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EXPERIMENTS WITH MARXISM-LENINISM IN COLD WAR SOUTHEAST ASIA

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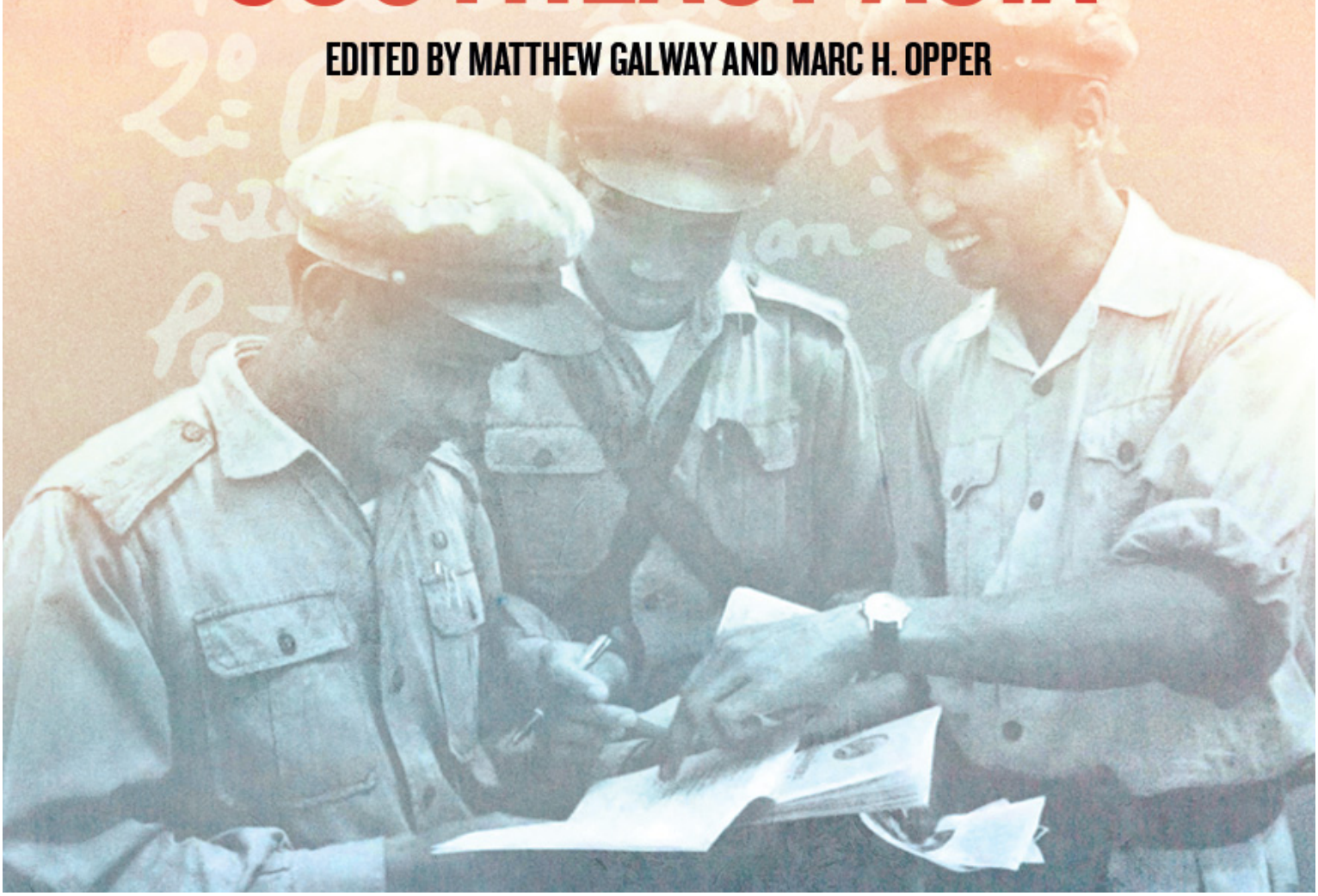

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Partai Republik Indonesia: Communist exiles and their noncommunist approaches to anticolonialism

Kankan Xie

From November 1926 to January 1927, a series of insurrections broke out in several districts across the Dutch East Indies (DEI) (now Indonesia). Starting in the capital city of Batavia, the revolt soon spilled over to the rural areas of the nearby region of Banten and finally reached the west coast of Sumatra at the turn of the year. Behind the movement was the Partai Komunis Indonesia (PKI, Communist Party of Indonesia), the earliest communist party in Asia. Lacking adequate coordination, the rebellions played out in a highly disorganised manner. The Dutch authorities managed to crush each insurrection within a few days. The revolts provided the authorities with ideal justification for full-scale suppression of the PKI and affiliated organisations. In the aftermath, the colonial government arrested 13,000 people for their direct involvement in the uprisings and 5,000 more for displaying 'communist tendencies'. They also banished 1,308 alleged communist leaders to a remote penal colony in Boven Digoel, Netherlands New Guinea.[1] The anticommunist repression destroyed the party organisation, marking the end of the first

1 Ruth McVey, *The Rise of Indonesian Communism* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1968), 353; J. Th. Petrus Blumberger, *De communistische beweging in Nederlandsch-Indië* [*The Communist Movement in the Dutch East Indies*] (Haarlem, Netherlands: Tjeenk Willink, 1935), 111.

phase of the communist movement in Indonesia. Despite attempts to reorganise the party in the late 1920s and throughout the long 1930s, the PKI would not play a significant role in Indonesian politics until its reestablishment after World War II (WWII).

The DEI authorities' full-scale suppression dealt a crushing blow to the PKI. The party lost its entire leadership in the DEI due to the ceaseless arrests, imprisonments and banishments. However, the PKI movement was by no means dead. While the party dissolved in the DEI due to the crackdown, hundreds of PKI members managed to escape to nearby British Malaya. Moreover, although just a handful of individuals, the party leadership in exile remained largely intact. Despite escalating pressures, the PKI liaison office in Singapore was still operating under revolutionary leader Tan Malaka and his inner circle. Alimin and Musso were on their way to join the Singapore group from Moscow. PKI leaders such as Semaun and Darsono stayed in Europe, where they sought to influence the Dutch Government by working with the Communist Party of Holland and Indonesian students in the Netherlands. Meanwhile, Dutch and British colonial authorities had not yet formed a close working relationship to fight communism. A question thus arises as to whether the PKI leadership overseas took the opportunity to try to reinstate the party. If so, why were they unsuccessful?

The existing literature commonly attributes the PKI's failure to the ruthless suppression of the DEI Government and suggests communism ceased to play a crucial role in Indonesian politics until its revival after WWII.[2] While such observations reflect certain truths from the perspective of domestic politics, they tend to downplay the fact that many PKI fugitives carried on the anticolonial struggle overseas in various forms throughout the remainder of the colonial era.[3] It is also problematic to regard the PKI as a clandestine movement from 1927. Due to the heated debates over who should be responsible for the poorly organised uprisings and, consequently, the party's disintegration, PKI fugitives split into many factions. While all claimed to be legitimate successors of the PKI, there was no central party leadership to speak of. At least three PKI factions coexisted outside the DEI with limited interactions between them: the Tan

2 McVey, *The Rise of Indonesian Communism*, 353–54; Harry Benda and Ruth McVey, *The Communist Uprisings of 1926–1927 in Indonesia: Key Documents* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1960), xviii; George McT. Kahin, *Nationalism and Revolution in Indonesia* (Ithaca, NY: SEAP Publications, Cornell University, 2003), 86–87.

3 Takashi Shiraishi, 'Policing the Phantom Underground', *Indonesia* (63) (1997): 1–3.

Malaka group formed the Partai Republik Indonesia (PARI, Indonesian Republican Party) and carried on clandestine struggles against Dutch colonialism. Alimin and Musso, two ardent advocates of the rebellion, fell out with the Tan Malaka group but stayed close with the Comintern course throughout the interwar period. By contrast, Semaun and Darsono gradually distanced themselves from Moscow but still sought to influence Indonesian politics in the metropole.

This chapter explores PARI's clandestine activities outside the DEI in the aftermath of the 1926–27 uprisings. While distancing themselves from Comintern-sanctioned international communism, PARI operated mainly in neighbouring countries and sought to infiltrate the DEI through various religious and nationalist networks. However, throughout its active years, PARI remained a propaganda group of limited size and with insignificant presence in the public sphere.[4] As a result, historians usually only mention the organisation in passing in their writings about Indonesia's nationalist movement, as it never grew into the mass movement envisioned by its founders. The scarcity of surviving materials also makes investigations into the clandestine organisation particularly difficult. Nevertheless, as Helen Jarvis points out, PARI was a 'golden bridge' that spanned the chasm between the failed PKI uprisings of 1926–27 and Indonesia's eventual independence in the late 1940s. PARI's significance lies in its efforts to carry on militant anticolonial activities—characterised by its continuous calls for immediate and complete independence—while the colonial state became increasingly repressive in the aftermath of the PKI uprisings. Moreover, what distinguished PARI from other Indonesia-based nationalist groups at the time was its leadership. With clear visions of the domestic and global situations, a group of former PKI leaders in exile adopted inverted approaches to anticolonialism.[5] PARI networks spanning Southeast Asia thus profoundly affected Indonesia's struggle for independence in the remainder of the colonial era.

