

The Communist Manifesto in Indonesia

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This article offers a new perspective on the reception of Marxism in Indonesia by examining the first Malay translations of The Communist Manifesto, published in 1923 and 1925. These translations, made from Dutch and German source texts, ‘domesticated’ the Manifesto by exchanging certain European terms for vernacular ones with greater resonance in the Indonesian context. They also introduced a wider Indonesian audience to Marxist class concepts, which offered a new international way of conceptualising political resistance, and terms from European philosophy and history. In the process, they broke down the barriers built up by Dutch colonial authorities to keep radical European political texts away from vernacular languages. After the failed communist uprisings of 1926–27, the increasingly intense colonial policing regime stifled further dissemination of the Manifesto, but translations of Marx and Engels’ text received a new lease of life during the Indonesian Revolution (1945–49) and in the postwar decades. The Communist Manifesto was suppressed once more under the anti-communist New Order regime which came to power in 1966 and reconstructed the barrier between radical European political thought and the Indonesian language that had been erected by the Dutch.

The years following the October Revolution of 1917 saw a surge of interest in communism across Asia. This was most clearly manifested in the formation of new Asian communist parties that were founded in the aftermath of the Bolsheviks’ success to represent the workers and peasants of countries as diverse as Indonesia (1920), China (1920), Turkey (1920), India (1920), Japan (1922), Korea (1925), Indochina (1930), the Philippines (1930) and Malaya (1930). A parallel proof of the growing engagement with communism in Asia was the fact that *The Communist Manifesto* (1848), long available in a variety of European languages, was translated into several Asian languages for the first time in the 1920s, namely Chinese (1920), Korean (1920), Turkish (1923), Malay (1923) and Vietnamese (1925).

This article examines the first translations of *The Communist Manifesto* made in Indonesia (officially the Dutch East Indies until 1942) in 1923 and 1925, exploring how the translators reinterpreted the *Manifesto* for a new audience and a new linguistic, cultural and social context. The translations, undertaken on the initiative of the

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Indonesian Communist Party (PKI), rendered Marx and Engels' text in Malay, the lingua franca of the Indonesian archipelago, which by the 1920s was also being called *bahasa Indonesia* (Indonesian). As we shall see, the *Manifesto* presented something of a quandary for Indonesian translators, being at once a universal message to humanity, addressed to the 'workers of the world', and a highly parochial document, suffused with culturally-specific terms drawn from European history, society and politics, which were incomprehensible to many Indonesians. In the face of this dilemma, the translators partially 'domesticated' the *Manifesto* by using familiar Malay words in place of the text's specifically European terms and concepts.¹ At the same time, they provided annotations, footnotes and glossaries that introduced their readers to Marxist categories and terms from European history and philosophy.

Studying the ways in which Indonesians translated *The Communist Manifesto* allows for a new perspective on the reception of Marxism in Indonesia, itself a strand within the larger literature on Indonesian engagements with Western political thought. The scholarship on this topic has stressed the dual nature of communist writing in Indonesia, a genre that simultaneously aspired to the status of a Western political science, with a universal and 'scientific' terminology,² and had the form of a hybrid political language, enmeshed with Malay, Javanese and Islamic idioms.³ These two sides of Indonesian Marxism are visible in the first Indonesian translations of *The Communist Manifesto*, which were simultaneously localisations that brought Marxism into contact with Indonesian idioms, and exercises in expanding intellectual horizons that introduced Indonesians to a radical new set of ideas from the West, previously monopolised by Europeans and the small minority of Indonesians educated in Dutch.

Translation and anti-colonialism

In early twentieth century Indonesia, despite the efforts of liberal reformers to increase the provision of Western-style education, knowledge of Dutch was restricted to the European minority and to the fraction of 'natives' who had been to Western-style schools. According to the 1930 census, out of a total population of almost 61 million, only 172,089 Europeans and 187,708 'natives' were literate in

1 A 'domesticating' method assumes that the source text has a 'transparent essence' which can be fully reconstructed in the target language. See Lawrence Venuti, *The translator's invisibility: A history of translation* (London: Routledge, 2004).

2 On the 'universal' qualities of socialist anti-colonial political writing in Indonesia, see Benedict R. O'G. Anderson, 'Language, fantasy, revolution', in *Making Indonesia: Essays on modern Indonesia in honor of George McT. Kahin*, ed. Daniel S. Lev and Ruth T. McVey (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1996), pp. 26–40. On the scientific aspirations of certain Indonesian communists, see Ruth McVey, *The social roots of Indonesian communism* (Brussels: Centre d'étude du Sud-Est asiatique et de l'Extrême-Orient, 1970) and Ruth McVey, 'Teaching modernity: The PKI as an educational institution', *Indonesia* 50 (1990): 5–27.

3 On the fusion of Communism and Islam see Ruth McVey, *The rise of Indonesian communism* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1965); Takashi Shiraishi, *An age in motion: Popular radicalism in Java, 1912–1926* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1990) and Lin Hongxuan, 'Sickle as crescent: Islam and communism in the Netherlands East Indies, 1915–1927', *Studia Islamika* 25, 2 (2018): 309–50. On the mélange of Javanese and Marxist terms in the anti-colonial press, see Rianne Subijanto, 'Enlightenment and the revolutionary press in colonial Indonesia', *International Journal of Communication* 11 (2017): 1357–77.

Dutch, meaning that just 0.3 per cent of ‘native’ Indonesians knew the language of their colonial masters.⁴ The vast majority of ‘natives’ were illiterate, with only 6.4 per cent being able to read and write in any language.⁵ The 1930 census did not record how many Indonesians were literate in Malay, the country’s lingua franca, but it was likely a much higher number than those literate in Dutch, since there were many more Malay-language schools than Dutch-language ones, and Malay was the main language of the colonial bureaucracy.

For Indonesians literate in Malay but not in Dutch or other European languages, Western texts could be accessed only through translation. Translations of European novels, such as the Sherlock Holmes stories, were popular, with much of the early translation work being undertaken by the Indonesian Chinese community in the first decades of the twentieth century.⁶ Malay translations were also published by Balai Pustaka (Literature Bureau), a government-sponsored agency formed in 1908 to disseminate ‘improving’ European reading material in what the Dutch considered to be a refined form of Malay.⁷ In keeping with Dutch colonial officials’ view of themselves as an ordering and tutelary presence, Balai Pustaka refused to translate any books with controversial political messages, focusing instead on children’s stories with a conservative undertone, such as Frederick Marryat’s *Children of the New Forest* (1847) (*Hikajat empat orang anak piatoe dalam rimba*, 1921) and Mark Twain’s *The prince and the pauper* (1881) (*Anak radja dan anak miskin*, 1922).

The formation of the Indonesian Communist Party (PKI) in 1920 established an alternative source of Malay translations of European texts.⁸ A number of Indonesian communists were literate in Dutch and were naturally eager to disseminate communist literature to the Malay-reading public. In a 1922 report on the state of the party, the PKI leader Semaun wrote that ‘something that is very important and which we do not have enough of is Communist books that are well translated into the Indonesian language. At present we are busy working on this problem.’⁹ A year after Semaun’s report, in 1923, the Semarang press of the Train and Tram Workers’ Union (VSTP), which was largely pro-communist, published the first Malay translation of *The Communist Manifesto*, titled *Manifest Kommunist*, which had been serialised in the PKI paper *Soeara Ra’jat* (The Voice of the People) earlier in the year.¹⁰

4 H.M.J. Maier, ‘From heteroglossia to polyglossia: The creation of Malay and Dutch in the Indies’, *Indonesia* 56 (Oct. 1993): 37.

5 Ibid.

6 For a discussion of the translation of the Sherlock Holmes stories in Indonesia, see Doris Jedamski, ‘The vanishing-act of Sherlock Holmes in Indonesia’s National Awakening’, in *Chewing over the West: Occidental narratives in non-Western readings*, ed. Doris Jedamski (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2009), pp. 349–79.

7 On this history of Balai Pustaka, see Doris Jedamski, ‘Balai Pustaka: A colonial wolf in sheep’s clothing’, *Archipel* 44 (1992): 3–46.

8 The party was initially named Perserikatan Kommunist di Hindia (PKH, Communist Association of the Indies). In 1924 it changed its name to Partai Komunis Indonesia (PKI, Indonesian Communist Party).

9 Semaun, ‘An early account of the independence movement’, trans. Ruth McVey, *Indonesia* 1 (Apr. 1966): 75.

10 The *Communist Manifesto* was presumably chosen because of its status as the foundational document of the movement and because it contained a clear statement of communist goals. The *Manifesto* had the further advantages of being relatively short and written in a gripping and provocative style. The much longer and more difficult *Capital* (1867), was not translated into Indonesian until the

The PKI had good reason to expect considerable interest in a Malay translation of *The Communist Manifesto*. In addition to communism's obvious international importance, by 1923 communism was also a powerful force in Indonesian politics. Although the PKI itself was a small party of at most a thousand members, it was embedded within the much larger Sarekat Islam (Islamic Association), a mass movement of Indonesian Muslims which claimed two million members in 1919.¹¹ The 'red' (that is, pro-communist) branches of Sarekat Islam, which in 1923 became known as Sarekat Rakyat (People's Union), together with the PKI-aligned trade unions, gave the communists substantial grassroots support. An early crescendo of the Indonesian communist movement came in 1923, when a major strike of railway workers was launched, which was the largest industrial action yet undertaken in Indonesia.

