved around affiliation with the

PKI: to be a Communist was to be a cadre, but there were activists aplenty who drew on Marxist ideas while resisting formal association with the PKI.

This paper makes its most direct contribution to the existing literature on this period by straddling the histories of Indonesian Communism and Indonesian Islam, and re-examining old sources with a fresh perspective. Through a careful re-reading of the published work of well-known *pergerakan*¹ (lit. movement) leaders such as Tan Malaka, Haji Misbach, Tjokroaminoto, and Soekarno, the co-dependency of Islam and Communism in the NEI during this period becomes evident. This phenomenon is hardly unknown, but is rarely pursued as the primary object of scholarly analysis. Many respected scholars have referenced it in passing, as if it were merely a charming oddity. Examples include Taufik Abdullah's *Schools and Politics*, Deliar Noer's *The Modernist Islamic Movement*, and Ruth McVey's definitive *The Rise of Indonesian Communism* (Abdullah 1971; McVey 1965; Noer 1973). To the best of my knowledge, only three authors have tackled the confluence of Islam and Communism head-on: Michael C. Williams, Takashi Shiraishi, and Syamsul Bakri (Bakri 2015; Shiraishi 1990; Williams 1990). Williams's study is rooted specifically in Banten and relies on ethnographic fieldwork, while Shiraishi and Bakri's studies are geographically limited to Surakarta. Bakri's book focuses specifically on Haji Misbach. By contrast, this paper avoids approaching the confluence of Islam and Communism as an isolated formulation by a few heterodox thinkers, or as the "false consciousness" of peasants and religious leaders who gravitated to the PKI without understanding its message. Rather, I argue that conciliatory discourses involving Islam and Communism were surprisingly common, and were promulgated at the highest levels of the *pergerakan* leadership. From the revolutionary Tan Malaka to the "cooperationist" Tjokroaminoto, resistance to the colonial state had to engage with the precepts of both Islam and Communism in order to be effective or meaningful in this period.

I argue that many *pergerakan* activists perceived Islam as an equitable and just system for organizing social life, as expressed in the obligation to give alms (*zakat*) and the prohibition of usury (*ribā*) (Shiraishi 1990, 134; Soekarno 1970, 50). Communism made similar claims to being an equitable system for organizing human relations, and several prominent *pergerakan* activists sought to build on that perceived concordance

of goals. Participants in the 1926-1927 uprisings articulated their antipathy toward the colonial state in both Islamic and Communist idioms, because they remained immersed in an Islamic milieu which constituted the ineluctable basis for understanding, interpreting and applying Communist ideas and modes of organization. Rather than the PKI cynically courting Muslim support by disingenuously claiming compatibility, I argue that diverse *pergerakan* elements theorized conciliation, from the deeply religious to the openly atheistic. For example, without denying the pragmatic considerations involved, Tan Malaka's writings suggest that he was articulating a genuine conviction: that personal faith and political commitment could be separated. Similarly, Haji Misbach saw in Communism the most effective path to fulfilling Islamic obligations. These ideas were not far removed from the motivations of ordinary participants in the uprisings.

In *Imagined Communities*, Benedict Anderson (2003, 37–47) argues that print capitalism was a key factor in stimulating the consciousness of “nation-ness”, an imagined political community. The thread of *pergerakan* print culture which connected Islam and Communism was very much part of the phenomenon Anderson named print capitalism, and exercised the same integrative function. However, it did so not independently of, or in opposition to, existing identities. This thread of *pergerakan* literature overlaid and drew strength from an already extant sense of “nation-ness.” This was the sense being brothers and sisters in the global community of Muslims, the *ummah*, and all the values associated with that identity.

Within this dual framework of shared “nation-ness,” some Indies Muslims invoked both the *ummah* as well as the identity and values associated with the international Communist movement. Tan Malaka's writings, for example, clearly imagine Indies Muslims as part of much broader worlds, whether the world of Dar al-Islam or the world of the Comintern. This field of connectedness created by print capitalism dovetailed with an existing field of connectedness created by membership in the *ummah*, as Ronit Ricci (2011) eloquently shows in *Islam Translated*. Each drew strength from the other in knitting Indies Muslims into a cohesive imagined community, a community that nursed within itself the imagined potential to repeal the eclectic, hybridized and (ultimately) ephemeral identity fostered by the Dutch colonial state. In its place, they imagined a community of Muslims

that was simultaneously part of the *ummah* as well as the nation-transcending world of proletarian solidarity.

Early Confluences: PKI and Sarekat Islam

The genesis of the Communist movement in the NEI lies in the formation of the *Indische Sociaal-Democratische Vereeniging* (ISDV, the Indies Social-Democratic Association) in Surabaya in 1914. Despite many of its (majority Dutch) constituent members' links to the Netherlands Social Democratic Workers' Party (SDAP), which advocated 'Ethical Gradualism' in the colonies, the ISDV embraced perceptibly radical solutions to the systematic exploitation and transparent suffering of the natives (McVey 1965, 14–15). While initially lacking native members and hobbled by its miniscule membership, the ISDV laid the foundation for the development of Communism in the NEI with the establishment of two periodicals: the Dutch-language *Het Vrije Woord* (The Free Word) in 1915 and the Indonesian-language *Soeara Ra'jat* (The People's Voice) in 1918. Under the stewardship of Dutch Communists Adolf Baars and Henk Sneevliet, the ISDV increasingly developed a working relationship with Sarekat Islam from 1916 onwards. Though Sarekat Islam, the largest *pergerakan* organization of the 1910s (claiming a total membership of 2.5 million members by 1919), was more reformist than revolutionary, it served as an incubator of Communist ideas and methods of organization.

As early as the 1916 Sarekat Islam congress, the issue of "amalgamating Islamic and Socialist principles" was debated, and attracted support from both the urban *santri* merchant class, as well as younger radicals who came of age in labor unions (McVey 1965, 20). The speech given by Hasan Ali Suriati, a wealthy backer of Sarekat Islam from Surabaya, provides a taste of the distinct flavor of that congress: "The righteous teacher, our Lord the Prophet Muhammad, was the man who removed all inequality between the sexes, did away with the difference between ruler and subject, between rank and class. And all these changes were brought about by the Socialist par excellence, by our Prophet Muhammad. The Prophet carried out the Socialist idea of equality in all branches of government affairs; economic and religious policy and administration were ruled by this idea" (McVey 1965, 363–64).

Precisely because neither the ISDV nor Sarekat Islam was initially a political party, this working relationship developed into something

resembling the united front strategy of the Comintern: concurrent membership in both organizations was permitted, which had the effect of bringing radical Sarekat Islam members into the ISDV and introducing them to Communist ideas, even as they retained their Islamic worldview, which continued to inform their articulation of opposition to the colonial state (McVey 1965, 68).² This led to the popular distinction between “red” and “white” Sarekat Islam branches (regional branches often maintained a high degree of autonomy in relation to Central Sarekat Islam). Red branches were influenced by Communist ideas and practices, demonstrating greater willingness to confront the colonial state, while white branches (referencing the symbolic color of Islamic piety) indicated the pietist Islamic worldviews of their constituent members. The PKI developed through the incubation of Sarekat Islam members within the ISDV, though it did not fully sever its umbilical cord linking it to Sarekat Islam until 1923 (McVey 1965, 21–23).³

The entwinement of key Sarekat Islam and PKI leaders exemplified the relationship between Islam and Communism in the 1920s. In 1921, future PKI leader Tan Malaka was introduced to Haji Omar Said Tjokroaminoto, the foremost leader of Sarekat Islam, in Yogyakarta. By this point, tensions between the pro-PKI faction within Sarekat Islam and other, more politically quiescent, members were already palpable. Tan Malaka, a committed Communist just beginning his political career at the time, cooperated closely with Sarekat Islam primarily in the field of education, setting up numerous Sekolah Rakyat (People’s Schools) and was warmly welcomed by Sarekat Islam leaders (Malaka 1991, 63 Vol. 1). In his biography, Tan Malaka spoke glowingly of Tjokroaminoto as well: “Tjokroaminoto also treated me like an old friend,” and “... Tjokroaminoto left me saying, ‘The doors of Sarekat Islam are open to you.’” (Malaka 1991, 63). Tan Malaka’s warm reception was indicative of the degree of cooperation and conciliation between Communists and Islamic anti-colonial activists even during the tense 1920s.

Tan Malaka received a similarly warm reception when he spoke at a 1921 Sarekat Islam meeting in Surabaya about “... The alliance between Turkey and the Soviet Union against imperialism... [and] the importance in Indonesia of unity between Islam and Communism against our common enemy,” resulting in several unspecified “Islamic

leaders” agreeing to attend the upcoming PKI congress of December 1921 (Malaka 1991, 67–68). Tan Malaka used this congress as a platform to broadcast his message that Dutch Imperialism remained hegemonic through the exercise of a policy of “divide and rule” between Muslims and Communists, arguing that “... If we deepened and accentuated the divisions between Islam and Communism, we would only give our ever-watchful enemies the opportunity to exploit our internal hostilities and weaken the Indonesian nationalist movement” (Malaka 1991, 68). Evidently, Tan Malaka espoused a narrative of cooperation between the PKI and Sarekat Islam, partly because he recognized their improved capacity for resisting colonial authority, and partly because they perceived the revolutionary potential of Sarekat Islam members (Poeze 1988, 302). Latent tensions were not easily resolved, but even so prominent religious figures such as *Kiai* Hadikusomo stepped forward to argue in favor of unity at the PKI congress on December 1921 (McVey 1965, 181; Poeze 1988, 69).⁴

This is not to suggest that there were no inherent tensions between Islam and Communism. Both Tjokroaminoto and his deputy, Haji Agus Salim, became members of the Volksraad, a partially-elected advisory council to the Dutch Governor-General founded in 1918, functioning as a kind of “loyalist opposition”. Sarekat Islam, partially as a result of its involvement in parliamentary-style politics in the Volksraad, came under increasing governmental pressure to rein in its “red” (PKI-dominated) branches. This culminated in the 1923 decision to enforce party discipline and expel all PKI members from the ranks of Sarekat Islam unless they forsook their PKI membership (McVey 1965, 181). Parts of the modernist Islamic movement, though tightly linked to the PKI in West Sumatra, and to a lesser degree, in Surakarta and Yogyakarta, eventually turned against the Communists. Muhammadiyah, the modernist Islamic mass organization founded in 1912, declared that Islam and Communism were incompatible in 1924 (McVey 1965, 171). Even Tan Malaka acknowledged these tensions as early as 1921, the year of his meeting with Tjokroaminoto, yet conciliatory discourses concerning Islam and Communism still circulated and had a powerful appeal beyond 1923. The Mu’alimin movement in Surakarta, a tabligh movement whose foundation predated the establishment of PKI and Sarekat Rakyat branches, expanded throughout the 1920s and claimed several thousand members around Yogyakarta and Surakarta in 1926.⁵

Adherents held private exegetical sessions where the Quran was interpreted through a Communist framework with little government interference (McVey 1965, 171; Shiraishi 1990, 321).