4 Takashi Shiraishi, *The Phantom World of Digul: Policing as Politics in Colonial Indonesia, 1926–1941* (Singapore: NUS Press and Kyoto University Press, 2021), 160–61.

5 Helen Jarvis, *Partai Republik Indonesia (PARI): Was it 'The Sole Golden Bridge to the Republic of Indonesia?'* (Townsville, Qld: James Cook University Press, 1981), 20–22.

PARI: A PKI reincarnation?

In his study of the Vietnamese communist movement, Christopher Goscha has explored how Vietnamese activists went to neighbouring countries to build revolutionary bases that served as a critical part of the extensive Vietnamese revolutionary network during the late colonial period. Southern China and north-eastern Thailand were ideal places for such purposes for two main reasons: first, the existence of large Vietnamese communities; and, second, their strategic location—'close to Vietnam but … just beyond the reach of the omnipresent French Sûreté'.[6] Goscha's work demonstrates how Vietnamese revolutionaries established themselves among immigrants in Thailand and how they continued to organise anticolonial activities against the French through layered intraregional networks.[7] PARI's regional networks shared many similarities with its Vietnamese counterparts. Nevertheless, its activities went far beyond one territory. The leaders of PARI—first started in the Siamese (Thai) capital of Bangkok in 1927—soon moved, along with party operations, to Singapore, Malaya, Borneo, southern China and the Philippines. PARI activists frequently penetrated Indonesia from these places, establishing contacts on both Java and the Outer Islands. Before delving into PARI's revolutionary practices, it is essential to discuss the backdrop against which the party was founded.

Shortly after the failed PKI uprisings, in May 1927, Tan Malaka gathered with his two loyal associates, Subakat and Djamaluddin Tamin, in Bangkok. There were several reasons for choosing Bangkok as their new hideout. Apart from the fact that Siam was relatively safe because it was not a Western colony, Malaka and Tamin also knew many people in the city through their West Sumatran network.[8] From his Sumatra Thawalib connections, Tamin heard that two *ulamas*, Sjech Taher and Sjech Ahmad Wahab, lived in the city and were sympathetic towards anticolonial

6 Sûreté is the detective branch of the French civil police force. See Christopher E. Goscha, *Thailand and the Southeast Asian Networks of the Vietnamese Revolution, 1885–1954* (London: Curzon Press, 1999), 65.

7 ibid., 8.

8 Djamaluddin Tamin studied and taught at the Islamic school Sumatra Thawalib in Padang Pajang, where communist ideas were widespread in the early 1920s. Tamin co-edited a progressive newspaper, *Pemandangan Islam* [*Islamic View*], and joined the PKI in 1922. Audrey Kahin, 'The 1927 Communist Uprising in Sumatra: A Reappraisal', *Indonesia* (62) (1996): 25–26, doi.org/10.2307/3351390.

struggles.[9] Without much difficulty, Tamin connected with Sjech Taher, who introduced him to Sjech Ahmad Wahab, a leader of 20,000 Wahhabi Muslims in Bangkok who ran several *pesantren* ('Islamic boarding schools') in the city.[10] Sjech Ahmad Wahab arranged accommodation for Tamin and Subakat, but they decided not to connect him to Tan Malaka for reasons of safety.

In Bangkok, the three PKI veterans finally had the chance to reflect on the party's failure and to analyse their situation. They concluded that, as of January 1927, the DEI Government had utterly crushed the PKI movement in the wake of the abortive revolts. According to Tamin, a Comintern document was crucial in the three PKI leaders' discussion. Alimin brought this document from Moscow and handed it to a Singapore-based PKI member before his arrest by British police.[11] The document confirmed that the Comintern regarded the PKI's plan to rebel (the so-called Prambanan Decision) as a mistake and was opposed to what it considered a suicidal revolt. The document also reaffirmed Tan Malaka's leadership role as a Comintern representative. Finally, the document showed only the Trotskyists supported the Prambanan Decision, while the Stalinists, who had more influence over the Comintern, opposed the plan.[12]

The most crucial outcomes of the discussion were two documents—a manifesto by Tan Malaka and a statute by Subakat—which the three PKI fugitives used to declare the establishment of the PARI on 1 June 1927. DEI authorities seized the two key documents when they arrested Subakat in Bangkok in 1929 with the help of the Siamese Government. The original 1927 version of the manifesto is no longer available. What remains in Dutch archives is a summary of a 1929 version produced by Tan Malaka in Amoy (Xiamen) and brought back to Indonesia by Mardjono, a PARI member who visited Tan Malaka in China in

9 According to Tamin, there were five famous religious teachers in Bangkok at that time, three of whom were well known for their pro-Dutch stance; only Sjech Taher and Sjech Ahmad Wahab were potential supporters. See Djamaluddin Tamin, *Sedjarah P.K.I.* [*PKI History*] (Jakarta: Pustaka Antara, 1957), 59.

10 Audrey Kahin, *Rebellion to Integration*: *West Sumatra and the Indonesian Polity, 1926–1988* (Amsterdam: University of Amsterdam Press, 1999), 301n.68, citing Djamaluddin Tamin, 'Sedjarah PKI. Djilid 1 [PKI history. Volume 1]' (Typescript, n.d.), 59–60.

11 Alimin and Musso fell out with the Tan Malaka group in Singapore after their release by the British police. The two then opted to leave Singapore for Moscow via China. See Tamin, *PKI History*, 55–56.

12 Tamin wrote his memoir in 1957; the PKI leadership at the time accused Tan Malaka of being a Trotskyist. It is highly possible Tamin emphasised this by pointing out they were not to defend PARI and Tan Malaka. See Tamin, *PKI History*, 60.

the same year. A Dutch intelligence officer summarised the 30-page document in nine and a half pages, noting that Tan Malaka had analysed the global communist movement based on the English translation by Max Eastman of Leon Trotsky's *The Real Situation in Russia*.[13] The book included a document Trotsky had presented at a meeting of the All-Union Communist Party in September 1927, but the English version was not published, in New York and London, until 1928. Therefore, it is unlikely Tan Malaka's original draft talked much about the international situation in the way he did in the 1929 version.[14] However, the summary did shed important light on PARI's stance on the PKI's weaknesses and the failures of the 1926–27 uprisings.

First, the manifesto addressed 'supporters of the Comintern in Indonesia' and suggested the Indonesian people must now accept the 'inglorious collapse' of the PKI, which had not one but many causes. Chief among them was the fact that the party was not sufficiently disciplined. Despite its popularity among the masses, the PKI 'fulfilled not the most elementary criteria of a communist party'. While the party accepted people from all walks of life, it was not 'organisationally a homogeneous machine', as many sections remained independent from each other. Additionally, qualified leaders were too few in comparison with Indonesia's population of 60 million and only a tiny proportion of workers were organised under unions. The PKI also significantly underrated Dutch imperialism, and the revolts carried out were 'not equal to a revolution; not even to a general strike'.[15] Furthermore, the manifesto indicated the more fundamental problem was deeply rooted in 'the psychology of the people', who had 'misplaced hopes' for assistance from outside. Indonesian people still believed in Ratu Adil (the 'Just Queen' of Javanese mythology) and Mahdi (a messianic figure in Islam), who would restore justice and order in times of hardship. In a way, the PKI riots of 1926–27 were 'in essence a copy of those in Aceh and Jambi, only on a smaller scale. The same in Bantam, but there too they thought they had joined a communist revolution.'

13 Leon Trotsky, *The Real Situation in Russia*, Max Eastman, trans. (New York, NY: Harcourt, Brace & Co., 1928).

14 Helen Jarvis, *Partai Republik Indonesia*, 5.

15 'Korte Inhoud van het Manifest der Partij Republiek Indonesia (PARI) [Brief Contents of the Manifesto of the Republic of Indonesia Party]', 2.10.36.06-446x/1936, Geheime Mailrapporten [Secret Mail Reports] [hereinafter GMR], Ministerie van Koloniën [Ministry of Colonies], Nationaal Archief [National Archives of the Netherlands; hereinafter NA-NL], Den Haag. Reproduced in Jarvis, *Partai Republik Indonesia*, Appendix 2, 1–6. Also see Shiraishi, 'Policing the Phantom Underground', 31.

Related to this point, Tan Malaka discussed in detail the 'indifference and ignorance' of the Comintern. Specifically, he criticised the bureaucratic leadership of Moscow, which cared only about the interests of Russia:

> With examples from Germany, Italy, and Bulgaria, it demonstrated that the Moscow leadership has failed for other countries. The entire Third International is built up in the Russian interest, and young Eastern leaders, in particular, will be inclined to go over to worship and to lose their independence, with the result that they will lack contact with their own masses, who have different impulses from the Russian people.[16]

It is also noteworthy that, by the time PARI was established in June 1927, the Comintern's China policy had failed because of Chiang Kai-shek's nationwide anticommunist purge in the aftermath of the Shanghai Massacre.