In response to these developments, the colonial administration resorted to increasingly heavy handed and repressive tactics. As well as using penal laws to arrest striking workers, the government tightened press controls.¹² Leftist journalists found guilty of 'press offences' (*persdelict*) faced years in jail.¹³ In this febrile atmosphere, publishing translations of *The Communist Manifesto*, a text which openly called for the oppressed to overthrow their masters, was an act of resistance against the colonial state. While Balai Pustaka wished Indonesians to read children's fables, the PKI encouraged them to engage with a text from the European socialist tradition, a tradition which was previously largely unknown to those without Western-style schooling.¹⁴ In doing so, the communists invited Indonesians literate in Malay into the formerly exclusive domain of Western political philosophy, exposing a larger audience to Marx and Engels' incendiary arguments.

The translations

The translator of the first Malay edition of *The Communist Manifesto* was Partondo, a Javanese journalist and devotee of *kejawen* (the syncretic religion practised in Java) who edited the PKI paper *Soeara Ra'jat*. Partondo had earlier been the editor of *Oetoesan Hindia* (The Messenger of the Indies), a newspaper affiliated

1970s. Karl Marx, *Kapital: Kritik ekonomi politik*, trans. Zhang Xun-hua and Hong Yuan-peng (n.p., 1979).

11 In 1924 the PKI had around 1,000 members. See McVey, *The rise of Indonesian communism*, p. xiii. The figures on Sarekat Islam membership come from George McTurnan Kahin, *Nationalism and revolution in Indonesia* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1952), p. 66.

12 On the use of penal laws to suppress strikes, see John Ingleson, "'Bound hand and foot": Railway workers and the 1923 strike in Java', *Indonesia* 31 (Apr. 1981): 53–87.

13 For an extended analysis of the control of the press in this period, see Nobuto Yamamoto, *Censorship in colonial Indonesia, 1901–1942* (Leiden: Brill, 2019).

14 Before the emergence of Malay-language communist papers like *Sinar Hindia* (founded 1918), socialist ideas were discussed in the Dutch-language journal *Het Vrije Woord* (founded 1915). Prior to the translation of the *Manifesto* into Malay, Indonesians educated in Dutch were able to access the text in Dutch. Tan Malaka, a leading PKI cadre in 1921–26, read the text this way while living in the Netherlands during the First World War (see Tan Malaka, *From jail to jail*, ed. and trans. Helen Jarvis [Athens: Ohio University Press, 1991], vol. 1, p. 27). Darsono, a founding member of the PKI, also showed some acquaintance with the *Manifesto* in 1919 before its Malay translation, which suggests that he read it in Dutch. See 'Manifest Baroe dari Kaoem Kommunist dan diterbidkan dari Moskou dalam 1919', *Soeara-Rajat*, 16–31 Jan. 1921, pp. 1–2.

with Sarekat Islam.¹⁵ The source text he used for his 1923 translation was Herman Gorter's Dutch translation of the *Manifesto*, first published in 1904,¹⁶ which in all likelihood he obtained through Dutch communists with links to the PKI and VSTP. Two thousand copies of Partondo's translation were printed by the VSTP press, all of which were sold within a year.

Two years later, in 1925, the PKI issued a second edition of *The Communist Manifesto*, once more using the VSTP press in Semarang.¹⁷ This edition, which re-edited Partondo's version, was authored by 'Axan Zain', a pseudonym used by Subakat, a journalist and PKI activist who was then on the run after being charged with press violations by the colonial government.¹⁸ Like Partondo, Subakat was a 'native' Indonesian involved with both Sarekat Islam and the PKI. When making his version, he drew on both Dutch and German source texts, the latter likely selected because German was the language in which the *Manifesto* was originally written, meaning that it would enable a more accurate rendering of the text. His edition was more complete than Partondo's, including Marx and Engels' prefaces and the footnotes added by Engels. He also appended his own glossary to his translation, in which he explained the text's difficult foreign terms in Malay.

Both Partondo and Subakat spoke of *The Communist Manifesto* in reverential terms in their translators' prefaces. Partondo described the text as the product of 'extraordinary intelligence'.¹⁹ Subakat hailed the authors as 'our two late teachers Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels'.²⁰ Despite being written in the mid-nineteenth century, they agreed that the text remained highly relevant in the 1920s.²¹ Partondo pointed to the recent socialist revolutions in Russia and Germany as proof that Marx and Engels' political forecasts had been vindicated.²² Subakat, writing of the text's famous opening line, observed that 'we may now change these words to: "A spectre is haunting the world, the spectre of Communism"', because now

15 McVey, *The rise of Indonesian communism*, p. 391. On Partondo's religious practices, see Tan Malaka, *From jail to jail*, vol. 1, p. 79.

16 Gorter's translation was first published in 1904. See *Het communistisch manifest, Karl Marx en Friedrich Engels*, trans. Herman Gorter (Amsterdam: Brouchurehandel SDAP, 1904). Further editions of this translation were published in 1907, 1910 and 1920. It is not clear which edition was used in Indonesia.

17 The 1925 edition, unlike the 1923 translation, showed its price on the cover. Its cost was 0.6 guilders, roughly the average cost of a book at the time. For a comparison, Abdul Muis' novel *Salah Asuhan*, published by Balai Pustaka in three volumes averaging 90 pages, cost 0.45 guilders in 1928. See Takashi Shiraishi, ed., *Reading Southeast Asia* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990), p. 19.

18 Harry Poeze, *Tan Malaka: strijder voor Indonesië's vrijheid. Levensloop van 1897 tot 1945* (S-Gravenhage: Martinus Nijhoff, 1976), p. 344. Subakat published two further pamphlets under the pseudonym Axan Zain: *Apakah maoenja kaoem Kommunist* (Semarang: VSTP, 1925) and *P.K.I. dan Kaoem Boeroeh* (Semarang: VSTP, 1925).

19 'Kepandaian jang loear biasa', *Manifest Kommunist oleh Karl Marx dan Friedrich Engels, dimelajoeken dan ditambah keterangan oleh Partondo* (Semarang: VSTP, 1923), p. 1.

20 'Goeroe-goeroe kita almarhoem Karl Marx dan Friedrich Engels', *Manifest Kommunist oleh Karl Marx dan Friedrich Engels, salinan baroe oleh Axan Zain* (Semarang: VSTP, 1925), p. 2.

21 As Partondo wrote, although the *Manifesto* was composed in 1847, its contents 'almost fit entirely with contemporary circumstances [*hampir tjetjok semoeanja dengen kenjataanja sekarang*]', *Manifest Kommunist oleh Karl Marx dan Friedrich Engels, dimelajoeken dan ditambah keterangan oleh Partondo*, p. 1.

22 *Ibid.*, p. 2.

everywhere across the world Communism has great influence among the oppressed classes of the people.’²³ He referenced the 1923 railway strike in Indonesia as proof that communism was gaining ground domestically too.²⁴

Partondo and Subakat both emphasised in their prefaces the value of the *Manifesto* as a text which pointed a pathway towards worldwide liberation.²⁵ Partondo wrote that it was through organised resistance against capitalism that ‘a free world’ would be created.²⁶ Subakat similarly argued that Marx and Engels’ text illuminated a revolutionary road to a world of ‘peace, prosperity and freedom’.²⁷ This advocacy of struggle as a means of liberation was a rebuke to those Indonesians who held the fatalistic view that ‘natives’ could never throw off foreign domination and would have to resign themselves to their lot, focusing on private religious improvement and abandoning any hope of dramatic political change.²⁸ For Partondo, the central insight of *The Communist Manifesto* was that societies were malleable, meaning that a better world could be created here and now through the collective struggle against capitalism. As he put it, the *Manifesto* revealed that ‘TO IMPROVE THE WORLD IT IS NOT THE BEHAVIOUR OF MANKIND THAT MUST FIRST BE CHANGED, BUT THE RULES OF THE WORLD.’²⁹ The revolutionary upheavals in Europe showed that such radical restructurings of society were already under way in the West. With the international communist movement on the rise, it was not beyond the realms of possibility that Indonesia too could be turned into a communist society, with the guidance of Marx and Engels’ prophetic text.³⁰

23 ‘Sekarang bolehlah orang meroebah perkata’an itoe demikian: “Ada hantoe mengembara di doenia, ja’ni hantoe Kommunisme”, karena sekarang di mana-mana tempet di seloeroeh doenia Kommunisme besar sekalilah pergaroenja atas golongan-golongan Rajat jang terindes.’ *Manifest Komunist oleh Karl Marx dan Friedrich Engels, salinan baroe oleh Axan Zain*, p. 2.