Tan Malaka's Integration of Islam and Communism

Tan Malaka was a complex figure, as the translator and editor of his autobiography, Helen Jarvis, notes: “[He] has been described variously as a communist, nationalist, nationalist communist, Trotskyist, Japanese agent, idealist, Muslim leader...” (Malaka 1991, lxvi Vol. 1). As one of the key leaders of the PKI from the 1920s until his death in 1949, Tan Malaka exerted considerable, protracted influence on the ideology and policies of the PKI. As early as 1926, his works *Naar de Republiek Indonesia* (1925) and *Semangat Moeda* (1926) were in circulation in the West Coast of Sumatra, one of the hotbeds of the 1926-1927 uprisings (Schrieke 1960). Tan Malaka's integration of Islam and Communism was perceptible in his theories and policy recommendations, but any analysis of his work should first take into account his general frame of reference, in which religion was imbricated in his essentially Marxist conception of history.

In the third volume of his autobiography, Tan Malaka elaborated his self-proclaimed *weltanschauung* (comprehensive worldview). It was presented in the form of a sequential short history of the world, a generally chronological account that hopped from one handpicked event, character or historical development to the next (Malaka 1991, 13-44 Vol. 3). Tellingly, Tan Malaka's short history of the world included three sequential sections on “The Prophet Moses,” “The Prophet Jesus,” and “The Prophet Muhammad” (Malaka 1991, 19-24 Vol. 3). His specific choice of these historical characters, particularly the attachment of the appellation “Prophet” to Jesus, reveals his retention of a fundamentally Islamic worldview, which places special emphasis on all three. This resonates with his praise for Islamic civilization earlier in his memoirs: “All the world, friend or foe, acknowledged the glory of the Islamic empire in Spain in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries” (Malaka 1991, 39-40). Evidently, Tan Malaka was aware of the cultural sensitivities of his readers, and these elements of his autobiography can be read as an expression of the subtle ways in which Islam and Communist worldviews were intertwined in the minds of Communist sympathizers and party cadres that Tan Malaka was writing for. Hilmar Farid and Razif make a crucial observation about the (re)

writing of history as a *pergerakan* enterprise, which helps contextualize Tan Malaka's worldview:

“Critiques of colonialism did not stop at matters directly experienced by the colonized. Activists realized that education was crucial for progress and for the advancement of the anti-colonial movement. Education was needed to undo the education promoted by the colonial state. Constructing a new history of the Indies society thus became an important aim” (Farid and Razif 2008, 285)

It was precisely this kind of counter-education that Tan Malaka was practicing in his articulation of an Islamic history, asserting the independence of Indies Muslims from the colonial logic of dependency, tutelage and (eventual) progress, while asserting their historical place in a broader Muslim world with its own rich traditions. This was by no means peculiar to Tan Malaka; the leftist journalist Mas Marco Kartodikromo had undertaken a similar exercise in his rewriting of the *Babad Tanah Jawa*, delinking it from Orientalist Dutch scholarship (Farid and Razif 2008, 285).⁶

Tan Malaka's political theory was flexible enough to accommodate religion. *Naar de Republiek Indonesia* laid out his proposed PKI minimum program, which explicitly called for the separation of church and state and the recognition of freedom of religion (Malaka 1996, 27). He described the proper conduct of the Communist revolutionary in the following terms:

“... a revolutionary must first gather together facts relating to all the social forces that are to be examined for their character and direction and to be coordinated and mobilized... while relying on one's instinct in understanding the psychology of the masses in motion... conclusions reached by Indonesian or Indian revolutionaries will certainly differ from those reached by Russian ones” (Malaka 1991, 89 Vol. 1)

Similarly, Tan Malaka argued that Communists had to recognize central features of national identity: “We must not forget the weakness of the science of revolution, a weakness shared by all the social sciences. They also have to take account of the *uncertain factor*, the ‘x’ factor: human behavior... revolutionaries must associate themselves with the masses, or at least be able to understand the psychology of the masses in action” (Malaka 1991, 89 Vol. 1).

While he did not explicitly mention religion here, Tan Malaka was clearly aware of the need for Communist theory to accommodate the

religious sentiments of the masses it sought to mobilize. This was further reinforced by Tan Malaka's deployment of the term *murba* instead of the more doctrinally orthodox *proletar* (proletariat) to describe the dispossessed masses of the Indies, which he perceived to be fundamentally different from the urban working class whom Marx prioritized (Malaka 1991, xxxviii Vol. 1). Tan Malaka included what Marx would have called the *lumpenproletariat* as well as agrarian smallholders within the *murba* category, to which he ascribed political agency. Tan Malaka was not theoretically doctrinaire, and keenly appreciated the need to adapt Communist ideas into terms comprehensible and meaningful to the masses. In the case of putative Indonesia, these terms would necessarily include Islam.

Tan Malaka made similar points in *Aksi Massa* (2008), an analysis of the political situation in the NEI during 1920s and a statement of his revolutionary program. In the section entitled "Parties and their characteristics," Tan Malaka argued that a party could not possess revolutionary strength unless it was able to commandeer the wholehearted support of its members (Malaka 2008, 105). Read in the broader context of his concerted attempts to reconcile Sarekat Islam with its Communist members, this underscores his awareness of the need to reach out to the masses on their terms, of which Islam was necessarily a part. In the same vein, Tan Malaka argued that despite its charismatic leaders, Sarekat Islam was unable to reformulate Islam as a viable popular political ideology precisely because it faced competition from the politically quietist Muhammadiyah (Malaka 2008, 121–22). This was effectively an implicit recognition of the power of religion to either bolster or undermine ideology, and the implications for the PKI were clear to Tan Malaka.

Tan Malaka's emphasis on the necessity of reconciling Islam to Communism was consistent, and evident even in his later works. One of the last books published before his death was *Islam dalam Tindjauan Madilog* (1950), loosely translatable as "Islam as critiqued by Dialectical Materialism," *Madilog* being a portmanteau of Materialism, Dialectic, and Logic. In it, Tan Malaka suggested that Islam acclimatized itself to local conditions as it spread outside of Arabia, but remained essentially coherent through the Ummah's interaction via the *hajj* pilgrimage (Malaka 1950, 6). This paralleled his recognition of specific conditions which required the PKI to focus on the *murba* rather than the narrower

category of the urban proletariat: he recognized the mutability of both Islam and Communism, and the desirability thereof.

He also couched his message in a clearly Islamic idiom. As in his autobiography, he began by providing a short history of Islam in terms familiar to any Muslim, a nod to the continuing relevance of Islam. He referenced the four Rashidun Caliphs, the Prophets Ibrahim, Musa and Daud, the four main schools (*madhhab*) of jurisprudence, the Mutazili School of theology (which had prioritized human reason in interpreting Islamic law), as well as such august personages as Imam Ghazali (Malaka 1950, 7). Furthermore, he made a point of adding the suffix “s.a.w.” (an Arabic acronym for “Peace Be Upon Him”) to Muhammad’s name whenever the Prophet was mentioned. By invoking these key markers of Islamic identity, Tan Malaka signaled his consistent immersion in an Islamic milieu, despite his ideological commitment to Communism.

The majority of *Islam Dalam Tindjauan Madilog* was given over to Tan Malaka’s portrayal of the historical development of Islam vis-a-vis other phenomena in world history, and his stance on Islam was visibly orthodox. Much of the book constituted a paean to Islam rather than an actual exposition of *Madilog*, his nuanced reformulation of Dialectical Materialism. That Islam was a central pillar around which his story revolved is particularly obvious when he considers the young prophet Muhammad in relation to Isaac Newton and Thomas Edison; unsurprisingly, Muhammad fares favorably in his comparison (Malaka 1950, 9). It was only in his final paragraph that Tan Malaka made his message clear: he argued that *Madilog* admitted the existence of God, and recognized God’s sovereignty over nature (*Jadi menurut Madilog yang Maha Kuasa itulah bisa lebih kuasa dari undang alam*) (Malaka 1950, 15). If *Aksi Massa* was an expression of the practical value of accommodating Islam within a Communist ideological framework, *Islam Dalam Tindjauan Madilog* was aimed squarely at Muslims, and openly championed the metaphysical compatibility of Tan Malaka’s understanding of Communism and Islam itself.