Although it is unclear whether Tan Malaka wrote his criticism in the original draft of the PARI manifesto or added the lines to the new version after witnessing the political situation in China for himself, his point about breaking away from the Comintern was well articulated:

> Following China's example, Stalin would send his Borodins, Van Gelens, Cheka, military and other innumerable advisers to a revolutionary 'Indonesia.' The Third International would have nothing to say in the choice of the individuals, and everything would remain secret from this body. They consider that it would be in the interests of imperialism, and not in the interest of the Indies if Stalin made himself master of an eventual revolutionary movement in the Netherlands-Indies.[17]

Therefore, the PARI trio decided not to reactivate the PKI, as there would be 'serious drawbacks' if people continued relating the new party to Moscow.[18]

Instead, Tan Malaka pointed out the urgent need to establish a new party that served the true interests of Indonesians:

> A soviet, naturally completely adjusted to local conditions, is, in the opinion of the writers, not only conceivable but would be the best form of government for Indonesia, taking into account its

16 'Brief Contents of the Manifesto of the Republic of Indonesia Party', GMR, NA-NL.
17 ibid.
18 Shiraishi, 'Policing the Phantom Underground', 30.

> cultural and economic development … The people of the Indies have enough to do without waiting around for the conclusion to the fight between Stalin and Trotsky. They have their own pressing problems that require a solution. PARI is a revolutionary-workers instrument that tries to deal with these problems on the basis of its own insight.[19]

The manifesto concluded by stating that the PARI group wished to remain internationalists but held different views from the Comintern on how to achieve the ultimate goal—'Not from above to below, but the reverse', Tan Malaka noted.[20]

PARI's statute by Subakat is available in full in colonial archives with parallel Dutch and Indonesian texts. While the tone was similar to Tan Malaka's manifesto, the statute made no mention of the PKI and international communist movements at all. It claimed PARI was 'independent and free from leadership or influenced by any other party or force, either within or outside of Indonesia'. The statute set PARI's objective as:

> [To] achieve full and complete independence for Indonesia as soon as possible, and thereafter to establish a Federal Republic of Indonesia on principles that accord with the country's economic, social and political conditions, with the customs and character of its inhabitants, and which, furthermore, are designed to advance the physical and mental well-being of the Indonesian people.[21]

Despite the statute's well-formulated statements, Helen Jervis suggests 'the exact nature of PARI, and what its founders intended it to be are shrouded in confusion'.[22] While many historians regard PARI as a complete break from international communism because it acted independently of the Comintern, others see it as a reincarnation of the destroyed PKI with continuities in many aspects of its communist ideology and organisational strategies.

In Tan Malaka's memoir, *From Jail to Jail*, he says little about PARI. A crucial reason for this was that when he wrote the memoir in prison around 1947, Tan Malaka was still engaged in heated debates with leaders

19 'Brief Contents of the Manifesto of the Republic of Indonesia Party', GMR, NA-NL.
20 Jarvis, *Partai Republik Indonesia*, 10.
21 'Statuten der Partij Republik Indonesia (PARI) [Statutes of the Republic of Indonesia Party]', 446x/1936, GMR, NA-NL, Reproduced in Jarvis, *Partai Republik Indonesia*, Appendix 1, 1.
22 Jarvis, *Partai Republik Indonesia*, 3.

of the reestablished PKI over the legitimacy of the party leadership.[23] It is likely Tan Malaka deliberately avoided this topic so his rivals could not use the narrative against him by claiming PARI was not communist. Instead, he provided a rather vague statement:

> Now, twenty years later, the results of the actions taken in Bangkok by the three of us are clear to all. We wanted to see continuity in the Indonesian peoples' and workers' movement through a time of great difficulty. We felt that this continuity could best be ensured first by relying on our own strength and secondly by marching independently but on a parallel course with the international proletarian movement—*getrennt marschieren, vereint schlagen* (march separately but strike together). We feel that the content and form of the situation and the struggles of 1945–1947 confirm in large part the position we took then, but it is not yet the time to reveal in detail the role played by PARI from its founding in July [*sic*] 1927 until now (July 1947).[24]

This implies PARI operated on its own and was independent of Comintern-sanctioned international communism.

In his 1946 *Thesis*, however, Tan Malaka gave a more nuanced description of the party's objective in response to new PKI leaders who accused PARI members of being Trotskyists:

> Party names are not so important and are easy to change as long as the contents remain. The Russian Communist Party itself has changed names three times! The important thing is [to retain] the revolutionary essence at every level and situation of struggle. Do not engage in counterrevolutionary actions, provocations, or opportunism. Marxism is not a dogma or a study of memorization, but a guideline for class struggles. And it is a method of dialectical materialism that must be carried out in accordance with the time and place. Since 20 years ago, PARI has possessed the quality

23 In May 1946, a committee of the reinstated PKI decided to hand over the party leadership to the 1926 generation. Sardjono, the PKI chairman in 1926 and a major advocate of the Prambanan Decision, took over control of the party. According to Tamin, Sardjono and Achmad Sumadi sabotaged the goodwill of this committee and excluded 75 former leaders of the PKI from the New PKI during the 1920–26 period. Alimin and Musso later joined the group after they returned to Indonesia. As a result, the PARI group was essentially alienated from the New PKI. See Tamin, *PKI History*, 56.

24 Tan Malaka and Helen Jarvis, *From Jail to Jail. Volume 1* (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 1991), 141–42.

> of Marxist philosophy with Leninist tactics. [PARI] is heading towards national and social revolutions, and towards socialist and communist societies throughout the world.[25]

Compared with the rather ambivalent position taken in his memoir, the statement in *Thesis* showed the leadership intended PARI to remain a Marxist-Leninist party in essence but carry on Indonesia's national and social revolutions on its own terms.

Tan Malaka continued, providing four reasons PARI had to be established in the way it was: first, most PKI leaders had been either jailed or banished to Boven Digoel in the aftermath of the two abortive revolts. While reflecting on the failure of the PKI movement was necessary, using the old name was not conducive to the correction of past mistakes. Second, PKI fugitives outside Indonesia lost contact with those inside the colony, and it was difficult to revive the party under the harsh government suppression. Meanwhile, due to the PKI's popularity among the masses, many people attempted to continue the movement under the same name. The PARI group saw these people as lacking a basic understanding of communist principles and their actions as nothing but dangerous provocation. Third, the PKI was so popular it led to widespread fanaticism, especially among illiterate people. Such fanaticism towards communism and Russia, as Tan Malaka suggested, was reminiscent of the groundless belief during past rebellions in Sumatra that Turkey would send warships to help Indonesian Muslims. Therefore, using the PKI name tended to reinforce people's unrealistic expectations that the Comintern would step in to help the Indonesian revolution and would 'push revolutionaries to the brink of opportunism, fascism or putsch'.

Finally, Tan Malaka reiterated that the Comintern had appointed him as a representative of what he called the 'Aslia' region, which encompassed continents and islands across East Asia and Oceania (including Australia). While Aslia countries shared many similarities in terms of 'environment, ethnicity, economy, and psychology', the common imperialist enemies, headed by the British with Singapore as their centre 'for trade and strategy', further strengthened the unity of this region. Tan Malaka thus believed the peoples of Aslia should pursue their common interests by taking an

25 Tan Malaka, 'Tuduhan Trotskyisme [Indictments of Trotskyism]', in *Thesis* (Djakarta: Moerba, 1946), available from: www.marxists.org/indonesia/archive/malaka/1946-Thesis.htm.

international 'proletarian revolutionary' path. 'One should not wait for gold to fall from the sky,' he emphasised, 'we should keep our eyes while walking on this rough field.'[26]

Despite Tan Malaka's efforts to establish PARI as an 'independent' communist party, the lack of clarity around its nature became one of his greatest political weaknesses.[27] After the PKI reemerged as a major political force in the postwar national revolution, Tan Malaka's opponents—now leaders of the new PKI—launched fierce attacks on him by branding him a 'Trotskyist'. They accused Tan Malaka of sabotaging the Indonesian revolution by rejecting the Prambanan Decision, trying to stop the revolts and establishing PARI, which operated outside the purview of the Comintern.[28] Sakirman, who worked with Tan Malaka in his Persatuan Perjuangan (Struggle Front) in early 1946 and joined the PKI shortly after, wrote a booklet entitled *Menindjau Perdjoeangan PARI* ('*Reviewing PARI's Struggles*') in 1947. In this booklet, he claimed PARI members should be regarded as 'enemies of Soviet Russia' because the party had 'opposed the Comintern's line of struggle and organisation', 'fraudulently used the name "communist"' and their 'ideals and the course of struggle are in contradiction to Marxism-Leninism'.[29]

As well as Sakirman, chief among the accusers were Alimin and Musso, who had held personal grudges against Tan Malaka since 1926. In response to Tan Malaka's 1946 *Thesis*, Alimin published his *Analysis* in 1947, in which he defended his position in the 1926–27 revolts and reiterated the 'Trotskyist' accusation. The feud between Tan Malaka and Alimin deserves careful study in its own right, but we should bear in mind that PKI members' verbal attacks on PARI emerged mostly in the late 1940s, and were more closely associated with the politics of Indonesia's national revolution than with what PARI really was in the 1920s and 1930s. Therefore, it is necessary to first investigate PARI's operation in the years after its establishment.

26 Malaka, 'Kesimpulan [Conclusion]', in ibid.
27 Jarvis, *Partai Republik Indonesia*, 10.
28 Kahin, *Nationalism and Revolution in Indonesia*, 85.
29 Sakirman, *Menindjau perdjoeangan PARI* [*A Review of the PARI Struggle*] (Djakarta: Soeara Lasjkar, 1947), 3. As quoted in Jarvis, *Partai Republik Indonesia*, 4.