24 *Ibid.*, p. 1.

25 Partondo finished his introduction by writing ‘I hope this M.K. [*Manifest Komunist*] may be very useful for all readers and I hope that readers who understand its contents go on to become leaders of the working class in the Indies and across the world, to bring about the freedom of mankind. [Kami harep, M.K. ini bisa bergoena banjak bagi sekalian pematja dan kami harep, soepaja pematja jang mengerti isi ini kemoedian djadi pemimpin kaeom boeroeh Hindia dan djoega di seloeroeh doenia, oentoek mendatengken kemerdekaan manoesia].’ *Manifest Komunist oleh Karl Marx dan Friedrich Engels, dimelajoeken dan ditambah keterangan oleh Partondo*, p. 2. Subakat similarly expressed a hope that ‘this second edition of *The Communist Manifesto*, like the first edition, will also be received with gladness by all those who desire truth and the independence of Indonesia and its people [tjetakan jang kedoea dari Manifest Komunist ini aken diterima dengan hati gembira djoega oleh sekalian orang jang menghendaki kebenaran dan kemerdekaan Indonesia dan Rajatnja seperti tjetakan jang pertama].’ *Manifest Komunist oleh Karl Marx dan Friedrich Engels, salinan baroe oleh Axan Zain*, p. 3.

26 ‘Doenia merdika’, *Manifest Komunist oleh Karl Marx dan Friedrich Engels, dimelajoeken dan ditambah keterangan oleh Partondo*, p. 1.

27 *Manifest Komunist oleh Karl Marx dan Friedrich Engels, salinan baroe oleh Axan Zain*, p. 2.

28 In 1965, the Minangkabau author Sutan Takdir Alisjahbana recalled that during his youth in the 1920s a fatalistic view was fairly common among his parents’ generation, writing that his parents felt that ‘this world was meant to be the infidels’ paradise, and that the faithful would only attain their heaven in the after-life’. Sutan Takdir Alisjahbana, *Indonesia: Social and cultural revolution* (Jakarta: Dian Rakyat, 2008), p. 24.

29 ‘OENTOEK MEMPERBAIKKEN DOENIA BOEKAN KELAKOEAN MANOESIA JANG HAROES DI ROEBAH LEBIH DOELOE, TETAPI ATOERANNJA DOENIA.’ *Manifest Komunist oleh Karl Marx dan Friedrich Engels, dimelajoeken dan ditambah keterangan oleh Partondo*, p. 1 (capitals in the original).

30 The PKI’s 1924 programme committed the party to strive towards the creation of soviets in Indonesia. See McVey, *The rise of Indonesian communism*, pp. 431–2.

Problems of translation

Despite their enthusiasm for spreading its message, both Partondo and Subakat stressed how difficult *The Communist Manifesto* was to translate. The main difficulty they cited was the density of foreign social, historical and, above all, theoretical terms contained within the text that had no clear Malay/Indonesian equivalents. In the preface to his 1923 translation Partondo wrote that

The task of translating the writings of *Marx* is not easy, especially from Dutch into Malay, two languages that are extremely different. Translating this Manifesto was even harder for me, because this Manifesto only recounts conditions in Europe, and the words used are difficult to translate into Malay, because those words relate only to conditions of Europe. There is another matter that made this translation difficult, which is that all the theories are explained very briefly, so those who have not yet read the other books of *Karl Marx* and *Friedrich Engels* will not truly understand the contents of this Communist Manifesto.³¹

Two years later, Subakat struck a similar note in his foreword, writing that while he had done his best to explain foreign words,

this Manifesto may still be difficult to understand for readers that don't yet truly understand Communism and its *filosofie* (its worldview). This is not a fault of the translation, but is in fact because the theories of Marx and Engels are new to the majority of readers.³²

Both Partondo and Subakat were thus acutely aware of the linguistic and cultural distance between their own country and the Europe of Marx and Engels. They feared, as a result, that they lacked the vocabulary required to adequately translate the text. It is worth noting that this sense of difficulty was not commented on by Engels in his preface to the English, Russian, Italian or Polish editions, or by Herman Gorter in the foreword to his Dutch translation. Gorter, in fact, noted the ease with which the *Manifesto* could be understood by working people.³³ Both Engels and Gorter seemingly assumed a basic historical and cultural continuity among European countries which meant the *Manifesto* could be adequately translated and understood across language barriers.³⁴ Partondo and Subakat, in contrast, were highly conscious of the

31 'Pekerjaan menjalin karangan-karangan *Marx* itoelah tidak moedah adanja, apa lagi menjalin dari bahasa Belanda ke dalem bahasa Melajoe, berdoea bahasa jang terlaloe bedanja. Salinan Ma'loemat ini lebih-lebih beratnja bagi kami, karena Ma'loemat ini hanja menjeritaken keadaan-keadaan di Europa itoe sadja. Ada lain hal lagi, jangan memberatkan penjalinan ini, jaitoe karena semoea theorie di terangkan dengan singkat sekali, hingga orang-orang jangn beloem pernah membatja boekoe-boekoe *Karl Marx* dan *Friedrich Engels* lainnja tidak aken mengerti betoel isi Ma'loemat Kommunist ini.' *Manifest Kommunist oleh Karl Marx dan Friedrich Engels, dimelajoeken dan ditambah keterangan oleh Partondo*, p. 1.

32 'Manifest ini masih bisa soesah djoega oentoek dimengerti oleh pematja-pematja, jang beloem paham bener dalem Kommuniste dan filosofienja (pemandangannja). Inilah tidak salahnja penjalin, tetapi memang karena theorie-theorienja Marx dan Engels itoe baroelah adanja bagi pematja jang terbanyak.' *Manifest Kommunist oleh Karl Marx dan Friedrich Engels, salinan baroe oleh Axan Zain*, p. 2.

33 *Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, Het Communistisch Manifest*, trans. H. Gorter (Amsterdam: J.J. Bos, 1920), p. vii.

34 Naturally, anti-communists in Europe, who believed Marxism was a dangerous foreign ideology with a foreign vocabulary, did not see things this way. In 1923 the British chancellor of the Exchequer Stanley

discontinuities between European languages and Malay, especially regarding terms derived from European history and philosophy that had no clear counterparts in Indonesia. These discontinuities made the *Manifesto*, despite its international message, a text somewhat resistant to Malay translation.

Explaining the terminology of *The Communist Manifesto*

To make *The Communist Manifesto* intelligible in Malay, Partondo and Subakat employed a number of explanatory devices. For the terms used by Marx and Engels that had no obvious Malay equivalents, they provided explanations in footnotes and annotations. Thus, Partondo translated economist as *econom* (the Dutch term), for which he gave the gloss ‘people who study the ways of producing and selling goods’.³⁵ Liberalism (*Liberalisme*) was ‘a movement of the eighteenth century for the attainment of freedom directed against the nobles. Now liberalism is still used by the capitalists to deceive the common people.’³⁶

Subakat compiled these novel foreign words into a glossary, attached at the end of his translation. Many of the entries were terms from European politics and philosophy taken from Dutch, such as:

Absolutisme (Power that is limited by no-one. Absolutism in a country means that in that country there are no representatives of the people).³⁷

Ideoloog (People who have their own views, that are different to those of others; *ideoloog* also means a person who dreams up good things).³⁸

R a d i k a l : all the way to the root. A radical Party is one that strives for its goals through extreme measures.³⁹

He also gave concise summaries of unfamiliar Marxist concepts, such as:

Anarchie (a state of disarray, without government and laws. ‘Anarchy in production’ means the making of goods without advance calculation or measurement; not examining first whether or not the goods that will be made can be used by society).⁴⁰

Baldwin stated, ‘It is no good trying to cure the world by repeating that penta-syllabic French derivative, “Proletariat”.’ Quoted in Alfred F. Havighurst, *Britain in transition: The twentieth century* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985), p. 179.

35 ‘Orang-orang yang mempeladjadi tjara lakoenja doenia menghasilkan dan mendjoel dagangannja’, *Manifest Kommunist oleh Karl Marx dan Friedrich Engels, dimelajoeken dan ditambah keterangan oleh Partondo*, p. 22.

36 ‘Pergerakan dalem abad 18 terhadap kepada kaoem bangsawan oentoek mendapat kemerdekaan. Sekarang liberalisme itoe masih dilakoeken djoega oleh kaoem modal oentoek menipoe Ra’jat.’ *Ibid.*, p. 21.

37 ‘*Absolutisme* (kekoeasaan jang tidak ada batesnja dari satoe orang. Absolutisme dalem negeri bererti jang dalem negeri itoe tidak ada perwakilan Rajat).’ *Manifest Kommunist oleh Karl Marx dan Friedrich Engels, salinan baroe oleh Axan Zain*, p. 65.

