



Muhammadiyah in the Dynamics of Ideology: The Battle for Representation Between Islam and Communists in the Dutch East Indies Colony

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ABSTRACT

This article examines the position of Muhammadiyah within the dynamics of the relationship between two ideologies, Islam and communism, during the colonial period of the Dutch East Indies, particularly in the 1920s. This period was marked by the emergence of two major ideological forces because of the ethical policy: Islam, represented by organizations such as Sarekat Islam (SI) and Muhammadiyah, and communism through the Partai Komunis Indonesia (PKI, Indonesian Communist Party). The aim of this article is to identify and understand the role of Muhammadiyah as an Islamic movement organization in the context of the ideological conflict between Islam and communism during the colonial Dutch East Indies period. This article uses historical methods, including heuristics, source criticism, interpretation, and historiography. The results of this research show that Muhammadiyah was not only involved in this ideological conflict, but also played a significant role in responding to the challenges of communist ideology. Ultimately, this conflict helped shape Muhammadiyah's character as a more progressive, moderate, democratic Islamic organization that was focused on making real contributions to the struggle for Indonesian independence.

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INTRODUCTION

The situation during the era of the national movement in the early 20th century cannot be separated from the development of world ideologies: nationalism, communism, and religion as concepts of liberation for colonial countries, which resonated especially in Asia. Japan's victory over Russia in 1905, the Indian nationalist movement led by Mahatma Gandhi, the spread of pan-Islamism in the Middle East, and the Chinese Revolution in 1911 that later evolved into the Communist Revolution in 1949, all marked turning points in the rise of resistance movements against European nations, particularly Western colonialism. The clash between these ideologies became the 'Asian Spring', which propelled the histories of Asian nations toward national independence (Kennedy, [1968](#)).

The Chinese civil war ended with Mao's victory, overthrowing the republican forces, and forcing them to retreat to Taiwan. Mainland China ultimately became a communist country, the PRC (People's Republic of China) on October 1, 1949. The founding of the Soviet Union and the PRC became a *ghirah* (zeal) for revolutionary struggle in other countries, especially in Asia, Africa, and South America, serving as a resistance ideology against colonialism and spreading communism throughout the world, including Indonesia (then the Dutch East Indies).

Next, there was the ideology of Islam, such as pan-Islamism. Before the 20th century, Islamic countries still took the form of sultanates and generally leaned towards or referred to the Ottoman Caliphate. Following the rise of European colonialism, one by one, Islamic states fell and were colonized. The fall of Islamic political authority to the colonials and the decline of Islamic civilization led to the emergence and growth of a new ideology, namely pan-Islamism, pioneered by Jamaluddin Al Afghani, Muhammad Abduh, and Rasyid Ridha, which later spread to the Dutch East Indies at the end of the 19th century (Burhanudin, [2021](#)). Pan-Islamism grew stronger as a movement to modernize and reform Islamic teachings from practices considered deviant, as well as to unite the ummah (Elson, [2007](#)).

Nationalism, communism, and Islam subsequently became the largest ideologies that grew and developed in the Dutch East Indies. As an effect of the Ethical Policy (education; modern/Western education), there emerged a new educated class that marked the beginning of national awakening and movement (Rizal et al., [2025](#)). Nationalism was championed by figures like Sukarno, Hatta, Syahrir, and others. Communism was introduced in the Dutch East Indies



by Sneevliet (from the Netherlands) and then continued by Semaun, Alimin, Darsono, Tan Malaka, Haji Mischbach, and others. Islam (as a movement ideology) was advocated by Haji Samanhudi, then Haji Oemar Said (HOS) Cokroaminoto, Agus Salim, Abdul Muis, and others; Sarekat Islam (SI), which later became a movement/political party, and then Muhammadiyah, founded by K. H. Ahmad Dahlan in 1912, Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) in 1926, and others (Overzicht van den Inwendigen Politieken Toestand [1922], [1923](#)).

The founding of various organizations, movements, and even political parties based on different ideologies led to internal friction, even though the goal was the same: Indonesian independence. Clashes were inevitable. SI eventually polarized and split into SI Putih (White SI) and SI Merah (Red SI), with the latter transforming into the Serikat Rakjat (SR) and becoming the Indonesian Communist Party (Partai Komunis Indonesia, PKI). Consequently, the three ideologies often attacked and criticized each other through newspapers used as a medium of struggle, each believing that their ideology was the most correct and appropriate for shaping the order of an independent Indonesia. Before the 'Sumpah Pemuda of 1928', these frictions were very intense. However, over time, this perspective shifted towards the idea of unity.

There arose an awareness among the components and ideologies that it was important to unite rather than attack one another, for the sake of fighting for Indonesian independence. Some figures, such as Sukarno, wrote articles that went viral in their time: "*Nasionalisme, Islamisme, Marxisme*", Tan Malaka, a PKI figure during the colonial era, rejected the 1926 PKI Uprising in Banten and West Sumatra. The Soviet Union, through the Comintern (Communist International), even once called for unity between the Soviet Union (communists) and Islamic forces (pan-Islamists) to defeat colonialism worldwide (Hadiz, [2011](#)). Unfortunately, this call was largely ignored by the Comintern comrades.

Based on the previously stated background, the main problem in this research is the rapid growth of communist ideology and Islamic teachings during the period of the national movement. In practice, these two were seen as having fundamentally distinct differences in both their ideas and methods of activism. Such differences triggered ideological conflicts between organizations representing each ideology. However, this was not the only aspect coloring the dynamics of relations between Islam and communism at that time. Another phenomenon highlighted a different reality namely, efforts by some movement leaders, including those from Muhammadiyah, to harmonize and reconcile communist perspectives with Islamic values. These figures viewed both communism and Islam as ideologies that share a fundamental purpose: the commitment to fight for justice for all people amid the practices of colonialism.