Tan Malaka in Exile

Tan Malaka rose swiftly through the ranks of the PKI and was elected its leader at the PKI congress of December 1921 (Malaka 1991, lxxxiv Vol. 1). His prominence soon attracted the attention of the colonial authorities, who exiled him shortly after his election. He eventually

travelled to Russia via the Netherlands, and continued to support unity between Muslims and Communists from afar: at the Fourth Comintern Congress (1922), he spoke of how Communism should relate to the Indian Swadeshi movement instigated by Gandhi, as well as whether Communists should in general support such movements (Malaka 1991, 92; Poeze 1988, 312).⁷ He went on to relate (in German) an incident in which pious Sarekat Islam members asked him whether the Communists in their midst believed in God. His reply was striking: “When I stand before God, then I am a Muslim, but when I stand before men, then I am no Muslim, for God has said that there are many Satans among men” (Riddell John 2012, 263). Here, Tan Malaka was likely referring to the Quranic *Sūrat al-An‘ām* (6:112): “And so we have appointed for every Prophet enemies – devils among mankind and jinn, inspiring one another with adorned speech as a delusion (or by way of deception) ...”⁸ Firstly, Tan Malaka seemed to be making a case for a division between the private spirituality and public political allegiance. One could be both a committed Communist ideologically, as well as a pious Muslim in one’s private life. Secondly, Tan Malaka seemed to cast himself in the role of an Islamic prophet, one who (in fine prophetic tradition) anticipated being attacked by various detractors (“devils”) who deliberately misconstrued his message. Here, he suggests that his faith was secure in his own mind, and felt no need for him to justify himself to human detractors. His prophetic message of social justice remained relevant whether they believed him to be a Muslim or not.

This was by no means an unusual position. At the 1923 joint PKI and Sarekat Islam congress, participants such as Haji Misbach and Sugono had openly advocated the PKI’s support for Islam while stressing that religion and politics were distinct (McVey 1965, 155–56). Tan Malaka ultimately concluded that Pan-Islamism was fundamentally the union of Muslims against Imperialism, and should thus be supported by the international Communist movement (Malaka 1991, 92 Vol. 1). To situate this contextually, this was not an unorthodox position for PKI cadres. At the June 1924 party congress in Batavia, Aliarcham’s speech ended with the pronouncement that the models the PKI aspired to were Soviet Russia and Turkey, a sentiment that was met with cheering (McVey 1965, 195).

As Tan Malaka’s long exile went on, he continued to voice his ideas about the expediency of cooperation between Muslims and Communists

as well as their legitimate grounds for conciliation. His 1924 pamphlet, *Theses Bagi Keadaan Sosial dan Ekonomi serta Tjara Bagi Mengadakan Organisasi dan Taktiek di Indonesia* (Theses on the social and economic situation and the means of organization and tactics in Indonesia), was read to the PKI congress of 1924 in his absence, and stressed the need for the PKI to organize “non-proletarian progressive elements into allied organizations such as the Sarekat Rakyat” (Malaka 1991, lxxxv Vol. 1; McVey 1965, 434–35). This was clearly an attempt to prolong a policy that the ISDV/PKI had been committed to for several years already. As late as 1945, Tan Malaka would still be lamenting the persistence of conflict between Communist and Islamic partisans in Pekalongan and Priangan, and he would found an umbrella political coalition, the *Persatuan Perjuangan* (Struggle Union), for the express purpose of sublimating such divisions (Malaka 1991, 109 Vol. 3; Poeze 2009, 162).

Setting the Stage: Islamic Modernism in the NEI

The rapprochement between Communism and Islam was intimately linked to modernist Islamic reformism, which sought to “update” Islam to ensure its continuing relevance in all facets of social life. Modernist or Reformist Muslims have had a substantial presence in the Netherlands East Indies since the 19th century, and can be located as the latest in a series of tides of Islamic renewal advocating and/or imposing orthodox praxis on Muslim society (Laffan 2003). These Islamic modernists were, like many of their counterparts in various “self-strengthening” movements throughout Asia, not uncritical of Western imports, whether technological or ideological. The conciliatory discourses Islamic modernists produced in the NEI can be understood as attempts to make sense of, and potentially appropriate, new ideologies such as Communism. This was not gratuitous posturing; components of these ideologies were perceived to resonate with core tenets of Islam, such as the promotion of social justice via *zakat* (mandatory alms) and the prohibition of *riba*’ (usury). Communism was approached as one amongst many potential ideologies that might yield a fruitful concordance with their modernist articulation of Islam.

In *Language and Power*, Anderson argues that the *pergerakan* commitment to Bahasa Indonesia should be understood as an “enterprise for the mastery of a gigantic cultural crisis, and a partly subconscious

project for the assumption of modernity within the modalities of an autonomous and autochthonous social-political tradition” (Anderson 1990, 124).⁹ This attempt by the *pergerakan* to construct a linguistic medium for the conveyance of new, radical discourses was driven by the adaptation of global discourses for an Indonesian context, for Indonesian consumption. This was a task that hierarchical Javanese was ill-suited for, while Dutch-medium education was reserved for native elites, relegating Dutch to a position of marginal relevance in the project of translation. As James Siegel puts it, “the *lingua franca* brought not only messages from groups present in the Indies; it brought stories from most of the globe as well. This moment has been seen to be the beginning of Indonesian nationalism. It is important to see that this nationalism began not in the nation and not with the colonial forces but with the reception of messages from Europe and Asia” (Siegel 1997, 6).

In the NEI, the reception of messages like Democratic Socialism from the Netherlands, or revolutionary Marxism from the USSR, necessarily required said messages to engage with Islam, given Islam’s sheer number of adherents, and its political salience during the early 20th century. Just as the adoption of Bahasa Indonesia as a discursive medium was essential to the maturation of the *pergerakan*, the attempts by Muslims to grapple with powerful new ideologies like Communism were an integral part of *pergerakan* political activity. Indeed, the adoption/codification of a *lingua franca* and the adaptation of new ideas went hand in hand. With that in mind, it is not surprising that conciliatory discourses positing the compatibility of Islam and Communism were formulated by prominent *pergerakan* activists, and are clearly discernable in *pergerakan* print culture of the period.

The Red Haji – Interpreting Communism within an Islamic Framework

The combination of Islamic and Communist discourses and practices was perhaps best embodied by Haji Misbach, a leading figure in both Muhammadiyah and the Insulinde.¹⁰ Misbach was educated in a *pesantren*, and became a key part of Muhammadiyah’s *tabligh* efforts in Surakarta from the mid-1910s onwards. He joined Sarekat Islam in 1912, and though not particularly active, he also joined the League of Native Journalists (IJB) in 1914, demonstrating his willingness to engage with new forms of media and new forms of political activity

while remaining rooted in a firmly Islamic worldview. Misbach was particularly close to Ahmad Dahlan (the founder of Muhammadiyah and erstwhile consultant to Sarekat Islam), but joined the Insulinde in 1918 as a propagandist. In 1919, he achieved notoriety by being accused of instigating a wave of peasant strikes across the Surakarta region (Shiraishi 1990, 128).

Misbach published his own monthly newspapers, *Medan Moeslimin* (founded 1915) and *Islam Bergerak* (founded 1917), drawing on his experiences with the IJB and its primary organ, *Doenia Bergerak*. The *pergerakan* print culture of the 1910s and 1920s was particularly fertile, and can be understood as *bacaan liar* (wild literature), in the sense that the newspapers and periodicals published by Misbach and his contemporaries were vehicles for discourses that lay clearly outside of the canon of Malay-language literature produced or approved by the colonial state's *Balai Pustaka*, or Bureau of Literature (Farid and Razif 2008, 281). Misbach himself founded a publishing house called *Insulinde* in the early 1910s in Solo, which specialized in producing such literature (Farid and Razif 2008, 280). Such newspapers had circulation in the low thousands, but had greater relevance than the numbers might suggest. They were often communally read, with the literate reading them aloud to the illiterate, with individuals pooling their financial resources to afford a joint subscription (Farid and Razif 2008, 284). Newspapers such as *Medan Moeslimin* and *Islam Bergerak* were representatives of a discourse that was not dogmatically class-based in a theoretical Marxist sense, but which articulated a shared sense of grievance on the part of Indies Muslims.

Misbach was by no means the only pious Muslim who supported the PKI. In the Javanese districts of Tegal and Ponorogo, Islamic Communist groups with tenuous connections to the PKI leadership existed under the leadership of Haji Adnan, and drew support from the *pesantren* students clustered in Ponogoro (McVey 1965, 174). Haji Datuk Batuah, an Islamic modernist reformist from West Sumatra, also joined the PKI and was primarily responsible for the spread Communism in West Sumatra; the celebrated nationalist poet Hamka wrote that Batuah had once told him that “his commitment to Communism was because of his responsibility as a Muslim” (Assyaukanie 2009, 42). Batuah commanded particular influence because he was high-born, a *haji* and a *penghulu adat*, in addition to being a PKI leader.¹¹

Along with Railway and Tram Workers Union (VSTP) activist Natar Zainuddin and Sumatra Tawalib teacher Djamaluddin Tamin, Batuah set up two Islamic Communist journals, *Djago! Djago!* (Up and at ‘em!) and *Pemandangan Islam* (Islamic Outlook), as well as an “International Debating Club” and a “Marxist Social Study Group” (McVey 1965, 175).¹² Even after Batuah’s arrest in 1923, the PKI’s development in Sumatra retained a strongly religious character closely aligned with the spread of Islamic modernism, free of the antagonism between the PKI and Muhammadiyah that persistently dogged their relations in Java (McVey 1965, 174–76).