Active penetration

Tamin pointed out in his memoir that despite the collapse of the PKI, left-wing forces in Indonesia had not entirely lost hope in their struggle against the Dutch Government around the time of PARI's establishment. As the authorities continued radical crackdowns on the PKI and affiliated organisations, news about communist activities was still all over the press in mid-1927. Although PKI members were not necessarily the ones plotting conspiracies, some of the news was encouraging from the perspective of the PKI fugitives, as it suggested the momentum of the PKI movement had not been entirely lost. For example, Tamin learned that the DEI Government had unearthed a conspiracy by former soldiers to organise a rebellion in West Java in July 1927. Although the government later found out the PKI was not involved in the incident, they arrested many nationalist leaders such as Dr Tjipto Mangoenkoesoemo, Sukarno's political mentor, who allegedly lent the soldiers moral and material support. Dr Tjipto received similar treatment to the PKI leaders and was banished to the Banda Islands in the east of the archipelago.

More exciting than the abortive uprising was the establishment of Sukarno's Perserikatan Nasional Indonesia (PNI, Indonesian National Association) on 4 July 1927.[30] Sukarno, who would rise to become Indonesia's first president 20 years later, claimed the PNI would adopt a noncooperative approach in its struggle for independence. The three PARI founders in Bangkok were delighted to hear this news, which reminded Tan Malaka that Sukarno had sent him a letter asking for guidance a year earlier. The trio thus came to realise PARI could use the PNI as a viable channel to influence Indonesia's nationalist movement.

Tan Malaka reacted immediately to the creation of the PNI by writing an article entitled 'PARI dan Kaum Intelektuil Indonesia [PARI and the Intellectuals of Indonesia]', which became one of the party's most important policy statements. As no copies of the document seem to be available today, we have only a general idea from Tamin's summary:

30 The Indonesian National Association changed its name to the Indonesian National Party in May 1928.

> I. Suggestions to Sukarno and all the intellectuals: please join hands with us so that all the patriots and fighters could achieve Indonesia's 100% independence. The primary objective of the Party Republic of Indonesia (PARI) is to establish a 100% Republic of Indonesia, be it in political, economic, or social domains;
>
> II. Books such as *Naar de Republiek Indonesia* [*Towards the Republic of Indonesia*], which had entered Indonesia in mid-1924, *De Jonge Geest* or *Semangat Muda* [*Youth Spirit*], in mid-1925, and *Massa Actie* [*Mass Actions*], at the end of 1926, should become guidance for intellectuals. Hopefully, they could also become the guidance for workers, farmers, youths, and national economic development in the fields of society, arts, culture, and education. Intellectuals will come to realize that patriots and fighters are living among the masses and will lead them to achieve the sacred ideals of independence;
>
> III. Try to work with religious, socialist, and other nationalist groups as much as possible;
>
> IV. Wake up and take over workers', farmers', and youths' movements. Try our best to approach the masses and unite them under organizations in which their leaders hold true leadership roles.[31]

PARI's three founders elected themselves members of the Central Executive Committee, with Tan Malaka as chairman, Subakat as secretary and Tamin as commissioner. The party's leadership decided to part ways shortly after its establishment and to run it from different locations. Subakat remained in Bangkok for two years. Although it is unclear what his specific job was, he maintained close contact with Tan Malaka until his arrest in 1929. Tan Malaka left Bangkok for Manila, but the Philippine Government arrested him within a few days of his arrival at the request of the DEI authorities. Under pressure from the colony's sympathetic nationalist leaders, however, the Philippine Government deported Tan Malaka to Amoy, where he would stay until 1929. Living far from the rest of his party members, Tan Malaka worked more like a theoretician than the party chairman, as he was mostly busy writing articles rather than directing PARI activities.[32] I will elaborate on Tan Malaka's experience in a later section, but for now, it is important to note Tamin played

31 Tamin, *PKI History*, 62.

32 Shiraishi, 'Policing the Phantom Underground', 31–32.

a more crucial role in the daily operation of PARI in the following years. Tamin returned to Singapore in August 1927 and began work almost immediately via the old PKI network.

There were obvious advantages to choosing Singapore as the base for PARI's operations. First, PKI activities had left a relatively good foundation in the city and, as PKI fugitives continued to come to Singapore after the failed revolts, Tamin could find many reliable disciples with whom to work. Additionally, there was an extensive Indonesian network in Singapore; PKI fugitives could not only evade surveillance by hiding inside the Indonesian community, but also ask for assistance such as accommodation and employment. Moreover, Singapore was close to Indonesia. While penetrating Indonesia was always an option, PARI activists also frequently used their personal networks to distribute propaganda materials. Singapore was an important hub for the Muslim pilgrimage, with many Indonesians passing through Singapore on their way to and from Mecca. Tamin noted many of Tan Malaka's books would *naik haji* ('rise to Haji'—make the pilgrimage to Mecca) before entering Indonesia.

Finally, Singapore is a port city with abundant employment opportunities for seamen. Many PKI fugitives took refuge in seamen's dormitories when they first arrived in the city and soon became sailors or mechanics themselves through introductions by their countrymen. Tamin's disciples Kandur and Djamaluddin Ibrahim, for example, took advantage of their jobs as seamen and frequently helped smuggle PARI publications to Indonesia. Tan Malaka's *Semangat Muda* ('*Youth Spirit*') and *Massa Actie* ('*Mass Action*') seemed to have enjoyed an extensive readership as many PNI-affiliated intellectuals would quote his words in their speeches and writing. Tamin was also pleased to discover that some Surabaya-based newspapers often cited articles and passages from PARI documents.[33]

Running PARI from Singapore also had its downside. The Straits Settlements authorities tightened their surveillance of communist activities in 1927. The shift in British policy was closely related to political events in China and the DEI at the time; the ongoing nationalist revolution in China polarised the politics of the Malayan Chinese. Under the influence of left-wing forces, Singapore saw a rapid rise of anti-British sentiment during 1926–27. A violent clash between supporters of the Guomindang's

33 Tamin, *PKI History*, 63.

left wing and the police—the so-called Kreta Ayer Incident—broke out in March 1927 and led to the death of six people and protracted protests in following months.

The two abortive PKI uprisings prompted the DEI Government to call for closer international cooperation in policing communist activities. Due to geographical proximity and the fact that Singapore had been serving as a PKI overseas centre, Dutch and British authorities gradually came to agree that anticommunist cooperation was of great significance. Although the British handling of the Alimin–Musso case was somewhat disappointing from the Dutch perspective, the two governments regarded communism as a common threat and expressed their willingness to deepen their cooperation.[34] Moreover, police officials on both sides established a close working relationship, which laid a good foundation for cross-border policing in subsequent years.[35] As a result, PARI faced much heavier pressure from British surveillance than the PKI.

To evade this surveillance, Tamin and his followers relied on the seamen's network. As mentioned earlier, Tamin had helped many PKI fugitives find accommodation and jobs by connecting them to Indonesian sailors in Singapore. This meant PKI fugitives could not only make a modest living, but also enjoy some other benefits of the party's operations. Colonial authorities certainly did not pay much attention to the activities of such a marginal group. Even if they had intended to, keeping track of the seamen's whereabouts was extremely difficult, as the highly mobile group was often absent from the city and sailors frequently changed from one ship to another.

The seamen played several crucial roles in PARI's operations: first, they were central to the dissemination of books and other propaganda materials. Tamin and his disciples mostly printed Tan Malaka's writings in Singapore in large volumes and sent them to Indonesia through the sailors' secretive channels. Kandur and Djamaluddin Ibrahim were two

34 See Consul-General Batavia's [Crosby] No. 47 Secret of 14 April 1927, CO 273/535, Straits Settlements Original Correspondence, The National Archives, Kew, United Kingdom.

35 For instance, M. Visbeen, assistant commissioner of the Batavian police, came to Malaya in December 1926 and stayed until July 1927. During this time, he formed close ties with his British counterparts such as Harold Fairburn, the inspector-general, and Rene Onraet, the chief of the Criminal Investigation Department (CID). See Takashi Shiraishi, 'A New Regime of Order: The Origin of Modern Surveillance Politics in Indonesia', in *Southeast Asia over Three Generations: Essays Presented to Benedict R.O'G. Anderson*, James Siegel and Audrey Kahin, eds (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2003), 68.

of the most active PARI couriers and often smuggled books to Indonesia. While Kandur went back and forth between Singapore and Sumatra, Djamaluddin Ibrahim frequently travelled between Batavia, Singapore, Pekan Baru and Padang.[36] Second, PARI relied on the seamen to approach nationalist group leaders such as Sukarno, Singgih and Dr Soetomo.[37] A common tactic was to connect with local branches of the PNI and recruit members for PARI activities.[38] Moreover, the seamen's network was essential to maintaining contact between PARI members dispersed in different locations. PARI activists considered postal services insecure as the colonial authorities often intercepted letters, so the party often delivered messages through the seamen's network, both inside Indonesia and beyond, by concealing letters and documents inside newspapers.[39]