The complexity of the relationship between Islam and communism, as ideologies that arose during the movement era, has become a discourse explored by several researchers from various paradigms. Yusuf and Arqam, in their article titled *Islam dan Komunisme: Analisis Pemikiran Islam dan Epistemologi Pergerakan Haji Misbach* ([2024](#)) aim to probe the mindset of Haji Misbach a movement figure who contributed to introducing the idea of Islamic Communism in the Dutch East Indies. Their work also highlights Misbach's efforts to unite two ideologies, often considered to be at odds and irreconcilable Islam and communism in the struggle against oppression and social injustice resulting from Western colonialism.

The next research is a paper titled *Pemberontakan Komunis Silungkang 1926-1927 Sebuah Gerakan Islam Revolusioner* by Amri Marzali ([2020](#)). This study was essentially written as Marzali's critique of the labeling of the uprising in Silungkang as part of the communist rebellion, a view held by some local and international historians. In his paper, Marzali demonstrates that the dominant force in the rebellion was the revolutionary Islamic organization Sarekat Rakyat, which was a splinter group from Sarekat Islam and operated under the principle of *fisabilillah*. Marzali also acknowledges that there was indeed a meeting point between Islamized communism and revolutionary Islam, but argues that the two were distinct, especially in the context of the Silungkang rebellion. He states that the relationship between the PKI and Sarekat Rakyat during the revolt was mutualistic symbiosis. The paper not only refutes the common notion that the rebellion in Silungkang was purely driven by communist ideology, but also provides an overview of the complex relationship between Islam and communism during the movement period.

Meanwhile, Bin Has, et al., in their article entitled *Ideologi Komunis dalam Perspektif Al-Qur'an (Analisis Penafsiran Ayat-Ayat Bernuansa Komunis)* ([2020](#)) examine how relevant communist ideology is to Islamic teachings through hermeneutic analysis of several Quranic verses that address economic, social, and political aspects. To identify these parallels, they compared the methods of implementation theoretically and historically practiced by communists with those prescribed by the Qur'an. The article concludes that, in general, communist ideology is at odds with the Qur'an, due to the presence of several communist ideas that are incompatible, and even contradictory, with certain Quranic verses.

The novelty of this study lies in illustrating how Muhammadiyah, as one of the prominent Islamic organizations during the era of social movements, alongside Sarekat Islam, perceived the phenomenon of the rise of communist ideology among Muslim activists because of the influx of global ideological influences in the Dutch East Indies. Although this study tends to focus on the complex relationship between Islam and communism, its findings also explain that Muhammadiyah's involvement in this ideological conflict was motivated by concerns among its leaders and members that the communist influence, which had already permeated some of its members, might disrupt the organization's operations. Furthermore, Muhammadiyah's movement, deemed no longer aligned with its original objectives due to its involvement in this conflict followed by the fall of communism triggered a fundamental transformation within Muhammadiyah in the 1930s.

METHOD

According to Garraghan ([1957](#)), the historical method refers to a set of systematic rules and principles applied by historical researchers to effectively assist in the process of collecting, analyzing historical sources, and presenting a synthesis of the findings in written form. The historical method essentially consists of four stages: (1) heuristics; (2) criticism; (3) interpretation; and (4) historiography.

The primary sources used in the writing of this article were obtained through literature study, including books, online articles, and several contemporary newspapers such as *Njala*, *Islam Bergerak*, *Pandji Poestaka*, *Soewara Muhammadiyah*, and *Medan Moeslimin*. Meanwhile, the aim of internal criticism is to analyze the credibility of a source based on a review of its content (Herlina, [2020](#)). This research was conducted by comparing information on similar topics or explanations from the obtained sources, whether newspapers or books. This process ensures that the information contained in the sources aligns with the actual situation and conditions at the time the source was created or when the historical event in question occurred.

The theme addressed in this study is political history. Politics encompasses everything related to state affairs and governance. Political science pays attention to various social phenomena, such as influence and power, interests and political parties, decisions and policies, conflict and consensus, recruitment and leadership behavior, the masses and voters, political culture, political socialization, and so on (Kuntowijoyo, [2003](#)). Thus, political history can be understood as a branch of historical studies that focuses on the analysis of political events, patterns, and impacts in the past (Rizal & Ramadhan, [2025](#)).

Meanwhile, the approach used in this study is the intellectual history approach. Intellectual history is an approach in historical scholarship that examines ideas, concepts, or the development of thought within a particular period, focusing on how these ideas emerge, develop, and interact with the social, cultural, and political context. According to Kuntowijoyo ([2003](#)), this approach tends to discuss individual thoughts which are based on the fundamental assumption that there is an influence from the *zeitgeist* (spirit of the age) and from an idealist historical perspective which holds that ideas influence behavior. The intellectual history approach will involve the analysis of the development of Islamic and communist ideologies as well as the conflicts between the two through the narration of certain movement figures associated with Muhammadiyah. Furthermore, the role of Muhammadiyah as one of the earliest Islamic organizations in the period of the movement also needs to be considered especially its position within the dynamics of the relationship between these two ideologies.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Islam vs Communism

The ideological clashes, the strongest of which was between the communists and Islam. Communists often criticized and attacked religious communities (particularly Islam), accusing them of perpetuating feudalism, causing harm to the grassroots (in communist terms; the proletariat), and serving as agents of colonial powers. The religious groups (Islam) were also skeptical, critical, and even went as far as to justify those communist teachings deviated from religion. Communists were seen as denying the existence of God through materialist concepts, antagonizing religious scholars and clerics as part of their revolution, and hating Islamic law because it did not support the concept of a proletarian dictatorship. Communism was regarded like a ghost or satanic teaching, whose followers wouldn't hesitate to kill those on the opposing side or people who, by social structure or hierarchy, stood above them thus, believing in communism was considered forbidden (*haram*) and equivalent to disbelief (*kafir*).