Misbach’s activities attracted the attention of the colonial government, and he was arrested and imprisoned from 1919 to 1922. Upon his release and return to Surakarta in 1922, Misbach’s commitment to both Islam and Communism became increasingly explicit, leading ultimately to his split from Muhammadiyah and his joining the PKI. In a series of articles published in early 1922, Misbach’s cohorts at *Islam Bergerak* and *Sinar Hindia* criticized Muhammadiyah in the name of “true Islam,” on the grounds that Muhammadiyah’s political quietism was motivated by fear of the temporal authority of the Dutch resident, which amounted to the blasphemy of fearing the Dutch resident more than they feared God (McVey 1965, 254–55). Misbach himself made his split with Muhammadiyah public in his first published article since his return from prison, arguing in the October 15, 1922 issue of *Medan Moeslimin* that “... those who call themselves *mu’min* [the faithful]... must willingly put truth and courage into practice. This stance I strongly affirm, because I observe it deriving from the Quran” (Misbach 1922). He went on to force the resignation of the Muhammadiyah members active in *Medan Moeslimin* and *Islam Bergerak* in mid-October 1922, and joined the PKI as a propagandist at the March 1923 PKI congress in Bandung and Sukabumi. Misbach’s arguments anticipated later developments outside of his immediate locus of influence: from 1925-1926, Communist labor unions spread rapidly in Aceh before they were suppressed, while in Palembang, the PKI gained considerable popularity by preaching self-government under a Muslim ruler. In Batak areas such as Mandailing, the PKI even openly called for the establishment of an Islamic state (McVey 1965, 302).

However, Misbach continued to attend and speak at Sarekat Islam rallies from November 1921-January 1923, “urging the maintenance

of the unity [of Sarekat Islam and the PKI] ... and arguing that Communism was in the principle of Islam” (Shiraishi 1990, 261). Misbach worked hard to keep Sarekat Islam in alliance with the PKI precisely because he perceived Communist and Islamic goals as mutually compatible, and the PKI as one of the few parties willing to openly confront the colonial state. Misbach was not the only one arguing for unity and positing compatibility. In the March 20, 1923 issue of *Islam Bergerak*, one Soekirno argued that the charge of insulting religion being levelled at the PKI was simplistic. He also made a distinction between Communism as an ideology and Communists as disciplined party cadres; he asserted the right of individual Communists to choose whichever religion they wanted to adhere to (Soekirno 1923). Well after his split with Muhammadiyah, Misbach continued to frame his critique of the colonial state in terms of the oppressed *ummah* and the corruption of Islam. In the November 20, 1922 issue of *Islam Bergerak*, he argued that “Destruction of the people’s freedom also means destruction of Faith in Allah... Here I only take up the main points of the greed of Capitalism and Imperialism... our freedom is still shackled within the grip of capital” (Shiraishi 1990, 258).

Misbach established the PKI Surakarta branch in June 1923, drawing on the support of many former VSTP members who had been dismissed after the failure of the May 1923 VSTP strike in nearby Semarang, Madiun and Yogyakarta. Misbach’s hybrid discourse of Islam and Communism proved popular in that context. Misbach became the undisputed leader of the PKI in the areas surrounding Yogyakarta and Surakarta by the end of 1923, having built his support base largely independent of the PKI leadership (Shiraishi 1990, 271-274). He was sufficiently popular that PKI leaders – such as Darsono, who disapproved of Misbach’s invocation of *perang sabil* (holy war) – could not control him and were instead forced to incorporate the Surakarta branch of the PKI while allowing Misbach to remain its autonomous leader (Shiraishi 1990, 274). Even after his final arrest and exile in July 1924, Misbach continued to send letters to *Medan Moeslimin*, one of which listed the presence of and his reception by local Communists in 16 ports *en route* to his exile destination of Manokwari. Misbach was warmly welcomed in four ports by local Communists, and observed the presence of local Communists in three others (Shiraishi 1990, 284).¹³ Until his death in exile in 1926, Misbach would continue to

send his writings on Islam and Communism for publication in *Medan Moeslimin*, which gives us some idea of the pervasiveness and popularity of this conciliatory discourse (Shiraishi 1990, 285–98).

Medan Moeslimin and Islam Bergerak

Haji Misbach and his colleagues were deeply involved in publishing newspapers/journals, a novel outlet for the expression of *pergerakan* ideas and the venting of their frustrations. A consistent theme in their publications was the notion that Islam and Communism were organically intertwined. They did not differentiate between Islam and Communism's respective routes to the establishment of a just society, and they championed the protection of Indies Muslims' economic interests as coeval with the promotion of their spiritual interests. Two newspapers in particular stand out in this regard: *Medan Moeslimin* (founded 1915) and *Islam Bergerak* (founded 1917), both published through the 1920s.

Medan Moeslimin was a bi-weekly paper printed in Medan, North Sumatra, and consisted of a short Javanese section alongside a lengthier Indonesian one in each issue. It also printed letters from readers, and can reasonably be characterized as a forum for the discussion of *pergerakan* concerns. It also strongly reflected reformist Muslim concerns, typified by engagement with Western ideas concerning politics, religion and society. Anxiety about Islam's position *vis-à-vis* Christianity in the NEI was particularly evident in its pages. A series of articles from 1921 constitute a public debate over Islam's relationship with Christianity between one M.A. Hamid and one Dr. B.J. Esser, a missionary based in Poerbolinggo, Java. All of this public correspondence was published in the Indonesian section, and continued well into the first two issues of 1922 (Esser 1921; Hamid 1921).¹⁴ Other typical articles included expositions on the possibility of renewing the Caliphate, and updates on Ataturk's reforms in Turkey (Pengasah Hati 1922).¹⁵ Evidently, *Medan Moeslimin* was deeply immersed in an Islamic milieu, both reflecting and informing the concerns of Indies Muslims. Recurrent topics were Islam's position in relation to Christianity, debates over Islamic praxis, polygamy, anxiety about Christian proselytization, the progressive capacity of Islam (or lack thereof), and accusations of closed-mindedness/rigidity in thinking (*berfikir tetap*) on the part of Indies Muslims (Pengasah Hati 1922).

Medan Moeslimin even attracted the input of *pergerakan* activists who were not necessarily in agreement with Misbach. In 1925, the founder of Muhammadiyah and erstwhile advisor to Sarekat Islam, Ahmad Dahlan, contributed an article that explained and challenged the tenets of Wahhabism, despite his organization's antipathy toward Misbach's Marxist influences (Dahlan 1925). This corroborates Farid and Razif's characterization of *pergerakan* print culture as hybrid, eclectic, and resisting easy categorization (Farid and Razif 2008, 282).

While remaining embedded in a distinctly Islamic worldview, contributors were keen to develop Marxist-influenced critiques of Imperialism and Capitalism. In a 1918 article published in *Medan Moeslimin*, Misbach baldly stated that "Many wealthy Muslims do not care to fulfil the commandments of their religion. That is, they do not like to contribute their wealth to the strengthening of our Islamness" (Shiraishi 1990, 133). In doing so, Misbach was likely invoking *zakat*, and castigating Muslims for failing to honor their obligations. Later in the same article, Misbach asserted that "The government does not meddle in matters of religion. But we know that the Christian religion here in the Indies is being helped by some capitalism – not the government, but the capitalists. These capitalists get protection from the government. Isn't this an elegant conjuring trick?" (Shiraishi 1990, 134). Here, Misbach employed a mix of Islamic and Communist tropes. He emphasized social justice in Islam while castigating elites for not doing enough to support Islam. He combined this with a critique of a colonial state captured by Capitalist interests (which he located as the Christian Other to the Muslim self). According to Misbach, the colonial state enforced (Christian) Capitalist prerogatives at the expense of Muslim peasants/laborers, which exposed the hollowness of the colonial state's claim to be respectful of Islam. Misbach evoked a well-worn image of Islam under siege by Christianity, amplifying it by inserting the insidious roles of Capital and the colonial state in masking oppression.

In a similar vein, an article published in the January 1, 1923 edition of *Islam Bergerak*, then under Misbach's direct editorship, identified colonial Capitalism as the prime cause of the people's suffering. Its author, M. Siraj, used the term *orang ra'ijat* (*rakyat*, lit. people) liberally, a term often employed by Communists such as Tan Malaka to denote "the masses" rather than the more doctrinally orthodox *proletar*

(proletariat). He did so while couching his analysis in terms of the coming of a new age (*peredaran zaman*) – a concept that would have resonated with Islamic eschatology in the canonical *hadith* collections (Siraj 1923).¹⁶ The suggestive metaphor of an eschatological “turning of an age,” one explicitly linked to capitalist exploitation, is encapsulated in the following excerpt: “The livelihood of these same people begins to change, then the times change [as well]. Wherefore then does the life of the people suddenly become difficult and murky? The revolution of the Capitalists” (Siraj 1923). It went on to castigate Capitalists for buying up fertile fields to build factories, trade offices and infrastructure such as railways, trams, telegram and telephone lines on the lands which provided the most income (Siraj 1923). This perspective cast what colonial bureaucrats would have labelled “infrastructural development” and the “facilitation of commerce” as the facilitation of exploitation instead. Siraj specifically inveighed against *pembawaan barang-barang dagangan*, the transport of trade goods, a key aspect of the extractive colonial economy. Siraj’s critique was reactionary, one that evoked familiar eschatological and bucolic themes for Indies Muslims, but it was also a perspective that was expressed through the modern medium of the newspaper.

Of particular interest is a column on *tafsir* (Quranic exegesis) that featured in a 1921 issue of *Medan Moeslimin*, authored by Moedhiroel-chak. It quoted the Quranic *Sūrāt al-Baqarah*, and attempted to explain the meaning of “*menoesia itoe oemat jang satoe*” (humanity as a unified people/community), a phrase derived from Quran 2:143 and rendered in Bahasa Indonesia by the author. The author explained its meaning in a distinctly exhortative fashion, emphasizing the centrality of community and mutual aid, which chimed comfortably with Islamic precepts. He explained that it meant living as if all men were parts of the same body (*hidoep sebadan*), and always thinking about the lives of their fellows (Moedhiroel-chak 1921). He concluded that it was impossible to obtain perfection or eternal life without following the path of mutual assistance (*djalan tolong-menolong*). Intriguingly, “*djalan tolong-menolong*” appears with “*collectivisme*” in parentheses next to it. The use of a term with strong Marxist overtones, transliterated from Dutch rather than translated into a colloquial equivalent for mutual assistance and cooperation (such as *gotong royong*), suggests that the author deliberately linked Quranic understandings of social justice with

Marxist ideas. Collectivism was presented as the fulfilment of Quranic instructions to live in harmony and mutual support, subtly connecting Communist ideas to Islam by embedding them in distinctly religious vocabulary.