Suitable couriers were not always available, however, and Tamin had to figure out other methods to keep in contact with Tan Malaka. Tamin thus sent several batches of young PARI activists to China in hopes they could reconnect with the party chairman while gaining knowledge and experience. For instance, Tamin sent Mardjono and Arief Siregar to Amoy in 1927. Djamaluddin Ibrahim and Sarosan went on the same journey a year later.[40] When Tamin sensed danger in Singapore in 1928, he had to move from one lodging house to another but usually stayed with his seamen friends. In August 1930, Tamin began working as a sailor himself aboard the *Darvel* of the Singapore–Zamboanga–Mindanao line. When the ship ran aground near Sandakan, in British Borneo, Tamin took the opportunity to enter the city, from where he managed to reestablish contact with Tan Malaka.[41]

As time passed, some PARI members became well established in Singapore. Umar Giri, for instance, opened a cigarette shop in the city's Geylang area with his comrades Subandi and Djamaluddin Ibrahim. By selling cigarettes and cigars smuggled from Indonesia, the business significantly improved the party's financial situation. Towards the end of 1928, most party members had secured higher incomes by taking stable jobs or

36 Tamin, *PKI History*, 64.
37 ibid., 68; and Shiraishi, 'Policing the Phantom Underground', 34.
38 Jarvis, *Partai Republik Indonesia*, 14.
39 'De Partij Republiek Indonesia (PARI) [The Republic Party of Indonesia]', 509x/1931, GMR, NA-NL; and Jarvis, *Partai Republik Indonesia*, 13–14.
40 According to Tamin, he initially only wanted to send Djamaluddin Ibrahim to Amoy and asked him not to reveal the plan to anyone due to the high cost. However, Sarosan heard about it and insisted on joining the trip. Tamin, *PKI History*, 64.
41 ibid., 69–70.

running private businesses. In addition to sustaining their daily lives, PARI members could now contribute a good amount of money to the party's operations and even provide financial assistance to Tan Malaka in China.[42] A major drawback of having more established lives in Singapore, as Tamin pointed out, was some PARI activists gradually lost their desire to get involved in dangerous activities and risk their comfortable lives. While PARI members continued to send books and newsletters to Indonesia, Tamin thought some of them were no longer passionate and confident about continuing the struggle against Dutch colonialism.[43]

The indolence of these members aside, PARI did manage to send activists back to Indonesia in hopes of influencing the nationalist movement there. Mardjono and Sarosan were the most active among the PKI fugitives who successfully penetrated Indonesia while maintaining close contact with the Singapore head office. Mardjono and Sarosan had known each other in Semarang, where they were both active in the PKI-affiliated Indonesian Scout Organisation.[44] In May 1926, Mardjono and Sarosan moved to Banjarmasin, where they worked for the local newspaper, the *Borneo Post*. After the PKI revolts, they escaped to Singapore and worked for the Al Ikwan Press, owned by Arab entrepreneur Said Djen Alsagaff. The two PKI fugitives met Tamin and joined PARI in Singapore. In late 1927 and early 1928, Mardjono and Sarosan went to Amoy successively, where they received training from Tan Malaka. Mardjono returned to Banjarmasin in early 1928, followed by Sarosan, who worked briefly as a sailor on the Singapore–Australia line.[45] While teaching at a private school run by his old comrade Moenandar, Mardjono established a PARI liaison office through which he maintained close contact with Singapore under the guise of a local postman.[46]

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42 ibid., 67.

43 ibid., 68.

44 Mardjono was Tan Malaka's student at the Sekolah Rakyat (People's School) in Semarang, which was established in 1921 to train party members. With its great success, the school expanded to many other places in the DEI. The People's School is also known as Tan Malaka's School. See Helen Jarvis, 'Tan Malaka: Revolutionary or Renegade?', *Critical Asian Studies* 19(1) (1987): 42. Sarosan graduated from a Dutch Native School in Purworejo and worked for PKI organ *Sinar Hindia*. Subsequently, he became a student nurse at the Semarang Central Hospital, where he participated in strikes and lost his job. He then joined the PKI organ *API* under Subakat's leadership. See Shiraishi, 'Policing the Phantom Underground', 35.

45 M. Visbeen and Mohamad Halid, 'Proces Verbaal [Police Report] (July 1930)', 2.10.36.06, 509x/1931, GMR, NA-NL; and Shiraishi, 'Policing the Phantom Underground', 35–36.

46 Tamin, *PKI History*, 67.

While Mardjono was busy reestablishing the liaison office in Banjarmasin, Sarosan went to Java, in April 1928. Through the introduction of Soedarmo, Mardjono's brother and a clerk from the Nederlandsch-Indische Spoorweg Maatschappij (NIS, Dutch East Indies Railway Company), Sarosan got in touch with Danoewirjo, an NIS conductor and former member of the PKI-affiliated Vereniging van Spoor-en Tramwegpersoneel (VSTP, Association of Railway and Tram Workers) who was still active in trade unionism. Danoewirjo then joined PARI and introduced Sarosan to his NIS co-workers, including Soetedjo and Tjokrosoebono, both from Cepu, and Ngadimin from Semarang. As Shiraishi has noted, there were obvious advantages in spreading propaganda among railway workers. Before the 1926–27 PKI revolts, the VSTP was one of the most potent and best-organised trade unions under the communist leadership, with 77 branches and 8,293 members in November 1925.[47] The VSTP was destroyed in the government's wholesale clampdown on communism, yet many workers had hopes of reviving the militant trade union movement and were willing to carry out propaganda for PARI among their 'old friends'.[48] According to Tamin, the group carried out successful campaigns in Central and East Java, and mobilised 350 railway workers within the first three months.[49]

Merantau: The Minangkabau network

With the arrest of Subakat in Bangkok on 8 October 1929, the *Kongsi Tiga* ('PARI Triumvirate') lost an indispensable pillar. Within the party's division of labour, Subakat's role might not have been as significant as that of his two comrades—he was neither a gifted theorist like Tan Malaka, who drafted most of the important party documents, nor a well-rounded executive like Tamin, who almost single-handedly rebuilt a party network from the shambles of the PKI—but his contribution was by no means trivial. His post in Bangkok functioned as a secret hub connecting Tan Malaka, PARI's chief strategist in China, and Tamin, the chief activist overseeing the party's operation across the DEI and British Malaya.

47 Shiraishi, 'Policing the Phantom Underground', 13.

48 ibid., 36.

49 Tamin attributed the success of the propaganda campaign to Mardjono, who was at that time still in Banjarmasin. Tamin's recollection contradicts the official records based on the police interrogations of PARI activists. The official records show it was Sarosan who recruited the railway workers through Danoewirjo. Mardjono came to Java in March 1929. See Visbeen and Halid, 'Police Report', July 1930; Shiraishi, 'Policing the Phantom Underground', 36.

As mentioned earlier, due to the increasingly stringent measures taken by both Dutch and British authorities, Tan Malaka usually mailed his writings to Bangkok wrapped in newspapers, which would be brought to Tamin and his disciples via trusted seamen travelling the Singapore–Bangkok route. Because it was not a colonial state, Siam was presumed to be safer than Malaya and Indonesia, but Subakat's arrest and ultimate extradition seemed to suggest otherwise. PARI members had apparently underestimated the capabilities of the DEI Government. The colonial intelligence and policing apparatus could easily extend its arms to foreign lands through international cooperation. Subakat's hideout in Bangkok had acted as something of a repository for crucial party literature. With the seizure of Subakat's archives, many PARI secrets were exposed.

Through Tamin, Hadji Djalaluddin, a famous Bangkok-based Islamic teacher from Bukit Tinggi, Sumatra, sold out Subakat to Siamese and DEI authorities. PARI activists in Singapore felt the impact of Subakat's arrest almost immediately, as Hadji Djalaluddin attempted to help Dutch officials make more arrests there by contacting people he knew in the PARI network. Having noticed the Hadji's intention, Tamin and his followers managed to conceal themselves temporarily from police surveillance, but they knew space in Singapore had become increasingly *sempit dan sulit* ('tight and difficult'). PARI members sensed the growing pressure from all sides, especially after hearing of the crackdown on the Sarekat Kaoem Boeroeh (Indonesian Workers' Union) in mid-1929, followed by the arrests of Iwa Koesoema Soemantri in July, Subakat in October and Sukarno and his PNI co-founders in December. As Tamin said, 1929 was a year when PARI and anticolonial struggles suffered *pukulan-pukulan yang dahsyat berat benar-benar* ('heavy and crushing blows');[50] and 1930 turned out to be no better. In February 1930, PARI members heard Subakat had killed himself in Glodok Prison in Batavia. Six months later, Dutch authorities crushed the PARI network in Central and East Java thanks to Sarosan's betrayal. From the interrogation of PARI activists, the DEI intelligence service learned that most of the party's documents entered Indonesia from Singapore through Mardjono, Soenarjo and Sarosan.[51] Singapore

50 Tamin, *PKI History*,70.

51 'Procureur-generaal (R.J.M. Verheijen) aan gouverneur-generaal (De Graeff) [Attorney-General R.J.M. Verheijen to Governor-General De Graeff]', [21 March 1931], GMR 509x/1931, in *De Ontewikkeling van de Nationalistische Beweging in the Nederlandsch-Indië* [*The Development of the Nationalist Movement in the Dutch East Indies*], R.C. Kwantes, ed. (Groningen, Netherlands: Wolters-Noordhoff, 1981), 549.

once again became the thorn in the side of the DEI Government, and they could only expect to pull it out by establishing a closer working relationship with the British authorities across the Malacca Strait.