Not all communists, in fact, were hostile toward Islam. Communism in Indonesia was indeed unique (including nationalism). The spread of any ideology or culture in the world will inevitably be filtered by the Indonesian people themselves. Islam in Indonesia is a good example, as it became part of local culture through acculturation. The same goes for ideologies, which were not just copied wholesale from their countries of origin (Europe). Nationalism and communism, too, eventually adapted to the context, situation, and conditions of the Dutch East Indies.

In 1926, the PKI revolted against the colonial government. Inspired by the 1888 peasant uprising, Banten became the location of another rebellion this time by the PKI. It also happened in West Sumatra, whose people, the Minangkabau ethnic group, follow a fundamentalist form of Islam (Salafi-Wahhabi, a result of the Padri War in the previous century). Banten itself has been known as a region where Islamic teachings are deeply rooted in the community (a former sultanate). It is thus interesting that the PKI rebellion broke out in these two religiously devout, Muslim regions. Ideologically and rationally, such a thing would seem unlikely. But this is the uniqueness of Indonesia.

The PKI, which perhaps since its founding was heavily criticized for deviating from Islamic teachings, certainly had to adapt to the local character and could not abandon Islam, let alone eradicate it from society. The PKI adapted, for example, through Tan Malaka's concept of Islamic-Communist unity and through H. Misbach, who spread the idea that communism was aligned with Islamic teachings Islam with a communist spirit. Misbach's popularity then faced much criticism and opposition. Nevertheless, Misbach's reasons for reconciling the two ideologies were plausible. However, because Misbach's way of expressing them was too harsh, he received a lot of criticism and ended up in conflict with many parties, including Muhammadiyah.



Figure 1. *Njala* newspaper under the supervision of the PKI's *Hoofdbestuur* (Source: *Njala*, January 26, 1926)

One example of the PKI's adaptation can be seen in the *Njala* newspaper in 1926, as shown in Figure 1. At that time, the PKI published a special article, "*Ra'jat Islam, awas!!*" (Islam people, beware!!). The *Hoofdbestuur* (central leadership) of the PKI also distributed the newspaper abroad via Tan Malaka to Asian countries, and Semaun to European countries. In that special article, the PKI felt that (at the time) communism had its own appeal as an ideology and was embraced by various elements of society: *doctors, professors, meesters, students, and intellectueels*, all turning into *komunisten* (*Njala*, 1926). Oesman Soetan Ke'adlan, as the editor, conveyed that since communism had become a 'decoration' in wealthy houses and was embraced by intellectuals, it caused the reactionary groups (those anti-PKI/communism) to panic. They (the reactionaries) were said to incite the people by claiming communism was contrary to religion; "*boekoe-boekoe beriboe-riboe dikeloearkan*" (thousands upon thousands of books were published) to counter the narratives and teachings of communism.

The anti-communist narrative, for example, came from *Pandji Poestaka* (a Balai Poestaka publication). This newspaper took Schmutzer's perspective, when the Volksraad discussed additional *begrooting* (budget) for *Afdeling X* (the fleet) in connection with the colonial government's intention to appoint fleet chaplains to tend to the spiritual needs of the crew. *Pandji Poestaka* also referred to the stance of the 1922 PKI Congress, where communists recognized the importance and influence of religion in politics, and thus intended to eradicate religion. It also referred to the 5th

Comintern Congress in Moscow, Soviet Union, stating that Lenin and Marxist propaganda must be supplemented with materialist propaganda. Therefore, to achieve these aims, it was necessary to oppose all religious leaders, whether *pandita Roem* or *Jahoedi*, or *Protestant*, and especially *Paoes* (*Pandji Poestaka*, [1925](#)) referring to the Soviet context, which directly intersected with Christianity, Judaism, and Catholicism.

PKI denied these accusations and knew very well that the religious community especially Muslims in this country have a strong *ghirah* (spirit) for their faith. There would be outrage, shock, and great anger if their religion were even touched, much less opposed or eradicated. Through the article in *Njala*, it was stated that PKI and communism were not anti-Islam, not opposed to religion. Instead, they opposed the 'rape of religion,' and fought against those who exploited religion. In short, they stood against people and groups who used religion and the faithful for personal or group profit, who turned religion into a tool to incite the masses, creating grassroots religious fanaticism (*Njala*, [1926](#)).

According to the PKI, this approach was characteristic of the reactionaries, and the *Pandji Poestaka* article was clearly targeted at Muslims as the largest religious group. The PKI believed that if the people understood and became communists, they would be able to distinguish right from wrong. "*djika tidak soeka (komoenis), maka tinggal tidoer sadja, tidoer jang poeles*" (If you do not like (communism), then just sleep, sleep soundly). The PKI also urged the newspaper *Medan Moeslimin* (a newspaper founded/owned by H. Misbach) to reprint and disseminate *Njala's* article so that its readers could read it as well.

Muhammadiyah and Sarekat Islam vs PKI in Java

The political situation among competing ideologies in the Dutch East Indies heated up throughout the 1920s, reaching its peak with the 1926 PKI rebellion, which also served as the 'anti-climax' for colonial-era communism, as after that, the PKI and communism were eradicated by the colonial government. Its activists were arrested, imprisoned, exiled, the party was dissolved, and the ideology was banned. During this era, SI and Muhammadiyah, as early Islamic organizations in the national movement, entered their first and second decades, growing stronger, spreading further, and becoming more established. SI developed into a political force, while Muhammadiyah focused on religion, education, and health (soft politics). The PKI became a new political force, essentially a splinter group from these two Islamic organizations. Most of the figures and members who joined the PKI were those disillusioned with SI and Muhammadiyah.

SI & Muhammadiyah eventually set a discipline policy, prohibiting dual membership. This further added to the disappointment of certain figures and/or members who were becoming more 'leftist' ideologically, more intense in their struggle against Dutch colonialism, and more inclined to political activism than to social-community work (such as education, economic, and health development). This led to sharper internal conflict among fellow independence fighters, even among fellow Muslims themselves. Up to now, most writings have focused on the conflict between PKI and SI, depicted as a battle of Islamic vs. communist ideologies. However, the PKI and Muhammadiyah also experienced conflict.