For all its Marxist influence, the fundamentally Islamic identity embraced by the editors and contributors of *Medan Moeslimin* was discernable in its stylized Arabic calligraphic imprimatur on the front page of every issue. The text was arranged in two concentric circles, and the inner circle of text was a stylized Arabic rendition of the *basmalah*, the phrase that prefaces each chapter of the Quran (with the exception of *sura* 9): “In the name of God the most gracious, the most merciful”. The outer layer of text was from *Sūrat al-Ṣāff*, which reads “And also (He will give you) another (blessing) which you love – help from God (against your enemies) and a near victory. And give glad tidings (O Muhammad) to the believers” (61:13). This Quranic verse is strongly associated with the martial and triumphant theme of Muhammad’s return to Mecca from Medina, a victory over his unbelieving enemies, and the foundation of a community of Muslims in Mecca.¹⁷ The fact that the editors of *Medan Moeslimin* chose to preface each issue with this calligraphic imprimatur was an affirmation of their Islamic identity, and their commitment to exploring issues of concern to Muslim readers. Moreover, the inclusion of *Sūrat al-Ṣāff* invoked the militant tone of Muhammad’s triumph over his enemies, and signaled the newspaper’s expectation of the eventual victory of Islam against the forces arraigned against it, a theme that was consistently evident in articles penned by Haji Misbach.

Islam Bergerak was a dual-language paper cut from the same cloth: founded in 1917, it also had Javanese and Indonesian sections, and mixed the icons and language of Islam and Western modernity. The cover page of each issue was headed by a striking image. The crescent and star of Islam were nestled in a dense backdrop containing a globe, a howitzer, a cannon, a cavalry sabre, and drums. The inclusion of Western military iconography, associated with colonial military might and political dominance, is suggestive of an attempt to associate Islam with these symbols of power, or perhaps even to stress Islam’s persistence and continued relevance in the face of military and political domination. Another expression of this “modernizing” impulse can be found in an *Islam Bergerak* article from the January 1st, 1923 edition,

entitled “*Verslag Pendek dari Openbare Openlucht Vergadering S. I. Pekalongan,*” literally “Short report from the public meeting of Sarekat Islam in Pekalongan, in both Dutch and Indonesian” (*Verslag Pendek dari Openbare Openlucht Vergadering S. I. Pekalongan 1932*). *Islam Bergerak* was unflinching in its enthusiasm for these novel forms of political activity: it prominently advertised PKI public rallies, with the March 10, 1923 edition carrying an announcement listing the venues, dates and times of various PKI meetings in Bandung and Sukabumi.¹⁸



Figure 1: Medan Moeslimin, January 1, 1925.



Figure 2: Islam Bergerak, March 20, 1923.

“*Verslag Pendek*” described a Sarekat Islam meeting that had occurred from 23-24 December 1922, and illustrated the very public circulation of conciliatory discourses within Sarekat Islam itself, on the eve of its expulsion of PKI members. S. Hardjowijoto, a representative

of Sarekat Islam's Semarang branch and known to be closely aligned with the PKI, was reported as having publicly clarified why he considered himself both a Muslim and a Communist (*seorang koeminist yang beragama Islam*) (Verslag Pendek dari Openbare Openlucht Vergadering S. I. Pekalongan 1932). He explained that Communism was a form of progressive, dynamic knowledge (*ilmoe bergerak*) that could oppose capitalistic power, and that capitalist regulations had caused multiple kinds of hardship for humanity (Verslag Pendek dari Openbare Openlucht Vergadering S. I. Pekalongan 1932). Tellingly, he used the word *ilmu* to characterize Communism, since *ilmu* is an Arabic loan word that is strongly associated with various forms of Islamic knowledge. Hardjowijoto went on to argue that the final goal of Communism was the elimination of poverty, which was also a key goal of religious people, especially given the squalor afflicting the masses in the Indies; he described those who said that Communism clashed with religion as making a big mistake (Verslag Pendek dari Openbare Openlucht Vergadering S. I. Pekalongan 1932).¹⁹ As with many of his contemporaries, Hardjowijoto's speech embodied specific themes: he emphasized Islam's social justice component, alongside the need for unity between Muslims and Communists: "...let our movement become one, and no longer have disputes moving forward!" (*Ibid.*).

Misbach in Exile: "Islamisme dan Kommunisme"

Misbach's most candid conciliation of Islam and Communism emerged in a series of articles entitled "*Islamisme dan Kommunisme*," published in instalments during the first three months of 1925, which he wrote from exile in Manokwari (Misbach 1925a). The opening instalment was published in the January 1, 1925 issue of *Medan Moeslimin*, which prominently displayed the Communist visual tropes: a stylized portrait of Misbach in his trademark white collared shirt and turban was flanked by a hammer and a sickle, taking pride of place on the cover page. Misbach's portrait was located under the stylized Jawi (Malay written in Arabic script) logo of *Medan Moeslimin*, an apt visual metaphor for the confluence of Islam and Communism (Misbach 1925a, 1).²⁰

In the first article of this series, Misbach openly criticized Muhammadiyah and Sarekat Islam, singling out the Sarekat Islam leader Tjokroaminoto, for what he perceived to be selective implementation

of only those Islamic precepts that suited their agendas. He called this being Muslim from “above the lip only” (*di atas bibir sadja*) – accusing them of merely mouthing piety, but avoiding pious actions (Misbach 1925a, 4). In stronger language yet, he went on to associate coming under the influence of Capitalism with loving the will of Satan, and declared that those who thought Islam and Communism incompatible were either not true Muslims, or had not yet understood the true position of Islam (Misbach 1925a).

Evidently, Misbach’s critiques were framed in religious terms, unlike those of other Communists who merely emphasized the distinction between religion and ideology (and thus the freedom to commit oneself to both Islam and Communism). He stressed both the compatibility of Islam and Communism as well as Indies Muslims’ solidarity with the oppressed around the world. In the same article, he mentioned the need to bury strife/tribulation (*fitnah-fitnah*, a loan word from Arabic that had strong associations with discord within the Muslim community) amongst the “People’s Movement” (*pergerakan rakyat*). Tellingly, he also highlighted the necessity of building the “human spirit” (*djiwa manoesia*) that had already been achieved in Europe; this hints at the perceived solidarity between Indies Muslims and the European working class, both being on the same trajectory toward liberating themselves from Capitalism (Misbach 1925a).

In “*Islamisme dan Kommunisme*”, Misbach summarized his take on the causes of disorder in the world. He argued that global poverty was caused by Capitalism, because it was a form of knowledge that searched for profit in conjunction with obtaining the rights of ownership for a limited few only. He ended this section with the clarion call *koeboerlah kapitalisme!* (bury Capitalism!) (Misbach 1925a). Misbach claimed that the age of Capitalism had corrupted people’s morality and humanity even as it had allowed them to attain elevated knowledge (Misbach 1925a).²¹ Moreover, Misbach’s arguments mixed an economic critique of Capitalism with a keen awareness of its morally deleterious effects – his critique was both materialist and spiritual. He argued that Capitalists tended to produce surplus goods, more than the population actually needed, ultimately resulting in unemployment for hundreds of workers. This, according to Misbach, had the consequent effects of worsening the corruption of humanity and encouraging people to violate religious prohibitions (presumably out of poverty) (Misbach

1925a, 6). He accused Capitalists of preventing their employees, like the 60,000 or so railway and tram workers of Java, from properly observing the tenets of Islam, such as the five daily prayers and fasting. This was something workers could not militate against without risking starvation, since they had to “chase sustenance and fill their bellies” (Misbach 1925a, 6).

More perceptively, Misbach highlighted the relationship between Capitalism and colonization, and identified the destructive effects of an extractive colonial economy that sold processed goods to a captive market: he pointed out that the factory-made products of industrial Capitalism were seemingly “refined in shape and cheap in price,” but they ultimately killed local businesses and deepened squalor in a colonized country over time (Misbach 1925a, 6). His language was as militant as the iconic calligraphy of the newspaper’s front page; he spoke of Capitalist “market colonialism” being prone to causing “murder” and “war” between the Capitalists and the oppressed, and in this war it was not the Capitalists who would be the “cannon fodder” and “bombs,” but the destitute populace who would be victims (Misbach 1925a, 6).

Despite drawing heavily on (his interpretations of) Marx in “*Islamisme dan Kommunisme*”, Misbach’s criticism was not rooted in materialism alone, but in a spiritual idiom familiar to Muslim readers. He argued that the wickedness of Capitalism lay in its tendency to make men hate each other, and make war upon each other (Misbach 1925a, 7). Here, Misbach again invoked the specter of *fitnah*, strife or tribulation within the *ummah*, which is often warned against in the Quran and *hadith*. He also inveighed against the dehumanizing effects of Capitalism in spiritual terms: Capitalism made money the principal goal of humanity, and it blinded men to their humanity to the extent that their humanity, bodies and souls were submitted to the pursuit of money (Misbach 1925a, 7). More directly, Capitalism was castigated for twisting each religion to its own devices (*memoetar masing-masing agama mendjadi perkakasnja*). Unlike Marx’s characterization of religion as the opiate of the masses, Misbach located the true danger of Capitalism in its corruption of Islamic praxis (Misbach 1925a, 7).

Moreover, distinctly Muslim concerns were never neglected in favor of political issues. *Medan Moeslimin*’s editors chose to preface the first of the “*Islamisme dan Kommunisme*” articles with another, shorter article, penned by Misbach as well, which gives the reader a sense of

the priorities of the newspaper and those of Misbach himself. This shorter article takes pride of place on the front page of that issue, and is entitled “*Perjalanan ke Makah-Madinah*” (Journey to Mecca and Medinah), a continuation of a series that had previously appeared in issue 21 of 1924. The editorial decision to give pride of place to this account speaks clearly of the priorities of *Medan Moeslimin*: while it critiqued Capitalism virulently, it did so from an Islamic modernist position which prioritized issues of interest to Muslims, such as the *haji*, in an era that saw unprecedented opportunities and decreasing costs for performing the *haji* for Indies Muslims (Tantri 2013, 125).