As Tamin recalled, he felt the atmosphere in Singapore turn even more intense shortly after the Dutch clampdown on the Mardjono–Soenarjo group in July 1930. Batavian police chief M. Visbeen—who had travelled to Singapore in 1927 for the arrest of Alimin and Musso—returned to the Straits Settlements in August 1930 to reconnect with his police counterparts such as Inspector-General Harold Fairburn, Criminal Investigation Department (CID) Chief Rene Onraet and Chief Inspector Prithvi Chand, with whom he had previously cooperated.[52] The Singapore police looked so busy that Pak Said, a retired CID officer who had been secretly protecting PKI fugitives since the uprisings, advised Tamin to be careful although he was unaware of what had happened in Java.[53] So intense was the atmosphere for PARI members in Singapore that Tamin came to realise the city was no longer an ideal place to hide. With the introduction of a bosun friend named Karim, Tamin became a seaman aboard the *Darvel* in August 1930.[54] From this point, heightened policing measures in both the DEI and British Malaya forced Tamin and many of his PARI followers to move from place to place, switching from job to job, and, as a result, they frequently lost contact with one another.

Many of the PARI activists had their origins in Minangkabau, an area centred on Sumatra's west coast.[55] The so-called *Alam Minangkabau* ('Minangkabau World') consists of two regions: *darek*, the inner highlands, and *rantau*, the coastal frontiers. Perhaps no term could better describe PARI members' unstable lives and wandering than the idea of *merantau*—an important cultural tradition in Minangkabau's matriarchal society.[56] In a rite of passage, a young male needs to *merantau* (leave his home village and the Minangkabau World) in pursuit of a career, knowledge and experience. Either pursuing a specific goal or simply wandering around, *merantau* is critical in the making or breaking of a man. As Taufik Abdullah puts it, '*merantau* is, according to *adat* ['custom'] philosophy,

52 For Visbeen's previous visit, see Shiraishi, 'A New Regime of Order', 68.

53 Tamin, *PKI History*, 68.

54 In his memoir, Tamin recalled he started his job as a seaman in August 1929, but this does match the arrest of PARI members in Java, which happened in July 1930. Tamin's recollection of the date was most likely wrong. His starting time should be August 1930. See Tamin, *PKI History*, 69.

55 Shiraishi, *The Phantom World of Digul*, 141–42.

56 Tsuyoshi Kato, 'Rantau Pariaman: The World of Minangkabau Coastal Merchants in the Nineteenth Century', *The Journal of Asian Studies* 39(4) (1980): 729–52, at p.730, doi.org/10.2307/2055180.

one way to fulfill that Principal Law which charges the individual to "subject himself" to the largeness of the world'.[57] While wandering the world, *anak perantau* ('youths who *merantau*') stay connected through their Minangkabau bonds, are introduced to one another, offered timely assistance and keep their lives going despite various hardships. The PKI fugitives' first *merantau* was in the aftermath the 1926–27 uprisings when the DEI Government's wholesale crackdown forced them to leave the Dutch colony.

Yet, PKI fugitives did not feel much different in Malaya than in the Minangkabau World, as the extensive Minangkabau network offered enormous help to get them settled in the Malay States and Straits Settlements. Now with the British implementing more stringent measures against them, Tamin and his PARI followers were pressured to have their second *merantau*—this time, mostly on their own.

Tan Malaka and Tamin reestablished direct contact more than a year after Subakat's arrest.[58] Around the same time, Tamin also received a letter from Daja bin Joesoef alias Alyasin, a PKI fugitive from West Sumatra who had been staying in Negeri Sembilan since 1927. Negeri Sembilan is known as a unique Malay state of Minangkabau tradition, which has maintained close ties with the Minangkabau homeland in West Sumatra since early settlers began migrating to the area in the sixteenth century.[59] Daja told Tamin he had to leave his family behind because Abdullah bin Hadji Isa, a new CID officer in the Federated Malay States, had spotted him and revealed his PKI identity. As a result, Negeri Sembilan's local rulers had rejected Daja's petition to take refuge in the area. Daja thus begged Tamin to help him escape to Singapore so he could become a seaman. However, Singapore had become increasingly dangerous for PARI activists and the CID seemed to be making extra efforts to track Tamin down. Tamin described his situation in a rather pessimistic tone:

> Singapore does not seem to allow me to set foot on its land anymore. In a matter of a few days, I will certainly be forced to leave my traveling home in the ocean. And I will land at a place that I cannot determine and answer now.[60]

57 Taufik Abdullah, *Schools and Politics: The Kaum Muda Movement in West Sumatra (1927–1933)* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell Modern Indonesia Project, 1971), 20; and Rudolf Mrázek, 'Tan Malaka: A Political Personality's Structure of Experience', *Indonesia* 14 (1972): 1–48.

58 Tamin, *PKI History*, 68–71.

59 Michael G. Peletz, 'Comparative Perspectives on Kinship and Cultural Identity in Negeri Sembilan', *Sojourn: Journal of Social Issues in Southeast Asia* 9(1) (1994): 2.

60 Tamin, *PKI History*, 71.

PARI was hitting dead-ends in all directions. According to Tamin, the CID had tightened surveillance of postal services between Singapore and Chinese cities such as Shanghai, Amoy and Hong Kong. Although emergent nationalist and communist activities among Malayan Chinese may have contributed to the change, PARI activists were forced to send their letters to Tan Malaka from cities such as Kuala Lumpur or Ipoh via seamen and merchants. Similarly, Tan Malaka would send his replies to a Hainanese coffeeshop in Sandakan so Tamin could pick them up when passing by. Tamin never mentioned to what extent such methods had helped PARI to overcome the hurdles, but we can imagine the party's operations must have been very difficult during this period, as Tamin felt PARI had encountered 'obstacles here and hindrances there, as well as the omnipresent surveillance since 1930'.

Besides external pressures imposed by colonial authorities, PARI was always short of manpower and the arrest in Java only exacerbated the situation. The Singapore headquarters lost contact with many of its previous Sumatran activists. Kandur, who had been very active in smuggling PARI literature to Sumatra after the PKI uprisings, ceased reporting to Tamin and seemed to be hiding from the Singapore group in Bukit Tinggi, West Sumatra. Tamin suspected Kandur had cut ties with PARI on purpose; Kandur could have contacted PARI members in Singapore easily if he wanted, as numerous Bukit Tinggi merchants came to Singapore every day. By contrast, Tamin's righthand man, Djamaluddin Ibrahim, remained active and was ready to return to Indonesia at any time. Given the circumstances, however, Tamin decided Djamaluddin should not go; he felt PARI could not afford to lose any more members and must wait until opportunities presented themselves.[61]

Tamin switched to another ship, the *Kistna*, of the Singapore–Bangkok line, in early 1931. The trip frequency of the *Kistna* was almost identical to that of the *Darvel*—namely, three round trips every two months. The main difference was the *Darvel* stopped many times along the coast of British North Borneo, whereas the *Kistna* provided a direct connection between Singapore and Bangkok—a city where Tamin sought to reconnect with the West Sumatran network Subakat had left behind.[62] Tamin managed to meet Sjech Ahmad Wahab, the Islamic leader who had hosted Subakat

61 ibid., 72.

62 On Vietnamese revolutionary networks in Siam during the same period, see Goscha, *Thailand and the Southeast Asian Networks of the Vietnamese Revolution*.

before his arrest. Sjech Ahmad Wahab invited Tamin to stay in Bangkok, but Tamin turned down the offer and decided to return to Singapore to lead the PARI movement. On landing back in Singapore in July 1931, Tamin noticed a CID inspector named Gulam Ali was actively searching for him. Once again, he narrowly escaped arrest but realised that his job as a seaman would no longer guarantee his safety.[63]

One of the few options that remained was to hide in the Malayan hinterland. Tamin's first destination was neither Johor, the Malay state adjacent to Singapore, nor Negeri Sembilan, where he could easily have blended into the Minangkabau community. Rather, he chose to go to Selangor to seek refuge with a group of Muslim scholars whom he had befriended when he was *mengelilingi* ('wandering around') Malaya for the first time in the guise of a journalist in early 1926. These scholars belonged to the *Angkat Tua* ('Old Forces') or the so-called *Alim Ulama dan Tjerdik Pandai* (lit., 'wise and knowledgeable Muslim intellectuals'), who followed the Kaum Muda Movement of West Sumatra.[64] Tamin's *Alim Ulama* friend Hadji Abbas and Djafar Ali, an officer of Kuala Lumpur's Electricity Bureau, hosted him in Rawang, Selangor. Tamin's *Alim Ulama* friends then introduced him to the more renowned intellectuals, the *tjendikiawan* ('pundit') group. Initially, Tamin was hesitant about getting too close to the *tjendekiawans*, as he thought many of them were 'politically illiterate' and generally harboured a 'pro-British, anti-politics, and anti-communist' attitude.