H. Misbach was a preacher, a *pesantren* graduate, and a former Muhammadiyah figure who eventually turned against Muhammadiyah and became the 'spokesman' (propagandist) for the PKI and communism. Misbach was also initially very close to SI. In the early era of the national movement, SI & Muhammadiyah were also closely connected, particularly through the relationship between HOS Cokroaminoto & K. H. Ahmad Dahlan. Aside from SI & Muhammadiyah, among the youth there was the Jong Islamieten Bond (JIB), from which young Muslims would later join SI or Muhammadiyah.

Misbach joined Muhammadiyah after meeting Haji Fachroedin in the *Inlandshce Journalisten Bond* (IJB) or *Bumiputera* Journalists' Association founded by Mas Marco Kartodikromo (Mu'arif, 2016). They then established the newspapers *Medan Moeslimin* (1915) and *Islam Bergerak* (1917), both of which were initially supported by Muhammadiyah's founder, KH. Ahmad Dahlan. Misbach's relationship with SI was also initially very close. He once established the Sidik, Amanah, Tabligh, Vatonah (SATV) militia to accompany the Tentara Kandjeng Nabi Mohammad (TKNM), a militia formed by HOS Cokroaminoto as a protest against a blasphemy case involving Martodharsono and Djojodikoro in 1918 (Raditya, [2020](#)).

Misbach shifted to the 'left' and moved further 'left' after meeting Semaun. The young man who led the Semarang branch of SI, later *SI Merah*, and then the PKI, truly attracted Misbach's attention despite their significant age difference. Together with Semaun, Misbach gradually became known as the '*Haji Merah* [The Red Haji].' He tried

to unite Islam and communism into a single ideology and political force, believing they did not need to oppose or contradict each other. However, differences of opinion, conflicts, friction even clashes could not be avoided. He no longer aligned with SATV and left in 1920. Misbach was imprisoned by the colonial government after becoming the instigator of riots and a sugar workers' strike in Klaten. According to Iwan, it was behind bars that Misbach met many activists from the Indische Sociaal-Democratische Vereeniging (ISDV, which later became the PKI), firmly setting his heart on becoming a communist (Setiawan, [2022](#)).

Misbach's conflict with the two Islamic organizations began with a dispute between HOS Cokroaminoto and other senior figures of Centraal Sarekat Islam (CSI). According to Suryana Sudrajat in *Kearifan Guru Bangsa* (2006), this conflict arose due to alleged embezzlement of TKNM funds (which was suspected to be committed by HOS Cokroaminoto himself). Misbach was deeply disappointed by this and even considered that Cokro and TKNM had betrayed the struggle to defend Islam. From there, Misbach's anger spread to SI. Matters worsened with SI's organizational discipline policy, which prohibited dual membership in other organizations, making Misbach even more furious. This prohibition was a result of numerous members of the Semarang SI branch also being members of the Perserikatan Komunis Hindia (PKH), which later became the Indonesian Communist Party (PKI) (Kheng, [2018](#)).

The conflict with SI extended to Muhammadiyah. Misbach, who was originally a revolutionary Muhammadiyah figure aiming to criticize SI, found himself facing bitter consequences. Muhammadiyah and SI drew closer together, and Muhammadiyah chose not to follow the hardline (non-cooperative) political path of SI, let alone PKI. Muhammadiyah opted for cooperation with the Dutch colonial government, which infuriated Misbach and intensified the conflict, especially after he was released from prison (in the case of the 1920 Klaten sugar workers' strike) in 1922.

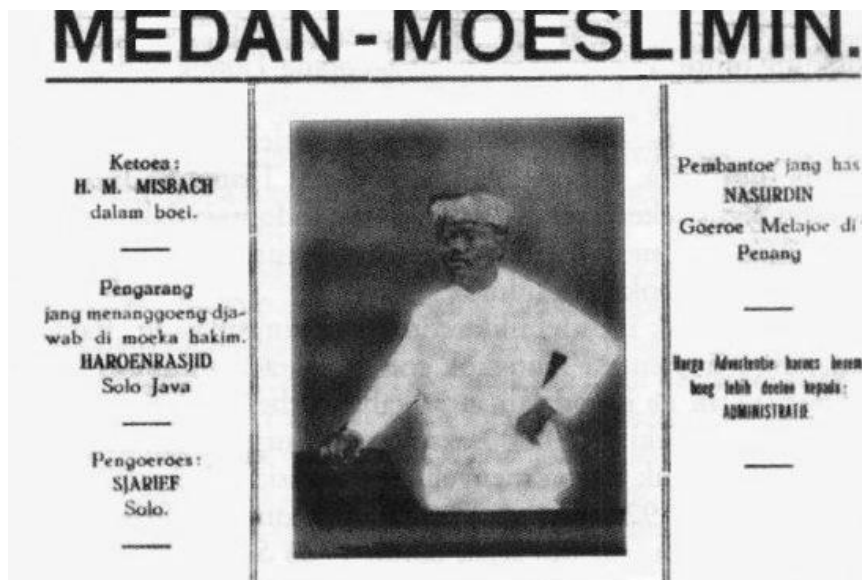


Figure 2. Portrait of H. Misbach when serving as Chief Editor of *Medan Moeslimin* (Source: National Geographic Indonesia, [2021](#))

Based on **Figure 2**, it can be explained that Misbach later took over the *Medan Moeslimin* and *Islam Bergerak* newspapers, sidelining Muhammadiyah members. The tension continued with debates on public platforms and in newspapers even during religious study sessions, he attacked Muhammadiyah and its leaders. Misbach believed Muhammadiyah allowed colonial oppression to continue by not choosing a political path in its struggle. For Misbach, not choosing a political path was hypocritical (Misbach, [1922](#)). In the *Medan Moeslimin* newspaper, Misbach wrote that Muhammadiyah was a group of '*kaum modal putih*' (white capitalists, Muslim capitalists) who only propagated Islam without defending the oppressed, even being involved in money-lending cases (Misbach, [1922](#)).