In his account of his travels to Medinah, Misbach recounted his own experience of having his belongings stolen while he slept at night. Characteristically, he didn’t miss the opportunity to identify Capitalism as the root cause of this unpleasant experience: in an italicized editorial insert, he explained that Capitalism, whose “poisonous fruits” have afflicted many places, had “attacked” thousands of Muslims in the *hejaz*, and had “flooded” them with squalor, causing them to lose heart and become thieves, highwaymen, robbers, and charlatans (Misbach 1925b). He again concluded that Muslims must “bury Capitalism” (Misbach 1925b). While emphasizing Muslims’ solidarity with the other victims of capitalism throughout the world, Misbach was especially outraged at how Capitalism had corrupted the heartland of Islam, the *hejaz*; his identification with the *ummah* was evident in the way he took particular umbrage at Capitalism’s purported penetration of the most sacred of Islamic experiences.

Tjokroaminoto’s Riposte: *Islam and Socialism*

Tjokroaminoto was the foremost *pergerakan* leader and head of Sarekat Islam until the 1926-1927 uprisings, as well as member of the “loyalist opposition” within the Volksraad from 1918 onward. His personal prestige was high, though his ability to control the far-flung and independent-minded branches of Sarekat Islam was limited. He served as mentor to some of the most prominent *pergerakan* activists, including Soekarno, the pious Muslim nationalist Kartosuwiryo, and the Communist leaders Alimin and Musso (Hering 2002, 24). Incidentally, this provides a sense of the personal relationships and networks that bound *pergerakan* activists together, and justifies considering their intellectual output as a unified discursive field. Under

Tjokroaminoto's tutelage, these individuals all engaged with Islam and Communism in some way, though they eventually came to disparate conclusions. Tjokroaminoto himself engaged with Communist and Socialist ideas in his published work, which is unsurprising given Sarekat Islam's symbiotic relationship with the PKI from the late 1910s and early 1920s.

Significantly, Tjokroaminoto's *Islam dan Sosialisme* (Islam and Socialism) was published in 1924, after the split between the PKI and the Sarekat Islam had been made explicit. Tjokroaminoto's book evinces the continuing relevance of Socialist ideas and goals in an organization whose core identity was Islamic. Following the split, Sarekat Islam needed to reassert its legitimacy and mass appeal vis-à-vis the more politically active PKI, which maintained close connections with labor unions and helped facilitate strikes, or at least lent the unions the backing of the party. Thus, *Islam dan Sosialisme* was probably also an attempt to compete for the loyalties of PKI party cadres who had until recently been simultaneous members of Sarekat Islam, and to consolidate the support of remaining Sarekat Islam members by reassuring them of Sarekat Islam's continued relevance in serving their interests. This was best done by demonstrating the progressiveness of Tjokroaminoto's political positions. Chiara Formichi suggests that unlike Soekarno, Tjokroaminoto tended to identify with Socialism as a powerful international movement with potential source of support for upholding Indonesian Muslims' interests (Formichi 2010, 128). Nevertheless, *Islam dan Sosialisme* amounted to an implicit admission of the continuing appeal of Marxist ideas, and the recognition that Socialism, when invoked within an Islamic framework, was a powerful political force.

This slim volume was published some years after the establishment of the Third International in 1919, by which time Socialism and Communism had begun to differentiate themselves more clearly, and the Third International had begun openly advocating a Bolshevik-style seizure of power via a revolutionary vanguard instead of incremental change. By avoiding the word "Communism," Tjokroaminoto was asserting the viability of Islam as a modern political ideology which shared many of the same goals as the Communists, but without the implication of revolutionary violence that would surely have invited suppression by the colonial authorities – a position very much in keeping with his projected image as leader of the loyal opposition

(Shiraishi 1990, 85). Given that Tjokroaminoto had a seat on the Volksraad and had previously been detained for 9 months in 1919 on the suspicion of inciting revolt (the *Afdeeling B* affair), this seems a plausible interpretation of *Islam dan Sosialisme* (McVey 1965, 382).

Tjokroaminoto made a concerted attempt to reconcile Islam and Socialism, starting from an essentially Islamic position; the thrust of his book was that Islam embodied the principles of Socialism, and therefore a good Muslim could also be a good Socialist (Tjokroaminoto 1924, 3). In that sense, *Islam dan Sosialisme* was in the vein of modernist Islamic discourse, and sought to justify adapting powerful new ideologies from Europe for an Indonesian context. After opening with a brief introduction to the core ideas of Socialism (“*Apakah Sosialisme Itu?*”) chapters were entitled “Sosialisme dalam Islam” (Socialism in Islam, rather than Socialism and Islam), “Sosialisme Nabi Muhammad” (the Socialism of the Prophet Muhammad), “Sahabat-sahabat Nabi Muhammad yang bersifat Sosialis” (The companions of the Prophet Muhammad who exhibited Socialist qualities), “Contoh-contoh Sosialisme berdasar Islam” (examples of Socialism based on Islam), and “Agama dan Sosialisme” (Religion and Socialism) (Tjokroaminoto 1924).

Tjokroaminoto argued that a variety of interpretations of Socialism existed, and that the Socialism he supported was one founded on the principles of pure Islam (*[Sosialisme] yang berdasar kepada azas-azas Islam belaka*) (Tjokroaminoto 1924, 5). He even went so far as to argue that the Islamic *ummah* had the responsibility of implementing this version of Socialism (Tjokroaminoto 1924). Evidently, Tjokroaminoto was attempting to formulate Socialism within an Islamic intellectual framework and through an Islamic idiom, in order to showcase the continuing relevance of Islam as a holistic way of life in a rapidly-changing colonial society molded by Capital. He even argued that the aims of Socialism had been evident in Islam for the past thirteen centuries, and thus Socialism could not be said to have arisen entirely from European influence (Tjokroaminoto 1924, 8). However, Tjokroaminoto also made a point of introducing the ideas of key thinkers within the Marxist canon, from Feuerbach and Hegel to Marx and Engels, liberally sprinkling the text with Dutch phrases to explain important but yet-unfamiliar concepts to his intended audience (Tjokroaminoto 1924, 19–21). Tjokroaminoto might even have deliberately juxtaposed his piety alongside his lucid exposition of Marxist ideas in order to

showcase his capacity for philosophy and theory, using this to further legitimize his vision of modernist Islam. This was encapsulated in his argument that being a Muslim was better, nobler and more beautiful than adhering to any ideology, except for a Socialism based on Islam (Tjokroaminoto 1924, 23).

Tjokroaminoto was explicit about the similarities between Islam and Socialism, particularly in relation to Capitalism. For example, he specifically condemned usury, identified interest with Capitalism, and went so far as to say that “Islam prevents Capitalist practices [like usury], combats Capitalism at its source, and destroys its roots” (Tjokroaminoto 1924, 63). To show the historical concordance of Socialist principles and Islam, Tjokroaminoto jumped between temporally and geographically disparate times and places to find relevant examples. In a section entitled “Democratic feeling in Muslim Autocracy”, he praised the reign of the autocratic Ottoman Sultan Abdul Hamid II for his industrialization of the Ottoman economy and the provision of jobs to orphans and the poor (Tjokroaminoto 1924, 79). Eclectically characterizing Abdul Hamid’s government as an Islamic Socialist-Autocracy, Tjokroaminoto likened him to the renowned 8th century Islamic military leader and Companion of the Prophet, Khalid ibn al-Walid, to whom he attributed the saying “... I am only discharging my obligation to God... other than that I have no authority or power over [my soldiers]!” (Tjokroaminoto 1924, 79).

The implication was that temporal authority, such as the purportedly Socialist government of Abdul Hamid II, was intimately linked to spiritual authority, and such authority could only be derived from Islam. This selective retelling of history was precisely the same exercise that Tan Malaka was engaged in, part of process of counter-education that Farid and Razif describe (Farid and Razif 2008, 285). Tjokroaminoto drew deeply on the shared cultural memory of an Islamic past familiar to his readers, as well as contemporary models of modernity. In doing so, he fused them into a cocktail that invoked the imagined community of the *ummah* past and the modernist present simultaneously, in order to enhance the appeal of his political message.

Soekarno the Conciliator: *Nationalism, Islam and Marxism*

As the first president of independent Indonesia, Soekarno requires little introduction. In the 1920s, however, he was a promising *pergerakan*

activist closely associated with Tjokroaminoto, and yet the achieve the paramouncy among the *pergerakan* he would later attain through non-cooperation in the 1930s. Soekarno's *Nationalism, Islam and Marxism* was published in 1926, a few years after the effective disintegration of Sarekat Islam. It was therefore aimed at consensus-building, an attempt to bridge the gulf between different *pergerakan* factions which Soekarno felt had crystallized into three major *aliran* (lit. streams): Islamic, Communist and Nationalist. It was published in the Jakarta *pergerakan* magazine *Suluh Indonesia Muda* in the hope that *pergerakan* factions could be persuaded to cooperate (Soekarno 1970, 17).

This impulse towards unity was typical of Soekarno, who in the 1930s would plough his efforts into forging a broad-based (but short-lived) *pergerakan* coalition, the Association of Political Organizations of the Indonesian People (PPPKI). Soekarno's article was an attempt to portray Islam and Communism as equally essential components within a broader nationalist framework. While Soekarno's essay can be reasonably read as a pragmatic attempt to exert moral authority over his rivals, it can also be understood as the idealistic expression of the young Soekarno's hope that Islam and Communism could work together to achieve what he saw as their similar goals. This idealism was hinted at in the hyperbole deployed by Soekarno: "... [The parties] each have their own spirit of Nationalism, Islam or Marxism. Can these spirits work together in a colonial system to form one Great Spirit, the Spirit of Unity?" (Soekarno 1970, 38).