38 ‘Ideoloog: orang jang mempoenjai pemandangan sendiri, berbeda daripada lain-lainnja; ideoloog bererti djoega: orang jang mengimpi-impi hal-hal jang baik.’ *Ibid.*, p. 67.

39 ‘Radikal: habis-habisan hingga sampai di akar-akarnja. Partai radikal jaitoe partai jang menoentoet maksoednja dengan djalan keras-kerasan.’ *Ibid.*, p. 71. The inconsistencies in the typography and style of the translated definitions reflect the original.

40 ‘*Anarchie* (keadaan jang tidak poenja atoeran, tidak ada peperintahannja dan tidak ada oendang-oendangnja. “Anarchie dalem penghasilan” itoelah ertinja membikin barang jang tidak menoeroet

K o m m u n i s m e : an arrangement of society that decrees that all means of production, such as land, mines, factories, machines and so on are public property, so that those means of production can be used for the needs and welfare of the people.⁴¹

K a p i t a l : money that is used by those who have (capitalists) to buy factories, machines, mines etc., and to pay labourers who work in those businesses. In doing this, capitalists seek to increase their wealth by exploiting the labour of the workers. The fruits of the workers' labour each day are greater than the price at which they sold. As a result, the capitalists gain a profit. ... Money that is stashed in the cupboard is not capital, but ordinary wealth ... Factories, railways, land and ships that are used to fulfil public needs will in Communist society not be capital, but ordinary objects. So it is clear that the destruction of capital does not mean the end of progress, but the end of the oppression and exploitation of one person by another.⁴²

By providing these annotations, Partondo and Subakat introduced Indonesian readers to novel political and philosophical concepts, several of which had a clear Marxist inflection: liberalism was a once emancipatory ideology that now served the purposes of capitalism; anarchy was a state of lawlessness and, in an economic context, a lack of rational planning; a capitalist was not simply a rich person but someone who owned a particular form of wealth that stemmed from the exploitation of labour. In this manner they illuminated some of the language of Western political thought for Indonesians unable to read European languages.

Since both Subakat and Partondo assumed that their readers had little knowledge of European history or politics, they provided explanations of the historical events and political movements described in *The Communist Manifesto*. Partondo related that 'the movement of the Chartists was a movement of people in England that aimed at democracy, which means also taking heed of the needs of the common people. This movement arose around the year 1848.'⁴³ Subakat explained that the February Revolution was 'a revolution that broke out on 24

hitoengan dan oekoeran lebih doeloe; tidak diperiksa lebih doeloe apakah barang-barang yang aken dibikin itoe nanti bisa dipakai ataoepoen tidak oleh orang-orang dalem pergaoelan-hideop). Ibid., p. 65.

41 'Kommunisme: Peratoeran dalem pergaoelan hideop, jang menetepken, bahwa semoea alat-alat penghasilan, seperti: tanah, tambang, paberik, machine-machine dan lain-lain djadi kepoenjaan Rajat oemoem, soepaja alat-alat itoe didjalanken boeat keperluan dan keselametannja Rajat sendiri.' Ibid., p. 68.

42 'Kapital: oeng jang didjalanken oleh jang poenja (kapitalist) oentoek membeli paberik-paberik, machine-machine, tambang-tambang dan lain-lain, dan djoega oentoek membajar kaoem boeroeh jang bekerdja di peroesahaan2 itoe. Dengan berboeat begini seorang kapitalist berkehendak menambah oengnja, karena ia menghisep kekoetaan kaoem boeroeh. Boeahnja pekerdjaan kaoem boeroeh sehari-harinja lebih besar harganya daripada djoemlah belandja jang di terimanja. Karena itoelah kaoem kapital bisa mendapet oentoeng. ... Oeng jang disipen dalem lemari boekan kapital, tetapi kekajaan biasa. ... Paberik-paberik, spoor, tanah, kapal-kapal jang didjalanken boeat keperluan oemoem nanti dalem pergaoelan Kommunist boekannja kapital, tetapi barang-barang biasa. Djadi teranglah, bahwa hilangnya kapital boekan bererti berhentinja kemadjoean, tetapi hilangnya kapital hanya bererti: hilangnya penghisapan dan tindasan dari satoenja menoesia atas lainnja.' Ibid., pp. 67–8.

43 'Pergerakan kaoem Chartist jaitoe pergerakan orang di Inggeris, jang mempoenjai haloean demokrati, ertinja toeroet memperhatikan djoega keperluan Rajat rendah. Ini pergerakan terjadi kira kira dalem tahoen 1848.' *Manifest Kommunist oleh Karl Marx dan Friedrich Engels, dimelajoeken dan ditambah keterangan oleh Partondo*, p. 25. Partondo was evidently not entirely sure when exactly the Chartist movement, which began in 1838, had been active.

February 1848 in Paris. The aim of the revolution was to bring down the monarchy (rule by *raja*) that had been founded in July 1830. This revolution created a republic.⁴⁴ By providing such notes, the translators revealed to Indonesian readers Europe's tradition of social revolution and radicalism. This presented an image of Western society quite different to the one given by certain Dutch authorities in Indonesia, who contrasted the orderly and rational nature of Europeans with the emotional and unruly 'native' psyche, and taught the history of European colonialism in Indonesia as a civilising process, which had pacified 'native' rebellions.⁴⁵ As the *Manifesto* showed, Europeans had an extended history of social and political upheaval of their own.⁴⁶

For alien European terms, Partondo and Subakat used more familiar Malay equivalents. Thus, the Russian Tsar (*Czaar* in Dutch) became the *Radja Roesia* (the Russian *raja*);⁴⁷ a priest (*priester*) became an *oelama* (an Islamic religious scholar);⁴⁸ a feudal lord (*leenheer*) became a *raja* or a *bangsawan* (noble);⁴⁹ and the 'powers of the nether world' (*onderaardsche machten*)—Marx and Engels' metaphor for the uncontrollable productive energies summoned by capitalism—became *djinn-djinn* (djinn).⁵⁰ In this way the translations exchanged unknown European terms for words with greater resonance in the Indonesian context: a *raja* was a familiar figure thanks to the extended history of Hindu kingship in Java and Bali; an *oelama* was a recognisable type in Indonesian Muslim society; the term *bangsawan* described Indonesian aristocratic elites, such as the *prijaji* nobles of Java, who were a distinct and powerful social group in colonial society; and a *djinn* was a well-known creature from Islamic mythology.

44 'revolutie jang petjah patda tanggal 24 Februari 1848 di Paris. Maksoednja revolutie jaitoe mendjatoehken monarchie (kekoeasaan radja) jang didirikan poela dalem boelan Juli 1830. Revolutie ini mendirien republik.' *Manifest Kommunist oleh Karl Marx dan Friedrich Engels, salinan baroe oleh Axan Zain*, p. 71.

45 On the psychological stereotyping of Indonesians, see Hans Pols, 'The nature of the native mind: Contested views of Dutch colonial psychiatrists in the former Dutch East Indies', in *Psychiatry and empire*, ed. Sloan Mahone and Meghan Vaughan (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), pp. 172–96. On the colonial accounts of Indonesian history and nationalist attempts to overturn them, see Anthony Reid, 'The nationalist quest for an Indonesian past', in *Perceptions of the past in Southeast Asia*, ed. Anthony Reid and David Marr (Singapore: Heinemann Educational, 1979), pp. 281–98.

46 The hypocrisy inherent in the simultaneous Dutch celebration of their own revolutionary past and suppression of Indonesian nationalism was not lost on Indonesians with Dutch educations. Suwardi Suryaningrat's 1913 polemic *Als ik een Nederlander was* (If I were a Dutchman) made this controversial point, and was quickly banned by the colonial government.

47 *Manifest Kommunist oleh Karl Marx dan Friedrich Engels, dimelajoeken dan ditambah keterangan oleh Partondo*, p. 3; *Manifest Kommunist oleh Karl Marx dan Friedrich Engels, salinan baroe oleh Axan Zain*, p. 19.

48 *Manifest Kommunist oleh Karl Marx dan Friedrich Engels, dimelajoeken dan ditambah keterangan oleh Partondo*, p. 5; *Manifest Kommunist oleh Karl Marx dan Friedrich Engels, salinan baroe oleh Axan Zain*, p. 24.

49 *Manifest Kommunist oleh Karl Marx dan Friedrich Engels, dimelajoeken dan ditambah keterangan oleh Partondo*, p. 3; *Manifest Kommunist oleh Karl Marx dan Friedrich Engels, salinan baroe oleh Axan Zain*, p. 20.

50 *Manifest Kommunist oleh Karl Marx dan Friedrich Engels, dimelajoeken dan ditambah keterangan oleh Partondo*, p. 7; *Manifest Kommunist oleh Karl Marx dan Friedrich Engels, salinan baroe oleh Axan Zain*, p. 28.