At the Muhammadiyah Annual Meeting in 1923 in Yogyakarta, Misbach came and requested that Muhammadiyah become a political party (Soewara Moehammadijah, [1923](#)). However, according to Mu'arif ([2016](#)), Djojosoegito's meeting notes recorded that "*Haji Misbach itu bukan sekutu Muhammadiyah*" (Haji Misbach is not an ally of Muhammadiyah). Misbach is believed to have left Muhammadiyah a year earlier (or at the beginning/middle of 1923), after strongly criticizing K. H. Ahmad Dahlan and H. Fachroedin, as well as the *Hoofdbestuur* of Muhammadiyah, accusing them of being involved in a debt scandal, calling them hypocrites, frauds, and even agents of capitalism (Hiqmah, [2008](#)).

Misbach was also present at the SI Merah Congress on March 4, 1923, in Bandung, West Java. The congress was attended by 16 PKI branches, 14 SI Merah branches, and a group of Communist workers. Misbach attended this

congress and expressed his views, citing verses from the Qur'an. He emphasized the relationship between Islam & Communism in the struggle against capitalism, as well as criticizing the leaders of SI Putih, whom he considered hypocritical for using Islam as a cover to enrich themselves (Rizal, [2014](#)).

Misbach also attacked HOS Cokroaminoto and Muhammadiyah. He did this because of the closeness between the two organizations. For him, it was very strange that SI had (apparently) conspired with Muhammadiyah. Previously, when Darsono (also a figure in PKI) campaigned against SI, the SI headquarters was quickly moved from Surabaya to Yogyakarta (which incidentally was the headquarters of Muhammadiyah). Misbach also stated that he found evidence that when the financial audit was carried out, the necessary funds were found in the SI's account (allegedly originating from the Muhammadiyah treasurer) (Shiraishi, [1997](#)).

According to Iswara, Muhammadiyah sympathized with Misbach. For K. H. Ahmad Dahlan, Misbach's firm, uncompromising, and indiscriminate attitude was the example of a true preacher who acted with real deeds and not just words. In fact, when Misbach was arrested for drawing cartoons in *Islam Bergerak*, which was considered an attack on the government and Sunan Pakubawana X, several individuals and organizations worked to secure Misbach's release (Raditya, [2020](#)). K. H. Ahmad Dahlan even sent a telegram to the Governor General of the Dutch East Indies, on behalf of Muhammadiyah, requesting Misbach's release (Shiraishi, [1997](#)).

Unfortunately, the conflict between Misbach-PKI and SI-Muhammadiyah grew increasingly sharper. This was regrettable, as all of them were national forces resisting colonialism. Misbach also became too zealous, deeming Muhammadiyah's struggle through grassroots resource development (education, economy, and health) as a futile effort.

"For Misbach, focusing on education and services was inappropriate at a time when the movement needed a clear, firm, and aggressive stance against colonial government dominance. In Misbach's analysis, this only caused Muhammadiyah to shift to the center, to become moderate. Misbach was unwilling to consider political realism, which, to a certain extent, led the Muhammadiyah leadership including Kiai Dahlan to tread more cautiously." (Raditya, [2020](#))

On October 20, 1923, Misbach was again arrested by the colonial government and then exiled to Manokwari, Dutch Nieuw Guinea (now Southwest Papua). While in Manokwari, he established communication with the Abdullah Lie Company, a service company that facilitated shipments from Ambon to Manokwari. According to Mu'arif ([2016](#)), this information is based on the testimony of H. Ismail Abu Kasim (an alumnus of MULO and the Muhammadiyah Teacher Training School in Solo), who stated that the Muhammadiyah pioneer in Ambon was H. Misbach from Solo. Even after leaving Muhammadiyah, Misbach apparently remained a subscriber of the *Soewara Muhammadiyah* newspaper. The Abdullah Lie Company supplied Misbach's needs while he was in Manokwari (Eli, [1981](#)). There, Misbach's wife passed away due to malaria. Misbach wanted to take her to Europe for treatment. However, before being transferred to Europe, he himself also contracted malaria, like his wife. On May 24, 1926, H. Misbach passed away, leaving behind two sons named Madoeki & Karobet, and a daughter named Soimatoen (Rizal, [2014](#)). His story with SI and especially with Muhammadiyah serves as a reflection for the movement and enriches the historical treasures of the organization.

Muhammadiyah and Thawalib vs PKI in West Sumatra

The polemic between Islamic and communist movements did not occur only in Java, but also in Sumatra. Java is known for H. Misbach, who clashed with Islamic movement factions opposing the communists (PKI), but on the other hand attempted to unite both ideologies. Meanwhile, in Sumatra, there was Haji Datuk Batuah. Although not specifically or directly related to Muhammadiyah (unlike H. Misbach who directly confronted Muhammadiyah and SI), Batuah, when expanding his revolutionary wings in West Sumatra, faced Abdul Muis (SI) and H. Rasul (Muhammadiyah). H. Rasul was Batuah's 'teacher', one of the founders of the Sumatera Thawalib *pesantren* (together with Syekh Ibrahim Musa), a pioneer of Muhammadiyah in West Sumatra, as well as the father of Buya Hamka.