Soekarno flaunted his familiarity with Marxist theory, stressing in particular the "unity of historical experience" shared by all factions "for hundreds of years", and therefore their indissoluble identity as a *bangsa* (people), which presumably overrode considerations of ideology or religion (Soekarno 1970, 40). To support his argument for unity, Soekarno invoked positive examples of cooperation such as Gandhi's support for the Pan-Islamic *khilāfah* movement, and the united front formed by the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) and the Kuomintang, alongside negative examples where the lack of cooperation between factions had undermined nationalist objectives, as in the case of the Hindu nationalist organization Arya Samaj alienating Indian Muslims (Soekarno 1970, 40, 42). Knowing full well that that Islamic political movements like Sarekat Islam were intimately related to Islamic modernism, Soekarno also appealed to their pillars of legitimacy,

quoting liberally from famous Muslim reformers such as Jamal al-Din al-Afghani, Mohammad Abduh, as well as various Ottoman and Egyptian Islamic reformers and nationalists (Soekarno 1970, 44–49). Citing the experiences of both Communist and religious movements as learning opportunities for the *pergerakan*, Soekarno demonstrated the cosmopolitan outlook of a *pergerakan* that paid close attention to developments in India and China. In discussing these movements in relation to one another, Soekarno also suggested his belief in their basic ontological similarity: in the context of anti-colonial resistance, the *khilāfah* movement was no less relevant an analogue to the *pergerakan* than the CCP.

More explicitly, Soekarno stressed the concordance of Islam and Marxism over issues like *zakāh* and *ribāʿ*, and evinced Tjokroaminoto's influence on him by stating that "Islam is essentially socialistic" (Soekarno 1970, 50). Soekarno quoted liberally from the Quran, identifying many points of agreement between Islam and Communism. Citing *Sūrat al-Imrān* (3:130) to support his arguments, Soekarno argued that "... by combating surplus value, Marxists combat the very roots of Capitalism... usury is basically no different from what the Marxists view as surplus value" (Soekarno 1970, 51).²² In the same vein, Soekarno argued that "The 'fanatical' Moslem, who is hostile to the Marxist movement... does not understand that true Islam, like Marxism, forbids the capitalistic hoarding of wealth for selfish ends. He forgets the verse in the Quran: 'those who treasure up gold and silver, and do not expand them in the way of God, give them the good tidings of painful chastisement!'" [Quran 9:34] (Soekarno 1970, 51).

Soekarno also emphasized that Marxism had made an important intellectual contribution to the critique of colonialism, what he identified as historical rather than philosophical materialism, which had helped Muslims understand the true nature of colonialism (Soekarno 1970, 54). Speaking to his Communist readers, Soekarno rejected doctrinaire Communist atheism: "Does not Marxism itself teach that Socialism can only be fully realized when all the major states have been 'socialized'? Doesn't the present situation differ radically from the pre-conditions required for the fulfilment of Marxist goals?" (Soekarno 1970, 58). Arguing that "contemporary Marxist tactics are different from those of the past," Soekarno proclaimed that he "favored no side," and wanted only "unity and friendship between all

our different movements” (Soekarno 1970, 58). Finally, stressing the differences between church-state relations in European and Indonesian contexts, Soekarno capped his exhortation to the Communists with “... Therefore, if Marxists will remind themselves of the differences between the churches in Europe and Islam in Indonesia, they will surely stretch out their hands and say: ‘Brother, let us be one.’” (Soekarno 1970, 58). Soekarno’s *Nationalism, Islam and Marxism* constituted a rhetorically persuasive and emotionally-charged attempt to unite the *pergerakan*, based on a genuine conviction that Islam and Communism were similar and compatible.

Conclusion: Conciliatory Discourses in Action

Thus far, this paper has focused on conciliatory discourses produced by relatively privileged and educated voices. By way of conclusion, this section explores the degree to which such discourses shaped the political views of ordinary participants in the 1926-1927 uprisings in Java and Sumatra. While recognizing the limitations of the available sources, this section explores the complex dynamics of how Islamic and Communist ideas were intertwined “on the ground,” by examining government-commissioned reports explaining participants’ motivations in West Sumatra, and ethnographic data collected by Michael C. Williams on the uprising’s participants in Banten, Java.

Islam constituted the medium through which anti-colonial resistance was rationalized and justified, while the PKI served as the most effective vehicle for mobilizing resistance to the colonial state. This confluence made sense in the context of economic precarity: the expansion of plantation monoculture, as well as the increased burden of taxation and labor obligations, combined to incite passionate opposition to colonial economic and political structures. The colonial government requisitioned up to 10% of the annual rice harvest in Banten in the late 1910s, fueling peasant discontent (Williams 1990, 128). Similarly, in West Sumatra in the 1920s, a tax on family homes was introduced, alongside a delimitation of the use of woodlands and the projected introduction of a new land tax (Schrieke 1960, 99). In the context of severe hardship with few avenues for redress, the PKI increasingly seemed like the most effective vehicle for mounting resistance. As early as 1919, the PKI leader Semaun spoke against the rice requisitioning at a public rally in Banten attended by 3,000 people, but the central

PKI leadership was wrong-footed by the upsurge in popular discontent, and unable to fully control its affiliates in the epicenters of the uprising. (Williams 1990, 4, 12). In order for the PKI and its ideology to be rendered meaningful to participants, Communist ideas were adapted to fit within an Islamic worldview. Participants drew on the organization and mystique of the PKI to gather support for the dangerous enterprise of revolt, while retaining distinctly Islamic rhetoric to justify their actions throughout.

During the mid-1910s, North Banten had been a stronghold of Sarekat Islam. The loci of authority there had remained distinctly traditional, with the leadership of Sarekat Islam branches usually dominated by local *‘ulamā’*, traders and minor nobility (Williams 1990, 118–23). These same leaders came to dominate local PKI leadership. They maintained their status and derived their legitimacy from their identity as *kiai*, *‘ulamā’* or nobles while becoming local PKI leaders. As the uprisings gained momentum, they invoked their traditional authority alongside the PKI’s anti-colonial message to mobilize resistance (Gobee and Sumitro 1960, 40, 61. 98). Unsurprisingly, part of the rationalization for anti-colonial resistance provided by these leaders was that working for the colonial state as *penghulu*, or within the *pangreh praja* (the native civil service), was *haram* (not permitted) because it constituted aiding the infidel enemy of Islam (Williams 1990, 122).

This distinctly Islamic idiom of opposition to infidel occupation was a recurring theme, and dominated how Bantense resistance to the Dutch was articulated. This echoed the Bantinese *‘ulamā’*’s continued support for PKI leaders Alimin and Musso when the PKI formally split from Sarekat Islam in 1923. Rather than close ranks with their co-religionists, the Bantanese *‘ulamā’* who dominated the upper echelons of the local Sarekat Islam leadership castigated Tjokroaminoto and the Sarekat Islam for being too passive and cooperative. Instead, they demanded that Alimin and Musso replace Tjokroaminoto as the leaders of Sarekat Islam instead of being expelled (McVey 1965, 303). In the words of a participant interviewed by Williams in Banten, “The PKI was the only organization willing to fight for independence. This we respected” (Williams 1990, 182).

The Governor General’s Report of January 1927, an analysis of the uprisings submitted to the Ministry of Colonies, also highlights

the role of Islam in the uprisings in other parts of Java. Chapter seven of the report, entitled “The Mohammedan Religion in the Service of Communist Propaganda,” cited a PKI pamphlet authored by Tan Malaka in 1926 entitled *Semangat Moeda* (The Spirit of Youth): “... recommended in this pamphlet is the making of propaganda by means of religion in Surakarta, Djogjakarta, Achin and Bandjermasin, among other regions” (Benda and McVey 1960). The report went on to claim that (unnamed) PKI leaders had “taken this advice to heart,” and recognized that “... Although as a Communist one is inwardly not religious... it is nevertheless of importance, and even vital for the expansion of Communism, that one should pretend to believe in the purity and sublimity of religion” (Benda and McVey 1960).

The Dutch security apparatus interpreted this cynically, reading it as evidence of Communist manipulation of credulous, quiescent rural Muslims, but *Semangat Moeda* is thematically consistent with the rest of Tan Malaka’s writings. Tan Malaka recognized that revolution was only possible through broad-based unity, thus Communism would have to reconcile itself to different religions and communities. *Semangat Moeda* explicitly stated that Sarekat Rakyat (and by extension, PKI) members could be from any caste, any profession, and any religion, whether Islam, Christianity or Confucianism, as long as they hated Imperialist oppression and opposed the Dutch (Malaka 2015, 72). *Semangat Moeda* also clearly showed Tan Malaka’s acceptance of the paradigmatic status of Islamic identity, and the importance of invoking that identity to mobilize anti-colonial resistance. In it, he argued that the sheer diversity of the NEI allowed the Dutch to divide and conquer, pitting Java against Sumatra against Menado against Ambon, even though all were part of the same Muslim community (*sama rakyat Islam*) (Malaka 2015, 85).