Using Malay social terms in place of European ones suggested a certain equivalence between Indonesian and European societies. As the Malay translations of *The Communist Manifesto* showed, Europeans had rajahs, *oelama* and *bangsawan* of their own. This diminished the status of Indonesian aristocratic elites, who tended to emphasise their unique status and power.⁵¹ It also suggested that Marx and Engels' account of the decline of European feudalism and the rise of capitalism could be read as a prophecy for Indonesian society, given that in Indonesia old aristocratic elites, though they continued to enjoy privileges and administrative powers within the colonial state, were relatively marginal to the emerging industrial economy in Java and Sumatra, which was largely in the hands of 'bourgeois' Europeans.⁵² The translations of the *Manifesto* thus subtly critiqued the hierarchies of 'native' Indonesian society by suggesting an equation of the *bangsawan* aristocracy with the doomed feudal classes of Europe. The proud *bupati* (regents) of Java, by this logic, were on the same road to destruction as the Bourbon monarchs of France.

As well as exchanging European terms for Malay ones, Partondo and Subakat just as often kept Dutch terms in their translations, followed by explanations in Malay. Partondo translated Pope as 'Paoes, the rajah of Christian religion based in the city of Rome' and monarchy as 'monarchi (rajahs)'.⁵³ Subakat translated aristocracy as 'aristokratie (nobles)' and literature as 'literatuur (books)'.⁵⁴ In his rendering of the *Manifesto*'s philosophical terms, Subakat provided a Malay translation, then gave both the Dutch and German phrases. In this way 'alienation of humanity' became "the disappearance of humanity" (*Entausserung des menschlichen Wesens*, in German and: *Vervreemding van het menschelijke wezen*, in Dutch).⁵⁵

Keeping such Dutch and German words signalled to readers that the translators were being faithful to their source texts. It also allowed Indonesians who were literate in both Malay and Dutch to compare the Malay translations with the European words. The resulting effect was to underline the foreignness of the *Manifesto*, drawing readers' attention to its European origins. In a way this added to the text's prestige, since knowledge of European languages was the preserve of a small elite in colonial Indonesia, meaning that Dutch and German words had a certain foreign cachet. By giving explanations, annotations and glossaries alongside the alien European terms,

51 As Benedict Anderson noted, 'In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, Javanese rulers had called themselves *Pakubuwono* (Nail of the Cosmos) and *Hamengkubuwono* (Holder of the Cosmos) without much self-consciousness, though from today's perspective there is something irremediably laughable about rival rulers with capitals (Surakarta and Jogjakarta) less than fifty miles apart calling themselves by such world-conquering appellations.' Anderson, 'Language, fantasy, revolution', p. 27.

52 While much of the domestic administration of Java was in the hands of the *pangreh praja*, the indigenous civil service, which had an aristocratic core, most of the large capitalist enterprises in Indonesia were owned by Europeans. In 1925, 54 per cent of firms employing more than six people were owned by Europeans, 29 per cent by Chinese, and 17 per cent by 'natives', Arabs and others. George Kahin, *Nationalism and revolution in Indonesia*, p. 29.

53 'Paoes, radja igama nasrani jang ada di kota Roem', 'monarchi (kaoem radja)', *Manifest Kommunist oleh Karl Marx dan Friedrich Engels, dimelajoeken dan ditambah keterangan oleh Partondo*, pp. 3, 4.

54 'aristokratie (kaoem bangasawan)'; 'literatuur (boekoe-boekoe)', *Manifest Kommunist oleh Karl Marx dan Friedrich Engels, Salinan Baroe oleh Axan Zain*, pp. 34, 49.

55 "'Lenjapnja kemoesian", (*Entausserung des menschlichen Wesens*, Djerman dan: *Vervreemding van het menschelijke wezen*, Belanda)', *Manifest Kommunist oleh Karl Marx dan Friedrich Engels, salinan baroe oleh Axan Zain*, p. 54.

the translators equipped their readers with a political and philosophical vocabulary that had previously been restricted to the Western-educated elite, exposing them to a new language of Marxist political thought, with its argot of ‘anarchy’, ‘liberalism’, ‘capital’ and ‘alienation’.

Translating class

The class terms of Marx and Engels were also translated by Partondo and Subakat in a multilingual style, with the European word being given followed by an explanation in Malay. Partondo translated bourgeoisie as ‘Bourgeoisie (capitalist [*kemodalan*])’, while Subakat similarly rendered the term as ‘Bourgeoisie (capitalists [*Kaoem Modal*])’.⁵⁶ Both Partondo and Subakat used the term *Proletar* or *Preletar* alongside the Malay gloss *kaoem boeroeh* (workers). In his glossary, Subakat gave the following definitions of the main groups of modern capitalist society:

Bourgeois, pronounced *boersoea* (a person that has capital [*modal*], and exploits the workers, a person of capital [*seorang modal*], a *kapitalist*).⁵⁷

Proletar: the class of the common people that is poor, owns nothing; at present that is the workers.⁵⁸

By using and elucidating the European terms ‘bourgeois’ and ‘proletarian’ in this way, rather than replacing them with Malay equivalents, the translators acquainted Indonesian readers with Marx and Engels’ original terminology, a terminology which had a broad international currency, being the established vocabulary of the international communist movement. By the 1920s this Marxist terminology was also being used routinely by Indonesian communists in their newspapers.⁵⁹

Using the terms ‘proletariat’ and ‘bourgeoisie’ also offered a new schema for thinking about Indonesian society. Colonial officials divided the population of Indonesia for legal purposes into three racial groups: Europeans (a category which included Eurasians), ‘foreign orientals’ (who were mainly Chinese and Arabs), and ‘natives’. These categories were further subdivided by religion and ethnicity.⁶⁰ Marx and Engels, however, classified social groups according to their relation to the means of production, yielding categories which cut across national, racial and religious boundaries. Most large capitalist firms in Indonesia were owned by

56 *Manifest Kommunist oleh Karl Marx dan Friedrich Engels, dimelajoeken dan ditambah keterangan oleh Partondo*, p. 3; *Manifest Kommunist oleh Karl Marx dan Friedrich Engels, Salinan Baroe oleh Axan Zain*, p. 20. The Malay word *modal* (profitable assets) overlaps with ‘capital’. The word *kaoem*, derived from the Arabic *qaum*, means a group of people with a common characteristic, such as Muslims (*kaoem Muslimin*) or youth (*kaoem moeda*), and so can be used more broadly than the English ‘class’ or the Dutch *klasse*, both of which tend to refer to socioeconomic groups.

57 ‘*Bourgeois*, membatjanja: boersoea (pendoedoek negeri jang poenja modal dan menghisep kaoem boeroeh, seorang modal, seorang kapitalist).’ *Manifest Kommunist oleh Karl Marx dan Friedrich Engels, Salinan Baroe oleh Axan Zain*, p. 65.

58 ‘*Proletar*: klas Rajat jang miskin, tidak poenja apa-apa; sekarang jaitoe kaoem boeroeh.’ *Ibid.*, p. 70.

59 The words *proletar* (proletarian) and ‘bourgeoisie’ cropped up repeatedly in the PKI papers *Soeara Ra’jat* and *Sinar Hindia*. On the latter, see Subijanto, ‘Enlightenment and the revolutionary press’.

60 See Robert Cribb, ‘The historical roots of Indonesia’s New Order: Beyond the colonial comparison’, in *Soeharto’s New Order and its legacy: Essays in honour of Harold Crouch*, ed. Edward Aspinall and Greg Fealy (Canberra: ANU Press, 2010), p. 71.

Westerners, making ‘bourgeois’ largely synonymous with ‘European’.⁶¹ A ‘proletarian’ (*proletar*), however, was an expansive category that could include Javanese sugar factory workers, Chinese coolies in East Sumatra, and even labourers in Europe, a fact underlined by the *Manifesto*’s call for proletarians of the *world* to unite.⁶²

The distinctiveness of the class analysis of the *Manifesto* in the Indonesian context can be appreciated by comparing the PKI to other contemporary political parties. These parties were generally constituted along ethnic or religious lines, such as the Javanese party Budi Utomo (Noble Endeavour, founded 1908) or Sarekat Islam.⁶³ The PKI, in contrast, was organised on the basis of class, which meant that it was open to all religions and races, and was aligned with the international workers’ movement.⁶⁴ Several of its most dedicated early cadres were Europeans.⁶⁵ Its first chair, Semaun, was Javanese, while its second, Tan Malaka, was Minangkabau. Revealingly the PKI’s official newspaper *Soeara Ra’jat* carried in its banner a Malay translation of the final line of the *Manifesto*, ‘PROLETARIANS [KAOEM PROLETAR] OF THE WORLD UNITE!’, to which a gloss was added in brackets that explained the meaning of the word *Proletar* in a manner that underlined the term’s international and religiously pluralist implications: ‘(Workers and the poor from all nations and religions come together to become one)’.⁶⁶

Translating *The Communist Manifesto* into Malay thus exposed a wider public in Indonesia to the theoretical foundations of the PKI’s proletarian internationalism. In the place of categories such as Javanese or Minangkabau, Muslim or Christian, Chinese or ‘native’, Marx and Engels’ text spoke of the proletariat (*proletar*), a category of dispossessed labourers which could subsume all of Indonesia’s racial and religious groups and extended across the world. The translations therefore complemented the PKI’s more general efforts to make Indonesians see themselves as participants in a larger international workers’ struggle, and to build a class-based political movement.