Fikrul Hanif Sufyan discusses this specifically in his work titled *Menuju Lentera Merah: Gerakan Propagandis Komunis di Serambi Mekah 1923-1949* ([2018](#)). Batuah was a religious teacher (assistant teacher) in the Sumatera Thawalib movement/school, which was modernist Islamic in character, located in Padang Panjang, West Sumatra. He tried to combine Marxism and Islam, as well as Minangkabau customary values, coining the term *kuminih*. According to Fikrul, this had a significant impact; together with Natar Zainuddin, they managed to attract nearly all the Thawalib students to embrace the 'red' ideology. Fikrul's research also states that the number of communist members soared in Padang Panjang (which later intersected with the Silungkang Rebellion in West Sumatra in 1927), and consequently, protest actions through newspapers quickly spread. In 1923, the colonial government arrested H. Datuk Batuah and

his friends. They were exiled to East Nusa Tenggara and imprisoned in Digoel, Dutch New Guinea, before being expelled to Australia. Colonial sources claimed that these communist propagandists were plotting murder, a coup or overthrow of power, and spreading hate.

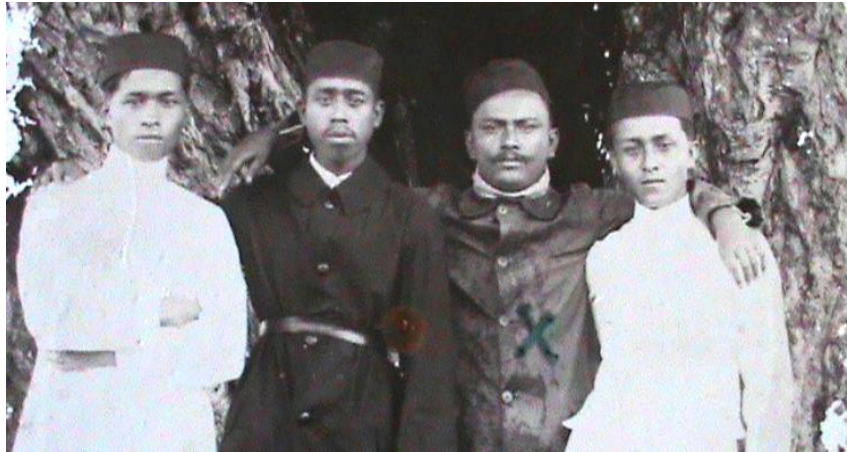


Figure 3. Daily Administrators of *Djago! Djago!* and *Pemandangan Islam*.

From left to right: Arif Fadhilah, Natar Zainuddin, H. Datuk Batuah, dan Djamaluddin Tamim. (Source: Sufyan, [2018](#))

Batuah's journey to becoming a Marxist was linked to the 'academic' freedom practiced at Thawalib, which was also in line with Muhammadiyah principles: modernist and egalitarian. H. Rasul did not prohibit Thawalib students from studying new things outside of Islam, such as ideologies, including Marxism (Kahin, [2005](#)). This encouraged Batuah and other students to explore various theories and ideologies. Batuah was a knowledge seeker. Before joining Thawalib, he studied with the legendary Minangkabau ulama, Syekh Ahmad Khatib Al-Minangkabawi. Batuah's intelligence caught the attention of H. Rasul, who made him a teaching assistant at Thawalib.

Batuah's relationship with his teacher and superior became strained as he increasingly held divergent and sharply conflicting ideological views. Batuah 'migrated' to communism after meeting and exchanging many ideas with Natar Zainuddin, a propagandist for the railway workers' union (Vereeniging van Spoor-en Tramwegpersoneel, VSTP). Natar returned to Sumatra after previously joining the PKI in Semarang. Batuah and Natar then became closer and established the PKI in Padang Panjang, with Batuah as its leader, Djamaludin Tamin as secretary and treasurer, and Natar and Datuk Machudum Sati as members their camaraderie evident in image 3 (Hartono, [2013](#)).

In 1923, they attended the PKI Congress in Bandung, West Java. There, they met H. Misbach. Batuah was even deeply captivated by Misbach after hearing his speech (Shiraishi, [1997](#)), regarding the ideological similarities between Islam and Communism, which he believed did not need to be opposed to each other. That was the moment that led H. Batuah to take a firm stance to part ways with H. Rasul's group and pursue his own path of struggle.

After the congress, Batuah, Natar, and their colleagues became increasingly active in various ways. They wrote passionately in the newspapers *Pemandangan Islam* and *Djago-Djago!*, and also established study clubs and/or propaganda centers such as the International Debating Club (IDC). These activities infuriated the colonial government. Batuah, Natar, Djamaludin Tamin, and Sati were each arrested and exiled to East Nusa Tenggara in 1923. Batuah was later exiled again to Boven Digul in 1927. During that era, between 1925 and the 1930s, the colonial government exiled many figures considered subversive (and/or involved in the PKI uprisings of 1926-1927) to eastern Indonesia, including Sukarno (Flores), Hatta and Syahrir (Banda and later also Digul), and even H. Misbach (who was also exiled to Digul). Unfortunately, Batuah and Misbach never met again in Digul because both were exiled in 1923 Batuah to East Nusa Tenggara and Misbach to Digul, but Misbach passed away in 1926.

When Japan began occupying the Dutch East Indies, the colonial government took the 'Digulis' to New South Wales, Australia, including H. Datuk Batuah. They returned to Indonesia after independence. Batuah himself stopped in Surakarta (Solo) and even met with Buya Hamka, who was, incidentally, the son of H. Rasul. Batuah emphasized to Hamka that he still respected his father (H. Rasul), and that their differences were only ideological never a matter of faith, nor would he ever become anti-religion (Sulistyo, [2024](#)).

In 1947, President Sukarno mandated Batuah to serve as a member of the Central Indonesian National Committee (KNIP). Soe Hok Gie ([2005](#)) listed the name Datuk Batuah as one of the communist representatives in KNIP, along with Dipa Nusantara Aidit, Alimin, and several other communist figures. Datuk Batuah joined KNIP representing Solo. He then returned to West Sumatra, specifically to Koto Laweh, and continued his Islamic and communist

propagation there until his death in 1949. During the Madiun Affair, Muso tried to persuade Batuah to have West Sumatra join Madiun and form a Greater Soviet. However, Muso's invitation was firmly rejected by Datuk Batuah, who unequivocally refused to recognize the coup carried out by Muso and his associates (Sufyan, [2021](#)).