Tamin's perception of the group gradually changed after meeting a *tjendekiawan* named Mohammad Jassin Abdullah, who expressed his concerns about British colonialism and hopes for Malaya's independence; Tamin regretted that Mohammad Jassin Abdullah died at a very young age. Another *tjendekiawan*, Haji Abdul Majid, a senior police officer, accidentally saved Tamin at the end of August. Outside his police job, Abdul Majid had close personal ties with Tamin's two hosts: he was Djafar Ali's uncle and had been a friend of Hadji Abbas since their school years. When a group of Singapore-based CID officials came looking for Tamin

63 Tamin, *PKI History*, 73.

64 The Kaum Muda Movement was started by a group of Middle East–educated Islamic scholars influenced by the Pan-Islamic Movement. Its main participants were students of two Islamic school systems: Thawalib, in which Tamin used to teach, and Dinijah. For more details about the movement, see Abdullah, *Schools and Politics*.

in Selangor, Abdul Majid unintentionally leaked this information to Djafar Ali and Hadji Abbas, who urged Tamin to leave Malaya as quickly as possible.[65]

Tamin left Selangor immediately but decided to try his luck in Ulu Beranang, Negeri Sembilan, a place he had visited in 1926 and where he sent Daja bin Joesoef in 1927. As Tamin anticipated, PKI fugitive Daja had left, but many villagers remembered him and treated him with great respect.[66] During his stay between September and December 1931, Tamin cultivated a close relationship with residents by teaching the Koran and contributing to communal work. Due to safety concerns, Tamin had initially planned to interact only with a small circle of trusted people, but many villagers ended up becoming acquainted with him and recognised him as a religious teacher from Sumatra. Instructed by his superiors in Singapore, police officer Abdul Majid continued to search for Tamin in the area, and even came to Ulu Beranang himself. To Tamin's surprise, some of the village chiefs were distant relatives of Abdul Majid and could have exposed Tamin if they had known his true identity. Fortunately, Tamin soon found such worries were unnecessary, as Abdul Majid concluded his search hastily and launched no further investigations.[67]

Towards the end of 1931, Tamin received some good news from Singapore: PARI activists Arief Siregar and Daja bin Joesoef had secured jobs at an oil well of the Nederlandsch Koloniale Petroleum Maatschappij (NKPM, Dutch Colonial Petroleum Corporation) in Sungai Gerong, South Sumatra.[68] Meanwhile, PARI's Singapore headquarters started to send literature to Batavia and West Sumatra again. More importantly, several people expressed interest in joining PARI, potentially ameliorating the party's cadre shortage. Among the most eager candidates was Ahmad Padang alias Djaus, Dawood or Davidson, an Indonesian-European from Tapanuli, North Sumatra, who had been working and living with PARI

65 Tamin, *PKI History*, 74–76.

66 As Tamin noted, villagers addressed him as '*tuan*', a honorific for senior officials or intellectuals. See ibid., 77.

67 ibid.

68 Arief Siregar first found a job as a clerk at NKPM in April 1930. After working there for seven months, he wrote a letter to Singapore, asking Tamin to send him an assistant. This happened to be the time when Tamin received Daja bin Joesoef's letter from Negeri Sembilan, asking for help to find him a job in Singapore. Tamin then sent Daja to Sungai Gerong to help Arief Siregar; the two had met previously in Singapore. See 'Proces Verbaal [Police Report] (Mohamad Arief Siregar), (6 October 1932)', 2.10.36.06, 963x/1933, GMR, NA-NL; Shiraishi, 'Policing the Phantom Underground', 40.

members in Singapore for five to six years. Tamin regretted that PARI members had excluded Djaus from the party for many years, not because of his capability or character but because of his skin colour.[69]

From Tamin's perspective, Djaus was an activist with great potential as he not only had a record for being trustworthy, but also was an experienced mechanic (which would allow him to find good jobs) and fluent in Dutch and English, as well as dialects of the Minangkabau and Mandailing regions. Djaus's recruitment was in stark contrast with Tamin's rejection of Limin, a PKI fugitive from Silungkang, West Sumatra, when Tamin was still working as a seaman. Limin had arrived in Singapore shortly after the 1926–27 uprisings, but Tamin believed people like Limin only cared about their own safety and had very shallow understandings of political theories and practices, which made them unqualified to join PARI's struggles.[70] Although Tamin did not elaborate on how he evaluated someone's 'understanding', he apparently had his standards for who should be allowed into the PARI inner circle; he needed to be the one to dictate the process, even if he was not always available while the party was short of personnel.[71]

Tamin returned to Singapore in December 1931 to pick up work on what he had left behind. Indeed, PARI saw some positive changes after Tamin's return. Sukarno's recent release seemed to have reactivated the revolutionary atmosphere in Java and Sumatra.[72] Enthusiasm for Indonesian independence was burgeoning among intellectuals, workers and the public. As a result, demands for PARI literature increased rapidly. In terms of party operations, Tamin and his followers were in a much better position than a year earlier. With the money saved from his modest life in the Malay States and his new job at a timber mill, Tamin managed to send Djaus to Shanghai in February 1932 to train with Tan Malaka. In March, Tamin met his old Thawalib friend Adam Galo, who was visiting from Padang Panjang. After a lengthy conversation, Tamin convinced Galo his revolutionary course was not 'anti-religion and anti-God' but aimed at Indonesia's full independence. Galo promised to support PARI's

69 Tamin speculated that Djaus might have been abandoned by his European father when he was young; it was understandable that Djaus did not know his place and date of birth. See Tamin, *PKI History*, 78.

70 ibid., 72, 78.

71 ibid., 72–76.

72 Sukarno was sentenced to four years of imprisonment in 1930 but was released early on 31 December 1931 due to pressure from liberals in both the DEI and the Netherlands.

struggles by helping with the distribution of its literature in Indonesia, sending cadres to Singapore for training and connecting PARI to the West Sumatran network of the Partai Sarekat Islam Indonesia (PSII, Islamic Association Party of Indonesia).

From May, Tamin noticed the police had started to follow him again. He suspected that Salim Sutan Malinggang, a PKI fugitive whom he had helped settle in Kota Tinggi, had informed the CID of his return to Singapore.[73] As he had experienced many times before, Tamin understood Singapore was not safe. However, he decided not to leave the city this time, as the momentum he had been hoping for the PARI movement was just picking up; he had to be in Singapore to hold absolute control over the party. Tamin's key strategy to evade police surveillance was to keep moving from place to place. According to Tamin, he had six to seven hideouts in Singapore, with the safest being CID retiree Pak Said's house, where he also stored numerous books and PARI documents. Tamin learned a lesson the hard way in April 1931, when PARI activist Umar Giri, who had been running a cigarette shop in Singapore to support the party's operations, was arrested in the nearby Indonesian town of Tanjung Uban on Bintan Island. Umar Giri's arrest cost PARI not only a primary source of income, but also Giri's house, which had been an important PARI meeting place and was where they produced most of their propaganda materials. As the police surveillance became more noticeable, Tamin stopped going to Pak Said's place in June 1932. He felt the CID could arrest him at any time but, first, he wanted to ensure the party's archives were safe.

Safety concerns aside, PARI was making unusual progress by mid-1932. Kandur, the PARI propagandist who had been hiding in West Sumatra for about three years, reemerged in Singapore in July with some good news. Kandur told Tamin he had gone to Batavia, where he got in contact with nationalist leaders of Minangkabau origin such as Mohammad Yamin and Assaat Datuk Mudo.[74] He then returned to West Sumatra and established connections with PSII leaders such as Djalaluddin Thaib and Gani Sjarif. Tamin reacted to Kandur's report with excitement, as he saw great potential to cooperate with the PSII through the Minangkabau

73 Shiraishi, 'Policing the Phantom Underground', 39.

74 Mohammad Yamin was born in Sawahlunto, West Sumatra, and was a well-known poet. He later became a career politician and played a key role in drafting Indonesia's first constitution in 1945. Assaat Datuk Mudo was born in Agam, West Sumatra. He was the provisional president of the Yogjakarta-based Republic Indonesia between December 1949 and August 1950 and led a rebellion against Sukarno in Sumatra in the late 1950s.

network. Tamin's plan became even more promising a month later, when Adam Galo carried out his promise and sent Lutan Sutan Basa and Lutan Madjid to Singapore for cadre training. Tamin encouraged the two to *menanam benih PARI* ('plant PARI's seeds') within the PSII and recruit new cadres from among Thawalib students. After enduring all sorts of hardships since Subakat's arrest in 1929, PARI members could finally see a viable path to reestablish the party back in Indonesia; they could certainly start with the Minangkabau network of West Sumatra.

Around the same time, Tamin heard that Mohammad Hatta, Indonesia's future vice-president, was about to return to Indonesia via Singapore. A Minangkabau himself, Hatta had by then already achieved fame by leading the Perhimpoenan Indonesia (Indonesian Union), a progressive student nationalist movement in the Netherlands. While PARI activists were thrilled at the prospect of meeting the renowned nationalist leader, Tamin worried Hatta's every move would be under the watchful eye of the CID. With a presentiment of trouble ahead, Tamin eventually gave up on the idea of meeting Hatta in Singapore.[75]

With PARI activities going so well and the pressures of the CID surveillance—and his potential arrest—becoming so intense, Tamin finally decided to return to Indonesia. He bought a ticket on a ship and was set to leave for Batavia on 15 September 1932. Two days before his departure, however, Tamin's worst hunch came true as CID Chief Inspector Prithvi Chand broke into his hideout and arrested him. In addition to Tamin, the police also arrested 12 other men, including Lutan Sutan Basa and Lutan Madjid, who were caught red-handed producing propaganda materials. Subsequently, Chand conducted a thorough search of the premises and seized many incriminating documents.