61 A cartoon in the leftist Islamic newspaper *Islam Bergerak* in 1919 depicted a bearded European wearing a white suit and hat, labelled ‘kapitalist’, sucking the blood out of an emaciated rural labourer. See Shiraishi, *An age in motion*, p. 147.

62 On the use of internationalist symbols, such as the hammer and sickle, in the early PKI, see Klaas Stutje, “‘Volk van Java, de Russische Revolutie houdt ook lessen in voor U’: Indonesisch socialisme, bolsjewisme, en het spook van het anarchisme”, *Tijdschrift voor geschiedenis* 130, 3 (2017): 427–47.

63 Because of the position of Muslims within the Indonesian economy, there were attempts to turn Sarekat Islam into a class-based party. These were met with resistance by the central branch of Sarekat Islam, which expelled PKI members in 1921.

64 The PKI joined the Comintern in 1920. In a 1924 party speech, the PKI campaigner Darsono emphasised the importance of organising along international class lines, stating that ‘The PKI must be international and must not forget that the Dutch workers are its great allies.’ Quoted in McVey, *The rise of Indonesian communism*, p. 124.

65 In the early days of the PKI the Dutch Communists Henk Sneevliet and Asser Baars were key members. Subakat’s translation of the *Manifesto* listed on its inside back cover the names of several exiled Dutch ‘comrades [*kawan-kawan*]’ who were to be honoured: Sneevliet, Brandsteder, Van Burink, Baars, Bergsma, Mrs Sneevliet, van Kordenoordt and van Munster.

66 ‘KAOEM PROLETAR DI SELOEROEH DOENIA, BERSATOELAH! (kaoem boeroeh dan kaoem miskin dari segala bangsa dan Igama, koempoellah mendjadi satoe).’ See, for example, *Soeara Ra’jat*, nos. 3–4, 16 and 28 Feb. 1921.

Reception

For Indonesians who could not read Dutch, Partondo and Subakat's translations of *The Communist Manifesto* gave them their first taste of the writings of Marx and Engels. Soemantri, a teacher in a Sarekat Islam school who in 1923 became chairman of the pro-communist Semarang Sarekat Islam,⁶⁷ published a novel in 1924 titled *Rasa Merdeka* (The Taste of Freedom) which drew on Partondo's translation of phrases such as 'means of production' (*alat-alat penghasilan*).⁶⁸ In early 1925, the PKI member and Islamic scholar Hadji Misbach, who did not read Dutch, likely used Partondo's translation as a source for his discussion of *The Communist Manifesto* in an article on the synthesis of communism and Islam published in the newspaper *Medan Moeslimin* (Forum of Muslims). He wrote that 'Toewan [Mister] Karl Marx then composed a book named *Kommunistische* [sic] *Manifest* in 1847 in the city of Paris. In the *Manifest* we can see for ourselves the position of Communism. Mister Karl Marx explains that Communism is a seed that comes from capitalism, planted in the hearts of the people, above all the workers.'⁶⁹

In 1926 a section of the PKI leadership, facing increasingly intense government repression, made a bid to seize power. Confident that the international communist movement would come to their aid and that the numerically tiny Dutch bourgeoisie could be toppled by the vast working masses of Indonesia, they planned to incite a rebellion among the workers and peasants of Java and Sumatra, which they hoped would develop into a full-blown communist revolution.⁷⁰ The planned revolt, which was opposed by more cautious members of the PKI, broke out only sporadically in West Java in November 1926 and in West Sumatra in January 1927. Russian assistance failed to materialise and the colonial authorities acted decisively to put down the rebellion within a few weeks. In the official report that followed, it was discovered that both Partondo and Subakat's translations of *The Communist Manifesto* had circulated in West Sumatra prior to the revolt.⁷¹

In the aftermath of the uprising, thousands of suspected Communists were arrested and executed or exiled, with many being sent to the Boven Digoel concentration camp in West Papua. Subakat, like many PKI cadres, fled overseas. He was arrested in Bangkok in 1929. A year later he committed suicide while in prison in Batavia, though many suspected that he was in fact murdered by the authorities.⁷² What became of Partondo is unclear.

67 Shiraishi, *An age in motion*, p. 247.

68 Thomas Rieger, 'Writing the nation: The pre-war Indonesian nationalist novel', in *Imagined differences: Hatred and the construction of identity*, ed. Günther Schlee (New York: Palgrave, 2002), p. 161.

69 'toewan Karl Marx laloe mengarang boekoe jang di namai "*Kommunistische Manifest*" pada tahoen 1847 di kota Parijs. Dalam *Manifest* kita bisa mengatakan sendiri bagaimana doedoeknja kommunist itoe. Toean Karl Marx menerangkan bahoewa timboelnja Kommunisme itoe bidji dari kapitalisme jang tertanam dalam sanoebarinja ra'jat, teroetama pada kaoem boeroeh².' Misbach, 'Islamisme dan Kommunisme', *Medan Moeslimin*, 11 (1925), p. 6.

70 Ruth McVey's *The rise of Indonesian communism* remains the definitive account of the PKI's path to revolution in the run-up to 1926.

71 Harry J. Benda and Ruth McVey, *The communist uprisings of 1926–1927: Key documents* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1969), p. 108.

72 Helen Jarvis, *Partai Republik Indonesia (PARI): Was it 'the sole golden bridge to the Republic of Indonesia'?* (Townsville: James Cook University of North Queensland, 1981).

For the remainder of the Dutch colonial period, and during the Japanese occupation that followed (1942–45), translations of *The Communist Manifesto* circulated underground. The PKI, which was secretly revived in Surabaya in 1935, made some effort to continue disseminating the *Manifesto* clandestinely by carrying translations of the text in its journal *Menara Merah* (Red Minaret) during the Japanese occupation, concealed behind the seemingly innocent covers of novels and cooking recipes, but unfortunately no issues of this journal have survived in public collections.⁷³

Sukarno's proclamation of Independence in August 1945 abolished at a stroke the press controls of the Dutch and Japanese periods, clearing the way for republication of the Malay translations of the *Manifesto*. In 1946 a recycled version of Subakat's translation, with his glossary, was published in Padang Panjang, West Sumatra, by the Poestaka Baroe press. Though Subakat (or rather 'Axan Zain') was not acknowledged as the translator, which was published under the name A.Z. Dahlamy, the fact that Subakat's version was republished then and there is proof that the 1925 translation of the *Manifesto* had survived during the decades of repression from the mid-1920s to the mid-1940s.⁷⁴

A new translation

In 1948 the PKI, which had been revived as a legal party at the close of 1945, during the early days of the Indonesian Revolution, resolved to produce a new translation of *The Communist Manifesto* to coincide with the text's centenary. The committee appointed to make this translation was dominated by younger communists who had come of age after the PKI's suppression in 1927 and had thus learnt the elements of Marxism from the handful of leftists who remained active in Indonesia in the 1930s and early 1940s.⁷⁵ Three of the translators, D.N. Aidit (b. 1923), M.H. Lukman (b. 1920) and Njoto (b. 1925), were young intellectuals, involved in the PKI's new theoretical journal *Bintang Merah* (Red Star), founded in 1945.⁷⁶ In their translators' preface, they acknowledged as forerunners the earlier translations of Partondo and Subakat, which they claimed had 'received an extraordinary welcome by the Indonesian general public'.⁷⁷

73 Anton Lucas, ed., *Local opposition and underground resistance to the Japanese in Java 1942–1945*, Monash Papers on Southeast Asia no. 13 (Melbourne: Aristoc, 1983), pp. 8, 41–2.

74 *Manifest Kommunist oleh Karl Marx dan Friederich Engels, disalin oleh A.Z. Dahlamy* (Padang Pandjang: Poestaka Baroe, 1946). The A.Z. in A.Z. Dahlamy may be an allusion to Subakat's pseudonym Axan Zain. It is unclear on whose initiative this edition was published as it contains no new introduction, but the publisher may well have had socialist sympathies, since *Politik* (Politics, 1946), a tract by the leftist revolutionary Tan Malaka, was published by the same press in 1946. Another translation of the *Manifesto* was published in Yogyakarta in 1946, translated by 'Saudara X' (Brother X), who may well have been a member of the underground PKI. See *Manifes Komoenis, Karl Marx–Friedrich Engels, Diterjemahkan oleh Saudara X* (Jogjakarta: Poestaka Proletar, 1946).

75 D.N. Aidit, for example, learnt Marxism from the lawyer and labour leader Mohammad Yusuf in the 1930s. McVey, 'Teaching modernity', p. 6.