Abdullah Kamil & Zain Jambek: Communists Enter Muhammadiyah

Abdullah Kamil and Zain Jambek are, in fact, not as well-known as other Minangkabau figures. However, this is the benefit of writing, especially of recording history. According to Sufyan ([2023](#)), Abdullah Kamil's name appears in historiography by European historians such as Schrieke (1929), Harry J. Benda (1960), and Akira Oki (1985). As a cohort of Batuah, Kamil's name was even mentioned by Buya Hamka in several of his works, such as *Muhammadiyah di Minangkabau*, *Tafsir Al-Azhar*, and *Kenang-kenangan Hidup*. Kamil was a 'junior' and a student of Batuah. He was active in the IDC, a forum founded by Batuah, and read works by Batuah and several of his other colleagues; *Pemandangan Islam* and *Djago-Djago*!

Kamil was still in his early teens, around 15 years old, when Batuah and his comrades were arrested by the colonial government. He acted three years after his seniors were exiled, specifically when the communist uprising broke out in West Sumatra in 1927. Kamil became a target of the colonial government following the rebellion and was arrested by the government of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia while performing the Hajj pilgrimage with his grandmother. According to a report in the *Sumatra Bode* newspaper, he was imprisoned for three months and was released from Muaro Padang prison in October 1927 (Sumatra Bode, [1927](#)).

After being released from prison, Kamil joined Muhammadiyah. This worried Hamka, as Kamil was feared to cause trouble and infiltrate the organization. However, Kamil proved that he did not harm the association and made significant contributions to it, as well as 'returning to Islam'. Hamka wrote, "*Rasa pesimis, benci, dendam, kecewa sebagai pengaruh dari ajaran perjuangan kelas dan kegagalan naik haji, berubah sama sekali. Dia melihat alam baru, dia melihat dan mulai merasakan kasih dan cinta*" (The sense of pessimism, hatred, revenge, and disappointment brought about by the teachings of class struggle and the failure of the Hajj pilgrimage vanished completely. He saw a new world, he saw and began to feel love and affection) (Hamka, [1984](#)). This transformation took place when Kamil listened to a sermon by Sutan Mansyur, a Muhammadiyah figure from West Sumatra and the son-in-law of H. Rasul.

Kamil quickly became a leading figure in the Muhammadiyah Padang Panjang Branch. He was the person behind the establishment of the Tabligh School in 1928. His ideas garnered attention at the 19th Congress in 1930 in Fort de Kock (Bukittinggi) and were warmly received by the Chairman of the Tabligh Council *Hoofdbestuur* Muhammadiyah of the Dutch East Indies, K. H. Mas Mansur. In 1940, Kamil also proposed that Muhammadiyah should soon establish a higher education institution (Sufyan, [2023](#)).

Zain Djambek, the son of Syekh Jamil Djambek, who instead became a protégé of H. Datuk Batuah and a staunch communist. Both Kamil and Zain, in the end, found their way to Muhammadiyah and became administrators of Muhammadiyah Padang Panjang and Bukittinggi, and were (considered to have) 'returned to Islam'. This was made possible through the efforts of Sutan Mansur, who preached and gave speeches everywhere, especially to the young generation of former 1927 rebels. Other youths who joined the association include Malik Siddik, Hitam Sutan Mudo (Hamka's brother-in-law/the younger brother of Siti Raham), and Oedin Kurai Taji (Sufyan, [2023](#)).

The Decline of Communism, the Rise of Aisyiyah, and the End of the Colonial Era

Muhammadiyah's development in West Sumatra grew increasingly rapidly as communist elements gradually disappeared from the land of Minangkabau. Muhammadiyah expanded, culminating in the establishment of Aisyiyah as its women's wing. This turning point coincided with the 1930 Muhammadiyah Congress held in West Sumatra.

The role of Minangkabau Muslim women was very prominent, as seen in figures such as Rangkayo Kahar Masyhoeri, Rangkayo Rasuna Said, Rahmah El Yunusiah, and others. This indicates that the national movement in West Sumatra was not carried out by men alone, but also by women. In addition, it proves that, apart from Kartini and Dewi Sartika in Java, there were many educated Minangkabau women who made significant contributions to Indonesia's struggle for independence, including Muhammadiyah women who were part of Aisyiyah.

After the PKI uprising of 1926-1927 and the Sumpah Pemuda of 1928, Muhammadiyah continued to spread its wings and strengthen the national movement with the goal of Indonesian independence. After the congress in the Minangkabau region in 1930, the 1932 congress was held in Makassar, South Sulawesi. Subsequently, in 1937, the congress took place in Yogyakarta, and in 1939 it returned to Sumatra, specifically in Medan.

The dissolution of the PKI and the communist movement also coincided with the Women's Congress on December 22, 1928. Without the communist (women's) movement, it was the nationalist, regional, and Islamic-oriented women's movements that came to the fore, including Aisyiyah. Therefore, the role of Aisyiyah as Muhammadiyah's women's movement is important to elaborate upon in the next section. Some of Aisyiyah's early milestones demonstrating the progressiveness of Muhammadiyah women included events such as congresses and baby contests at the Muhammadiyah Congress in Makassar, which supported mothers and improved the quality and care of infants. Additionally, there was also an ideological side, with the dissemination of important ideas through the newspaper *Suara Aisyiyah*, which was established in 1926 and became influential in the 1930s. This signals that the press activism was not only carried out by men, but also by women.