On the West Coast of Sumatra, the PKI was also able to enlist the support of pious Muslims. The base of PKI power in Padang Panjang lay in the modernist religious schools, with many younger teachers and students comfortable in their commitment to Islam and simultaneous support for the PKI (Kahin 1996, 22). This was particularly true of pupils of a local network of modernist Islamic school, Sumatra Tawalib, who played a significant role in the uprisings, even after their leaders were detained by colonial authorities in 1925 (Schrieke 1960, 100). Similarly, the PKI leadership in Silungkang, another West Sumatran

city, was comprised primarily of local religious leaders and the merchant class, who agitated against the paramouncy of the collaborationist high nobility, and adopted the PKI slogan of *sama rasa sama rata* (same level, same feeling) with gusto (Schrieke 1960, 100). Like Tan Malaka, PKI members in West Sumatra tended to articulate its conciliation with Islam in terms of a lack of conflict between religion and ideology, arguing that one's religious and political affiliations were separate issues. This was also the case in Banten: in his sociological "autopsy" of the uprisings submitted to the colonial government in 1929, Dutch Sociologist B. Schrieke stated that "It was explained [by participants Schrieke interviewed] that Communism had nothing to do with nationality or religion, but that it rather was a science like medicine, the technical sciences etc." (Schrieke 1960, 102–3). Similarly, a PKI leaflet printed in the West Coast of Sumatra and distributed in the Minangkabau interior in 1926 cast resistance to the colonial state in an overwhelmingly Islamic idiom, and stressed the relevance of Communism to Islam, using a hodgepodge of Communist and Islamic imagery: "The Communists really do desire what is right, namely, that religion, *adat*, and prosperity should all be improved... Has not Allah said, 'Do not obey the commands of the *kafir* [infidels]?'... Our *adat*, which used to govern us... have been ruined by the government and the capitalists" (Schrieke 1955, 155).

As early as 1923, West Sumatran newspapers such as *Pemandangan Islam*, edited by the Sumatra Tawalib graduate and PKI leader Haji Datuk Batuah, argued for a reconciliation of the "science of the regulation of the community [Communism] for the benefit of the masses living in misery and poverty," which would serve the "intentions and the requirements of the true Islamic faith!" (Schrieke 1955, 103). Admittedly, this was not a seamless narrative of compatibility: both *Pemandangan Islam* and the PKI organ *Het Vrije Woord* carried articles condemning nationalism and the Pan-Islamic movement as indulging ethnic chauvinism. However, these same publications also printed articles on the desirability of cooperation between PKI and Sarekat Islam. *Het Vrije Woord* went so far as to identify Sarekat Islam as the only organization the PKI would cooperate with, and argued that Communist political ideology was in full agreement with the postulates of Islam in the 20th century; Capitalism was castigated for pursuing "unclean aims at odds with the teachings of Islam," and Muslims were

“enjoined to fight for freedom in accordance with the prescriptions of the Quran (Schrieke 1955, 103). Interestingly, Schrieke also noted that the word for Capitalism was translated by PKI publications into Minangkabau as *kapisetali*; *kapi* being the Minangkabau equivalent of *kāfir* (unbeliever), while *setali* referred to the Dutch 25-cent piece. This portmanteau embodied “feelings against the unbelievers, the *kapi*, and the feelings against... the tax-demanding government” (Schrieke 1955, 156–57). This theorized etymology is hard to verify, but it is plausible when read in the broader context of conciliatory discourses circulating in West Sumatra.

Rather than recasting the four *pergerakan* activists canvassed here as “Islamic Communists,” the point of this paper has been to show that Islam and Communism were both integral elements of *pergerakan* discourse, and that many prominent activists were concerned with how to conciliate them. Clearly, significant numbers of Communists and politically-engaged Muslims perceived a genuine concordance between their religion and ideology; they also pragmatically recognized that engaging either Islam or Communism was politically fruitful. Both at the level of *pergerakan* activists who theorized conciliation in print, and the motivations of participants in the 1926-1927 uprisings, Islam and Communism were not inimical to one another. While counter-vailing forces did exist, Islam and Communism proved a potent combination when invoked in opposition to the colonial state. For many Muslims, whether they were *pergerakan* activists or ordinary participants in the uprisings, Communism appeared as the best vehicle for fulfilling their religious obligations to create and maintain an equitable society. For others, personal faith and political ideology were perceived as distinct and thus non-contradictory.

Endnotes

1. The *pergerakan* constituted a wide range of political actors of diverse ideological backgrounds, whose political activism ranged from agitating for independence to fostering the 'national awakening' of an Indonesian nation. What united them was their conviction of both the possibility and necessity of shaping a distinctly Indonesian future.
2. The Comintern officially adopted a united front strategy (of which the PKI was an adherent) advocating cooperation with other anti-colonial forces, from 1920-1927.
3. The ISDV would eventually be reorganized as The League of Communists in the Indies (*Perserikatan Komunis di Hindia*, PKH) in May 1920, the first Asian member of the Second International, and subsequently change its name to the Communist Party of Indonesia (*Partai Komunis Indonesia*, PKI) in 1924.
4. The epithet *kiai* refers to an Islamic religious teacher in Java, usually a member of a scholarly lineage and the head instructor of a *pesantren*, a traditional Islamic boarding school.
5. *Tabligh* refers to Islamic gatherings with the aim of spreading the message of Islam and promoting piety through scripture reading, discussion, *dhikr*, and other practices. See Esposito (n.d.). The Sarekat Rakyat (People's Associations) were affiliated with the PKI, and had grown out of the 'red' Sarekat Islam branches that were more amenable to the leadership of PKI members such as Semaun, rather than the more quietist Central Sarekat Islam headed by Tjokroaminoto.
6. Mas Marco Kartodikromo was a pioneering Indonesian journalist and founding president of the *Inlandsche Journalisten Bond* (IJB, League of Native Journalists), who later became a prominent PKI organizer in habkarta during the mid-1920s.
7. Pan-Islamism here refers to the early 20th century *khilāfah* movement, which aimed to mobilise Muslim support for the Ottoman Empire as the heir to the classical Islamic Caliphate. It resonated particularly with Muslim Indians and attracted the attention of Islamic communities in South Africa and the NEI as well. For more information on the relevance of the movement to the East Indies, see Chiara Formichi (2010, 125–46).
8. All Quranic quotations drawn from *The Noble Quran* (2012).
9. Bahasa Indonesia is based on Malay, the mercantile *lingua franca* of the linguistically-diverse Malay Archipelago, which was adopted in a simplified form by the Dutch colonial state as a language of colonial administration. The Dutch also sought to "develop" Malay as part of their "civilizing mission," and sponsored publication of non-threatening Malay literature through the *Balai Pustaka* (Bureau of Literature).
10. The Insulinde was the successor to the Eurasian-dominated radical nationalist party, the *Indische Partij*, and agitated for an independent Indonesia led by Eurasian elites.
11. *Pengbulu adat* refers to a community leader with authority to interpret and enforce customary laws.
12. The *Vereniging van Spoor-en Tramwegpersoneel* (VSTP) was founded in Semarang in 1908, and had strong links with the ISDV/PKI from its inception. Key PKI leaders like Semaun began their careers as unionists in the VSTP. The Sumatra Tawalib network of modernist Islamic schools was founded in 1919, and combined instruction in both religious and secular subjects. Educational institutions were an integral part of the modernist Islamic revival in the NEI, of which the best-known example is Muhammadiyah's network of schools. For more on the Sumatra Tawalib schools, see Abdullah (1971, 34–40).
13. Interestingly, the four ports where Misbach was warmly welcomed were the Eastern Islands of Ambon, Makassar, Ternate, and Sanomo, all outside of the traditional strongholds of the PKI in Java and Sumatra. Evidently, Misbach's invocation of Islam

- alongside Communism, and his willingness to confront authority, had made him popular even far from home.
14. For information on Esser, see Zwemer (1917, 217).
 15. For more on the relationship between the Khilafat movement, Atatürk's reforms, and Indies Muslims, see Formichi (2012, 23–25).
 16. Of the canonical *ḥadīth* collections, both *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim* and *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī* identify minor signs of the impending judgement that are reminiscent of the effects of Capitalism. For example, such minor signs include the spread of the practice of *ribā'* (usury) and the earning of money through *ḥaram* (forbidden) means.
 17. Translations and interpretations courtesy of Professor Hamza Zafer, Department of Near Eastern Languages and Civilizations, University of Washington.
 18. This particular meeting lasted until 12:30 at night, according to the article, and may be some indication of the popularity this novel form of association. For more on political rallies as spectacle, with parallels to the traditional *wayang*, see Shiraishi (1990, 65–66).
 19. While Hardjowijoto generally uses the term "*agama*" (religion) in this article, he ends off his speech by saying "Although I am a Communist, I also will fulfil the requirements of our religion, Islam"; ultimately, he leaves no doubt as to which religion he is referring to throughout his speech.
 20. See Figure 1.
 21. Interestingly, Misbach used the English word "moral" rather than the Dutch *moreel*, and provides a vernacular translation in parenthesis, i.e. *Budi*, which denotes mind or character. Similarly, Misbach categorized Capitalism as a kind of *ilmu* (knowledge, an Arabic loan-word), which has strong associations with both the formalized and mystical forms of Islamic learning. This suggests that these early articulations of Communist discourse were still unfamiliar to most readers, and had to be couched in an Islamic or vernacular idiom in order to be comprehensible.
 22. The verse reads "Devour not usury, doubled and redoubled, and fear you God; haply so you will prosper."

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2. Booth, Anne. 1988. "Living Standards and the Distribution of Income in Colonial Indonesia: A Review of the Evidence." *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 19(2): 310–34.
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5. Utriza, Ayang. 2008. "Mencari Model Kerukunan Antaragama." *Kompas*. March 19: 59.
6. Ms. *Undhang-Undhang Banten*, L.Or.5598, Leiden University.
7. Interview with K.H. Sahal Mahfudz, Kajen, Pati, June 11th, 2007.

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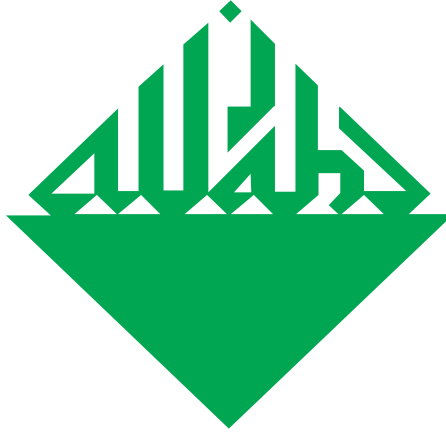
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