76 The text's introduction credits D.N. Aidit, M.H. Lukman, A. Havil, P. Pardede and Njoto as translators. In his 1979 memoir, the PKI veteran Soerjono claimed that Rollah Sjarifah, the sister of M.H. Lukman, who was not credited, was the lead translator. Soerjono and Ben Anderson, 'On Musso's return', *Indonesia* 29 (Apr. 1980): 73.

77 'mendapat sambutan jang luar biasa dari Rakyat Indonesia seumumnja'. Karl Marx & Frederick Engels, *Manifes Partai Komunis* (Djakarta: Jajasan Pembaruan, 1952), p. 12. The original 1948 edition does not seem to have survived in public collections, so I have used the 1952 reprint throughout.

Nonetheless, by 1948 the PKI clearly felt that a new translation was necessary. The Malay language had changed in a number of ways since the 1920s, not least in the style of spelling which was used, with the result that the earlier translations now seemed outdated.⁷⁸ Producing a new translation was also necessary because it would establish the authority of the revived PKI as a competent interpreter of Marx and Engels' words. Indeed, the title chosen for the new translation, *Manifes Partai Komunis* (Manifesto of the Communist Party) differed from Partondo and Subakat's title, *Manifest Kommunist* (The Communist Manifesto), in a way that deliberately emphasised that the *Manifesto* was the foundational document of all communist *parties*, making the PKI the inheritor of the text and the legitimate authority to oversee its translation.⁷⁹

Like Partondo and Subakat, the translators of the 1948 edition presented the *Manifesto* as a work of genius, written by 'Karl Marx and Frederick [*sic*] Engels, two great experts of scientific socialism and leaders of the modern workers' movement'.⁸⁰ They too used their translators' preface to point to the *Manifesto's* prescience and continued relevance, noting that 'the contents of this *Manifesto* have begun to be realised in the Soviet Union, where a socialist system has become a reality. In a number of countries in Europe and Asia working people have begun to wield power under the leadership of the working class.'⁸¹ As Subakat had done twenty years earlier, they claimed that the prophecy of the *Manifesto* was now coming true.⁸²

The 1948 PKI translation differed from its predecessors in a number of ways. In the first place, the primary source text was not Dutch or German but English, using an edition printed in Melbourne which had been approved by the Marx-Engels-Lenin Institute in Moscow.⁸³ As a result, the Dutch terminology which Partondo and Subakat had left in their translations disappeared from the new edition, which was written in a less multilingual style. Thus 'civilisation' was translated as *peradaban* (the Malay word) rather than *civilisatie*. 'Combination' was rendered as *perkumpulan* rather than *associatie*.⁸⁴ While the translators included footnotes that explained obscure events and movements from European history, such as the July Revolution

78 Soerjono remembered that the outdated style of Partondo's translation was a reason for undertaking a new translation in 1948. See Soerjono and Anderson, 'On Musso's return', p. 73.

79 The question of what the title should be caused some debate within the PKI. Aidit argued for *Manifesto of the Communist Party* on the basis that the text was 'operationally speaking' a manifesto of the communist party. Tan Ling Djie claimed that since the text predated any communist party, the original title, *The Communist Manifesto* should be used. Soerjono and Anderson, 'On Musso's return', p. 73.

80 'Karl Marx dan Frederick Engels, dua guru-besar dalam ilmu sosialisme dan pemimpin pergerakan buruh modern'. Karl Marx & Frederick Engels, *Manifes Partai Komunis*, p. 11.

81 'Isi Manifes ini sudah mulai diwujudkan di Negara Soviet Uni, dimana sistim Sosialisme sudah mendjadi kenyataan. Dibeberapa negeri di Eropa maupun di Asia Rakjat pekerdja sudah mulai berkuasa dibawah pimpinan kaum buruh.' Karl Marx & Frederick Engels, *Manifes Partai Komunis*, p. 12.

82 Karl Marx & Frederick Engels, *Manifes Partai Komunis*, p. 11.

83 The translators cited their source text as "'Manifesto of the Communist Party", in English, endorsed by the Marx-Engels-Lenin Institute in Moscow, put out by "International Bookshop Pty. Ltd", Melbourne, 2nd edition' ['Manifesto of the Communist Party', dalam bahasa Inggris, jang telah disahkan oleh Marx-Engels-Lenin Institute di Moskow keluaran 'International Bookshop Pty. Ltd', Melbourne, edisi kedua], *ibid.*, pp. 12–13.

84 *Ibid.*, pp. 56, 63; Subakat translated these words in the same way but left the Dutch terms in, adding the Malay translation afterwards in brackets.

and the Young England movement, they assumed a somewhat higher degree of knowledge of European terms than Partondo or Subakat. The word ‘Tsar’, for example, was simply transliterated from English, without explanatory text in Malay.⁸⁵ Some European terms which had been exchanged for Indonesian equivalents in the 1920s translations were rendered more literally: ‘priest’ was translated as *pendeta* (clergyman) rather than *oelama* (Islamic religious scholar), ‘spirits of the netherworld’ as ‘magical powers [*kekuatan gaib*]’ rather than *djinn*.⁸⁶ These changes suggest the translators in 1948 felt less of a need to use Islamic terms in their version than either Partondo or Subakat. This was perhaps because they wanted to stick more rigidly to the sense of the original in order to underline the authority of their translation. They may also have felt that since the PKI was no longer associated with Sarekat Islam, they did not need to translate the text in such a way as to make it resonate with an audience of religious Muslims.

For all these differences, the translators of the 1948 edition of *The Communist Manifesto* grappled with the same dilemma as Partondo and Subakat over whether to domesticate Marx and Engels’ words or preserve their European form. Some words were localised in the 1948 translation, such as ‘monarchy’, which became *keradjaan* (‘rajahnate’), and ‘knight’, which became *ksatria*, a word that referred to the Hindu warrior caste of pre-Islamic Java.⁸⁷ For class terms, the translators used transliterated versions of Marx and Engels’ original terms, as the 1920s translations had done, writing of the *burdjuis* and the *proletar*. The result was a translation which, like its predecessors, alternated between Malay and Marxist idioms in a manner that made the *Manifesto* both resonant with Indonesian history and international in its scope.⁸⁸

The PKI’s 1948 translation became the standard Indonesian version of *The Communist Manifesto* in the postwar decades. Following the decimation of the PKI after the 1948 ‘Madiun Affair’ (a failed left-wing insurrection against Sukarno and Hatta’s Republican government in which PKI members were involved), Aidit became party chair in 1951 and Njoto and Lukman joined the politburo. The fact that the 1948 translation had been authored by the PKI’s leaders added to this edition’s air of definitiveness. After the ‘August raids’ of 1951, where 15,000 communists and leftists were arrested on suspicion of plotting against the government, the PKI sought to strengthen its support among the public, which was done in part by disseminating translations of Marxist-Leninist classics, including *The Communist Manifesto*.⁸⁹

85 Ibid., p. 47.

86 Ibid., pp. 54, 58.

87 Ibid., pp. 50, 53. The *ksatria* remained an extant social group in Bali, which, unlike Java, had not shifted from Hinduism to Islam.

88 Tan Malaka’s 1946 text *Politik* offers an interesting point of comparison. In that pamphlet Tan Malaka, though a Marxist himself, deliberately did not use international Marxian terms such as proletariat or bourgeoisie, instead imagining Indonesian classes as being embodied by individuals whom he named *Godam* (‘hammer’, standing for the workers), *Pacul* (‘hoe’, standing for the peasants), *Denmas* (a condensed version of the Javanese noble title Raden Mas, standing for the nobility), *Mr Apal* (Mr being the title of a person with a law degree in Indonesia and *apal* meaning to learn by rote, standing for the intelligentsia), and *Toke* (this being a derogatory word for a Chinese businessman, standing for the traders).

89 Vanessa Hearman, *Unmarked graves: Death and survival in the anti-communist violence in East Java, Indonesia* (Singapore: Asian Studies Association of Australia; NUS Press, 2018), pp. 38–9.