On 17 September, Tamin was brought to court and he and his comrades were charged with organising an illegal political party intended to rebel against the British Government. Tamin protested by going on a hunger strike, claiming he had never formed any political organisation against the British. The hunger strike earned Tamin an opportunity to talk to the new CID director, Arthur Harold Dickinson, who, according to Tamin, showed great sympathy for Tamin's struggles and appeared very impressed that Tamin was able to run the organisation without the assistance of

75 Tamin, *PKI History*, 79–83.

Moscow.[76] Tamin and his comrades were brought back to court two days later. This time, although the court dropped the previous charges of forming an illegal party against the British, they rearrested eight PARI activists under a new law passed in 1931 that subjected foreign politicians establishing political parties in British territories to imprisonment or repatriation to their place of origin. On 22 September 1932, British authorities handed Tamin and his followers over to police officers from the DEI, who brought Tamin back to Batavia for further investigation.[77]

Tamin's arrest in Singapore was the prelude to a much larger, coordinated police operation against the *perantaus* of the PARI network. As mentioned earlier, Arief Siregar had been working as a clerk with the NKPM in Sungai Gerong, South Sumatra, since April 1930; Daja bin Joesoef joined him seven months later but was in Batavia at the time of Tamin's arrest.[78] By investigating the documents seized during Tamin's arrest, the CID learned he had been in close contact with the two activists. The CID immediately notified their Dutch counterparts in Java and Sumatra, who captured the two activists on the same day, along with PARI literature and photographs in their possession.[79]

The PARI network collapsed after the arrests of Tamin and his followers. Dutch authorities conducted a thorough investigation of Tamin in Batavia and eventually interned him, together with his disciples Arief Siregar and Daja bin Joesoef, in Digul in August 1933.[80] Tamin remained in Digul until the outbreak of WWII, when the Japanese invasion prompted the Dutch Government to transfer them to Australia. PARI activities did not cease entirely, however, as younger activists such as Djaus and Sukarni carried on the work, although not necessarily under PARI's name. While some achieved political success by attaining influential positions in legal youth groups, more would be arrested and banished like the party veterans to Digul in the following years.[81]

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76 Dickinson assumed the position of CID director in February 1932. Before this, he was the chief police officer in Malacca. See 'Mr. A.H. Dickinson', *The Straits Times*, [Singapore], 5 February 1932, 12.

77 Tamin, *PKI History*, 84–87.

78 Shiraishi has conducted an intensive study of Arief Siregar's activities and his connections to Tamin and Daja based on Arief's interrogation record, which shows the two activists made very little progress in expanding PARI's influence among nationalist groups. See Shiraishi, 'Policing the Phantom Underground', 38–44.

79 The ARD also tracked down Kandur in June 1933 by using the information it had obtained from Arief's and Daja's arrests.

80 Tamin, *PKI History*, 84–87.

81 Kahin, *Nationalism and Revolution in Indonesia*, 85–86.

By 1932, the Dutch–British policing cooperation had reached an unprecedented level, paralysing PARI's clandestine network. The *ad hoc* cooperation we see in Alimin and Musso's arrests in 1927 gradually evolved into a multilayered system, which included greater gubernatorial consensus, smoother institutional communication, more effective intelligence sharing and closer personal ties among relevant officials. However, it is worth noting that such cooperation was not limited to the colonial governments of the DEI and British Malaya. Nor did the PARI network operate only in the two colonies. For instance, Tan Malaka's presence outside the two colonies extended the meaning of PARI's *perantau* network, further complicating how the pan–East Asia policing network would operate to counter it.

Conclusion

This chapter has shown that although PARI played a limited role in shaking the foundations of Dutch colonial rule, its operations outside the colony exerted a crucial and lasting impact on Indonesian politics. Like the regional networks of the Vietnamese communist movement during the same period, PARI grafted its revolutionary networks on to the kinship, occupational and religious networks of Indonesian immigrants across many Southeast Asian port cities and smaller towns in the hinterland. In relying on such networks, PARI activists managed to penetrate Indonesia and shape colonial politics by smuggling in anticolonial literature, recruiting new members and cooperating with various nationalist and religious groups.

However, PARI's revolutionary practices differed from those of its Vietnamese counterparts, especially in its relationship with the international communist movement. With the backing of the Comintern, Hồ Chí Minh established Vietnam's earliest communist organisations in southern China in 1925 and then grafted them on to existing anticolonial networks of Vietnamese immigrants in Thailand.[82] Such connections would later become 'the western bulwark of a larger Vietnamese revolutionary network' that connected the Asian bases such as Canton, Hong Kong and Singapore to the European communist headquarters in Moscow,

82 Goscha, *Thailand and the Southeast Asian Networks of the Vietnamese Revolution*, 64–68.

Berlin and Paris.[83] PARI, by contrast, broke from the Comintern and adopted a more nationalistic approach to its anticolonial struggle. As a consequence, PARI's operations in Southeast Asia were largely independent of concurrent anticolonial activities by former PKI members in the Soviet Union and Western Europe.[84] Although communism subsided inside the DEI under full-scale suppression, PARI activists continued their militant anticolonial struggle through multilayered noncommunist networks. When communism regained its prominence during Indonesia's national revolution after WWII, the ideological debates between Tan Malaka and the Alimin–Musso groups, which dated back to the PKI's split after 1926, remained central to the power struggles for the legitimacy and leadership of the new communist movement.

As Shiraishi points out, PARI was a small revolutionary party that never succeeded in establishing a significant presence in Indonesian nationalist politics. It was a network of Tan Malaka's disciples, akin to a group of 'commissioned traveling salesmen', whose main task was to distribute his writings.[85] While the hope was to educate millions of competent followers to aid in the attainment of Indonesia's independence, Tan Malaka and his righthand man, Tamin, managed only to train no more than 30. As a result, the threat PARI posed to the colonial order was minimal.[86]

From a policing perspective, however, PARI was not insignificant as it was the closest thing to a reincarnation of the PKI, which had posed an enormous threat to the colony's *rust en orde* ('peace and order') by plotting rebellions against the Dutch Government while maintaining close ties with international communism. The DEI authorities thus had sufficient reason for the mass arrests, imprisonments and internments of anyone reminiscent of the PKI. More importantly, as PARI's network operated mostly outside the DEI's borders, domestic policing appeared insufficient to tame the seemingly ever-growing communist beast—generating a fear that boosted the demand for joint efforts between colonial powers to tackle the 'red menace'. The disappearance of Tan Malaka—Indonesia's most capable and legendary communist leader—further intensified such anxiety. As Tamin wrote:

83 ibid., 8.

84 Klaas Stutje, *Campaigning in Europe for a Free Indonesia: Indonesian Nationalists and the Worldwide Anticolonial Movement, 1917–1931* (Copenhagen: NIAS Press, 2019), 114–18.

85 Shiraishi, *The Phantom World of Digul*, 160.

86 Shiraishi, 'Policing the Phantom Underground', 43–45.

> In the British intelligence circle in India and all over the British colonies, Tan Malaka has indeed become a great specter. They were always worried, always suspicious, that Tan Malaka might have been in India already. They were not able to find any trace of Tan Malaka ever since he vanished at the Amoy Port in November 1932. Maybe Tan Malaka is in India, maybe in Iran, maybe in Egypt, maybe in Rangoon, maybe in Malaya … For this reason, the Dutch and British intelligence services needed closer cooperation.[87]

The tone may seem exaggerated, but the essence of the message is clear: the collapse of the PARI network in 1932 did not mark the end of the policing cooperation between colonial powers. In fact, the episode drew the partnership closer. Director Dickinson of the Singapore CID, who had just finished handling Tamin's extradition and Tan Malaka's deportation, visited Batavia in early 1933 to strengthen cooperation between the British and Dutch intelligence services.[88] The following March, Governor of Hong Kong William Peel proposed amending the colony's Deportation Ordinance, pointing out that 'very notorious' communists such as Hồ Chí Minh and Tan Malaka had not committed extraditable crimes and could not be deported to their own countries. Peel argued it was no longer possible to 'consider red communist agitators political offenders against their own country only [because] "red communism" has become a matter of international concern'. Therefore, British authorities should stop allowing foreign revolutionaries to take refuge in their territories.[89] The amendment was subsequently approved in London.[90] As Foster rightly suggests, officials from Dutch, British, French and US colonies in the region shared similar concerns, and it was this consensus that drew the four colonial powers closer than ever. It strengthened their political cooperation, which would persist throughout the interwar period and eventually into the Cold War.[91]

87 Tamin, *PKI History*, 89–90.

88 'Letter of Consul-General in Batavia, 1 March 1933', Foreign Office (FO) 371/17403/W 3745/66, The National Archives, Richmond, UK; Harry Poeze, *Tan Malaka: Strijder Voor Indonesië's Vrijheid* [*Tan Malaka: Fighter for Indonesia's Freedom*] (Leiden, Netherlands: Brill, 1976), 433.

89 'Deportations, 1933', in Treaty Department and Successors: General Correspondence from 1906, Foreign Office (FO) 372/2913/02762, as quoted in Jarvis, *Partai Republik Indonesia*, 50.

90 ibid., (FO) 372/2913/303; Poeze, *Tan Malaka*, 433.

91 Anne L. Foster, *Projections of Power: The United States and Europe in Colonial Southeast Asia, 1919–1941* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010), 41.

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