Muhammadiyah activists in the 1930s increasingly demonstrated their prowess in the national movement. Without always carrying the Muhammadiyah name, they were Muhammadiyah figures recognized by the colonial government and participated in various political forces, such as Sukarno, who was exiled to Ende then to Bengkulu and became a Muhammadiyah activist. Kiai Haji Mas Mansur, Kasman Singodimedjo, Ki Bagus Hadikusumo, K.H. Kahar Muzakir, and others were Muhammadiyah figures who, from the late 1930s to the early 1940s, played vital roles in Indonesia's struggle for independence.

Hoofdbestuur Muhammadiyah, which at that time was led by K. H. Mas Mansyur in 1938, created the first *khittah* known as the 12 Steps of Muhammadiyah. According to Miftahulhaq, this idea emerged due to the dissatisfaction of the younger generation with the central leadership, and it was published under the title *Tafsir Langkah Muhammadiyah* on May 7, 1939. He also explained that the context at the time was the need to strengthen the personal qualities of Muhammadiyah's leaders, members, and institutions in facing national life (which was then the colonial era), so that Muhammadiyah could continue to play its role in the struggle for Indonesia's independence (Ilham, [2022](#)).

These 12 Steps of Muhammadiyah are as follows: First, deepening the embrace of faith. This means that faith should be spread as widely as possible, shared with its background and proofs, encouraged and nurtured until it becomes an intrinsic part of us, ingrained in our very bones and innermost hearts. Second, broadening religious understanding, so that the true meaning of religion is presented in the broadest sense, open to examination and comparison, enabling Muhammadiyah members to have a wide, not narrow, or rigid, understanding of Islam. Third, cultivating noble character, meaning every Muhammadiyah member must understand and explain to others what noble and what base morals are. Every member must practice good morals and avoid blameworthy ones in their daily lives.

Fourth, guiding the practice of *intiqad* (self-reflection and evaluation). The intent is to always evaluate and improve oneself, whether regarding one's actions or responsibilities within the organization. Fifth, strengthening unity. This means reinforcing organizational unity and solidifying brotherhood, upholding equality of rights, and providing freedom for ideas to develop. Sixth, upholding justice. The aim is that justice is truly carried out and upheld appropriately, even if it affects oneself or one's relatives. Decisions made with utmost fairness should be defended and maintained wherever one is.

Seventh, exercising wisdom. Every Muhammadiyah member, in all their actions, should place everything in its proper context, making and taking decisions with careful consideration, without haste, and always based on the Quran and the Sunnah of the Prophet. Then, the eighth through twelfth steps: strengthening the Tanwir council, holding sectional conferences, deliberating decisions, overseeing the course of the movement, and fostering cooperation with external parties on the basis of friendly relations and mutual assistance (Hadi, [2021](#)).

The leadership of K. H. Mas Mansyur, who was elected in 1937, essentially changed the style of Muhammadiyah's movement, which was considered rather stagnant and overly focused solely on education, as well as perceived as slow because it was led by the 'older generation'; Kiai Haji Hisyam. During the era of K. H. Mas Mansyur, the 'younger generation' took over the organization's reins and (were seen as) running it in a more democratic manner. Muhammadiyah figures of that time also emphasized Muhammadiyah as a non-political organization, because in previous times, especially in connection with SI and communists, Muhammadiyah was involved in political battles.

The colonial era of the Dutch East Indies then ended in 1942, and Japan occupied the homeland. During this era until Indonesian independence, K. H. Mas Mansyur, Ki Bagus Hadikusumo, and others were politically active through another channel; the Majelis Islam A'la Indonesia (MIAI) which later became the Majelis Syuro Muslimin Indonesia (Masyumi) as Muhammadiyah's representative. These figures also joined and worked together with

nationalist leaders like Sukarno, Hatta, and others, pioneering Indonesia's independence. Unfortunately, in the era of independence, Muhammadiyah was once more swept into the political current through the Masyumi Party.

CONCLUSION

The implementation of the Ethical Policy at the beginning of the 20th century opened opportunities for the people of the Dutch East Indies to access new ideas and values that were developing internationally. In this context, nationalism, communism, and Islam emerged as three new forces that not only complemented each other but also often found themselves at odds in various aspects. These three ideologies became important actors in shaping collective awareness as well as social and political movements in the colonial territories.

The conflict between communism and Islam, as reflected in the struggles between organizations such as the PKI and Muhammadiyah, was not merely a clash of ideologies within the colonial context. More than that, these dynamics represented how each organization sought to position itself and respond to the complex social and political conditions of the time. The debates and frictions that arose contributed to the maturation of ideologies and movement strategies in confronting colonial injustice.

Figures such as H. Misbach, H. Datuk Batuah, Abdullah Kamil, and Zain Djambek exemplified Muhammadiyah's success in producing movement leaders who were not only grounded in Islamic teachings but also open to other values, such as communism. This phenomenon demonstrates the inclusive and adaptive nature of Islam in responding to the changing times. In the context of the national movement, Islam served as a primary medium for interpreting social reality, understanding structural disparities caused by colonialism, and affirming the collective stance of Muslims in the struggle for independence.

The contest between Islam and communism during the 1920s also contributed to the formation of a new identity for Muhammadiyah as an increasingly progressive, modern, and democratic organization oriented toward making concrete contributions to the national struggle. While remaining firmly committed to Islamic principles and values, Muhammadiyah demonstrated its capacity to engage in dialogue with other ideologies in its efforts to achieve social transformation and Indonesia's independence.

Based on how Muhammadiyah responded to ideology during the movement, it provides an important lesson that Islam is not a narrow (in terms of scope) and stagnant (in terms of teachings) religion. The movement period proved that Islam could move within a broader spectrum, beyond the general perception of a religion, and has had a significant impact on the sustainability of Indonesian life. The flexibility of Islam and the alignment of its values with the humanitarian mission and struggles of that time inspired many Muslim individuals to collaborate and contextualize themselves within the prevailing circumstances. Such characteristics may still be upheld today as a form of affirming Islam's stance, particularly in political matters.

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