New editions of the 1948 translation were printed in 1952, 1959, 1960 and 1964 by the Jajasan Pembaruan press in Jakarta, a publisher founded in 1951 to promote the dissemination of left-wing literature. It was presumably this translation which Aidit had in mind when he called for all PKI cadres to study the *Manifesto* in 1956.⁹⁰ The PKI thus achieved its aim of producing a definitive vernacular translation which could be widely read by Indonesians. The earlier efforts of Partondo and Subakat, meanwhile, were not reprinted and faded into the distant background.⁹¹

Suppressing *The Communist Manifesto*

When Sukarno formulated the Pancasila (Five Principles) in 1945, which became the official ideological basis of the Indonesian Republic, he was careful to ground ideas with a leftist inflection, such as international cooperation and social welfare, in what he considered to be the fundamental values of Indonesian religion and culture. In this spirit, the Pancasila specified that the belief in God (*Ketuhanan yang maha esa*) and Indonesian unity (*Persatuan Indonesia*) were to be fundamental principles of the Indonesian state, principles which tempered the materialism and class conflict of orthodox Marxism.⁹²

Sukarno believed that there was an important place for Marxism in Indonesian political ideology. Indeed, he worked with the PKI during the Guided Democracy period of his presidency (1959–65). From the late 1950s, he cemented the place of communism in his syncretic political doctrine, which he gave the name NASAKOM, a portmanteau of *NASionalisme*, *Agama* (religion), and *KOMmunisme*. In 1962, the minister of foreign affairs, Subandrio, gave a speech to department trainees encouraging them to study ‘the current of Marxism’, exhorting the sceptics among them ‘not to belittle Marxism too readily, nor to turn too stony a gaze upon the “specter” of communism’.⁹³

The Pancasila was also open to a more hard-edged interpretation, however, in which communism could be seen as fundamentally un-Indonesian because of its atheistic elements and its promotion of class conflict. This view reprised earlier criticisms of Marxism made in the 1920s by members of the ‘white’ (non-communist) Sarekat Islam, who argued that Marxism’s secular origins, rhetoric of class war, and internationalism made it inappropriate for Indonesian political life, which they believed should be oriented towards Islamic principles alone.⁹⁴ The notion that Indonesia was a fundamentally religious and harmonious society, making Marxism anathema

90 D.N. Aidit, *Bersatu untuk menjelesaikan tuntutan2 Revolusi Agustus 1945* (Djakarta: Jajasan “Pembaruan”, 1956), p. 73.

91 In his 1979 memoir Soerjono did not realise that Partondo was in fact a real person, thinking mistakenly that it was a pseudonym of the PKI cadre Darsono. Soerjono and Anderson, ‘On Musso’s return’, p. 73.

92 Sukarno had first argued that Marxism needed to be tempered by nationalist and Islamic values in his famous 1926 essay ‘Nationalism, Islam and Marxism’. See Soekarno, *Nationalism, Islam and Marxism*, trans. Karel A. Warouw and Peter D. Weldon (Ithaca, NY: Modern Indonesia Project, Southeast Asian Program, Cornell University, 1969).

93 Herbert Feith and Lance Castles, eds, *Indonesian political thinking 1945–1965* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1970), p. 462.

94 See McVey, *The rise of Indonesian communism*, pp. 84, 103; H.O.S. Tjokroaminoto, *Islam dan Sosialisme* (Jakarta: Lembaga Penggali dan Penghimpun Sedjarah Revolusi Indonesia, 1963), p. 13.

to Indonesians, had been a commonplace among conservative nationalists since the interwar years.⁹⁵

This view of Marxism as un-Indonesian and un-Islamic helped in large part to justify the anti-communist pogroms which convulsed Indonesia in 1965–66 and led to the fall of Sukarno's Guided Democracy regime. Over the course of the pogroms, which began in the wake of the assassination of six generals by junior military officers on 30 September 1965, an act which was blamed on the PKI and framed as an attempted PKI coup, hundreds of thousands of suspected communists were murdered or imprisoned in the most violent episode of Indonesian history. Aidit, Njoto and Lukman, who were major targets because of their position at the head of the PKI, were captured and executed without trial. In the wake of the massacres, the New Order government rose to power, with General Suharto, who had led the army's response to the events of 30 September 1965, becoming president in 1966.

The New Order was fiercely anti-communist and was determined to crush the influence of Marxism in Indonesia, which it saw as antithetical to the Pancasila. On 5 July 1966, a decree was passed which proscribed the PKI and the promotion of Marxism-Leninism. The decree stated that 'Communist/Marxist-Leninist concepts or teachings stand in fundamental contradiction to the Pancasila' and, as such, were a threat to the Indonesian Republic. The promotion of Marxist ideas was outlawed, with the sole exception of those such as university students, who were permitted to study Marxism 'for the purposes of safeguarding the Pancasila provided that such work is supervised and has the approval of the government'.⁹⁶ The mass dissemination of *The Communist Manifesto*, of the kind undertaken by the PKI through its translations, became illegal. Marxism once more became the preserve of the educated elite.

To some extent the New Order government, which remained in place until 1998, thus reimposed the barrier between the Indonesian language and radical European political thought that had been constructed by the colonial state.⁹⁷ Communism was again presented as a devilish foreign ideology that was best kept at a distance. Suharto came to see the Pancasila as a distillation of ancient Indonesian wisdom, set in opposition to Western political ideas. Although Sukarno, the originator of the Pancasila, had been an omnivorous political thinker who had drawn extensively on foreign political writings, including those of Marx and Engels, the New Order redefined the Pancasila as an expression of indigenous political thinking alone. In 1982 Suharto stated that,

The main thing we have to do is to really seriously implement the New Order's resolve to return to the authentic purity of Pancasila and our constitution. It goes without saying, then, that we must find a way to convince our people now, our youth, of the truth of Pancasila. The realities of the past convince us that Pancasila is the right approach to

95 See David Reeve, *Golkar of Indonesia: An alternative to the party system* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985); David Bourchier, *Illiberal democracy in Indonesia: The ideology of the family state* (London: Routledge, 2015).

96 David Bourchier and Vedi R. Hafiz, eds, *Indonesian politics and society: A reader* (London: Routledge Curzon, 2003), pp. 33–4.

97 On the depoliticising stance of the New Order see Ruth McVey, 'The Beamtenstaat in Indonesia', in *Interpreting Indonesian politics: Thirteen contributions to the debate*, ed. Benedict RO'G Anderson and Audrey Kahin (Singapore: Equinox, 2010 [1982]), pp. 149–66.

take, rather than the approaches of modern ideological thought such as are found in Marxism, communism and liberalism.⁹⁸

Such a stance sought to reverse the efforts of Indonesian communists to translate the words of Marx and Engels and so bring Indonesians into dialogue with Western political thought. Instead, the New Order ordained that political thinking should remain restricted to the Pancasila and so protected from the corrupting influences of 'modern' and 'Western' ideologies.

Conclusion: Making Marxism Indonesian

In his influential 1964 article 'Democracy in Indonesia', the historian Harry J. Benda argued that 'Westernized' Indonesians, educated in the European style, were 'a small, intrinsically foreign element of the body social of Indonesia'. In Benda's view, the heart of Indonesian culture was found in 'the social and ideological world of Indianized Indonesia, especially of Java' which remained 'outside the orbit of modern, rational economic life and a great deal else that belonged to the superimposed Western order'.⁹⁹ Benda's image of the intellectual landscape in Indonesia implied that there existed a chasm between European political theories such as Marxism, which appealed only to the handful of Westernised Indonesians, and Indonesia's core culture, which remained attuned to its own more indigenous values. Dutch colonial officials largely shared this view, believing that Indonesian communism was a sinister Bolshevik import that impressed Indonesian intellectuals with links to Moscow, rather than an expression of any form of 'native' political thinking. In their view, communism found sympathy among the Indonesian masses only insofar as it resonated with indigenous notions of prophecy and holy war.¹⁰⁰ After the interlude of the Sukarno years, when a version of Marxism filtered through Sukarno's own ideology entered the mainstream, the colonial view of Marxism as a dangerous foreign import which needed to be suppressed was reprised under the New Order.

There were Indonesians, however, who saw Marxism not as an esoteric European doctrine but as a universal ideology, as applicable to Java as to Germany. The act of translating *The Communist Manifesto*, Marxism's foundational text, into Malay broke down the barriers that had been carefully maintained by the colonial state for keeping Indonesians literate in Malay away from radical European political books. In the process, these translations brought European and Malay political idioms into dialogue. This dialogue localised the terms of Marx and Engels, turning kings into rajahs and priests into Islamic scholars, but also expanded the horizons of Indonesians, turning workers into proletarians, regents into feudalists, and bosses into bourgeoisie. Marxist concepts offered a new lens through which to see Indonesia and the world at large, holding forth the promise of a great international emancipation of the oppressed through class struggle.

98 Bourchier and Hafiz, *Indonesian politics and society*, p. 105.

99 Harry J. Benda, 'Democracy in Indonesia', *Journal of Asian Studies* 23, 3 (1964): 453–4.

100 For Dutch officials' views on the Indonesian communist movement, which was generally characterised as a result of Bolshevik influence, among advanced cadres, or as an outburst of 'native' rebelliousness, among the masses, see Takashi Shiraishi, 'Policing the phantom underground', *Indonesia* 63 (1997): 1–46.

Ultimately, though, *The Communist Manifesto* was judged by the New Order to be too dangerous for general consumption. Its internationalist message and insurrectionary call to arms were seen as fundamentally at odds with Indonesian values, making its translation and dissemination treasonous. The PKI's vision of a vernacular *Manifesto*, that would bring Malay-reading Indonesians into the world of international class struggle and Marxist political thought was suppressed. Instead of engaging with foreign ideas through translation, political thought was increasingly limited to the articulation of what the government defined as 'indigenous' political ideas, defined with reference to a narrow interpretation of the Pancasila. As a result, Marx and Engels' short but powerful book was banished from public political discourse.