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Reuven Pinnata

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Lin Hongxuan. *Ummah Yet Proletariat: Islam, Marxism, and the Making of the Indonesian Republic*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2023.

Reviewed by Reuven Pinnata*

Is Marxism a science? From Marx's oft-quoted critique of religion as the heavenly compensation for earthly misery and Engels's distinction between utopian and scientific socialism to theories on the colonial nature of capitalism advanced by Rosa Luxemburg and Walter Rodney and the program of art as cognitive mapping advocated by Fredric Jameson, the main task of Marxism has often been understood as one of demystification. The mists of abstractions are parted to reveal the hard concrete of the mode of production, for social existence determines consciousness, not the other way around. But, within these cracks of the concrete, is there a space for human consciousness to grow, for the flourishing of what Jameson (1974) himself calls "the *subjective* dimension of Marxism" (p. 376)? Do Communists dream only of electrification and Soviet power?

In his wide-ranging book, Lin Hongxuan retells the relationship between Islam and Marxism during the first half of the twentieth century in the Netherlands East Indies/Indonesia through "a history of dreams and aspirations" (p. 5). Dispelling the myth originating with Suharto's authoritarian New Order that Communism entails atheism, the book documents the deep roots of what Lin terms throughout his book "conciliations" between Islamic practices of piety and Marxist visions of social justice. In distinction from previous studies such as Ruth McVey's *The Rise of Indonesian Communism* (1965) or Rex Mortimer's *Indonesian Communism Under Sukarno* (1974), it strays beyond the well-trodden path of analyzing institutions and political leaders to track the aspirations of believers, novelists, students, and other everyday intellectuals. It does so by forgoing state archives and other documents that might provide a more detailed account of these social movements and opting instead to focus on vernacular print culture, including but not limited to literary fiction. Such an approach is especially necessary to more fully account for the history of Communism in Indonesia, which, as Lin correctly notes, has tended to favor the Indonesian Communist Party (Partai Komunis Indonesia; PKI) and its associated organizations, such as Gerwani (Gerakan Wanita Indonesia; the Indonesian Women's

* Department of English, Center for Southeast Asian Studies, Northern Illinois University

Movement) and Lekra (Lembaga Kebudayaan Rakyat; the Institute of People's Culture). As a result, the reader is treated to a satisfyingly rich archive that includes more well-known novels such as Mas Marco Kartodikromo's *Student Hidjo* (Student Named Hidjo) as well as the writings of S.K. Trimurti, Indonesia's first minister of labor. The depth and care with which Lin analyzes this archive shows his ability to read his sources not simply as a means of reconstructing a past epoch but as a serious intellectual resource.

Thus, even if it aims to tell an alternative story about the past, Lin's book remains in dialogue with much of the current scholarship on religion and politics in the Global South, which the introduction lays out with admirable clarity and conciseness. Of especial interest is the question of whether the influence of Marxism over anticolonial nationalist movements represents another moment of Western epistemic dominance. This view would put Marxism at odds with Islam, and Lin notes that some scholars of global Islam have contended that attempts to synthesize Islamic and Marxist tenets represent either politically motivated efforts by Communist regimes or eccentric outliers to "actual" Islam. Once again, Lin encourages us to read beyond the empirical and embrace the power of the fictive, the "anachronisms" (p. 32) necessary for any collective, future-oriented project like anticolonial nationalism. To ask whether progressive modalities of Islam are authentic is to fail to acknowledge the agency of Islam's practitioners and succumb to historicist bad faith.

Chapter 1 situates the emergence of Communism in the Netherlands East Indies between the rise of Sarekat Islam (Islamic Union) and the failed 1926–27 Communist uprisings. Already one decade prior, Sarekat Islam leaders had articulated their critique of colonial labor exploitation through a vernacular Islamic idiom. Thus, working in collaboration with the colonial state was considered unclean or forbidden (*haram*). The chapter then analyzes articles published in two regional newspapers from Java and Sumatra. Lin directs our attention to the language of these articles, remarking on the poetic facility with which their authors braid clear-eyed descriptions of the harsh reality of colonial capitalism with baroque evocations of hell. Lin also points out instances where foreign capital, as opposed to simply colonialism, is identified as the true oppressor of the Indies, in a move reminiscent of Lenin's contemporaneous critique of imperialism and Nikolai Bukharin and Yevgeni Preobrazhensky's theory of monopoly capitalism in *The ABC of Communism* (1920).

Chapter 2 investigates the aftermath of the failed uprisings in the Netherlands East Indies, as political action could no longer take the form of public mobilization due to heightened state surveillance. Lin reads this moment dialectically, not simply as a period of repression but also as an opening of new discursive arenas of struggle. He identifies three particular arenas: workers' cooperatives, education, and feminism. He also emphasizes the transnational dimension of these activities, as Muslim activists seeking to connect their faith with contemporary issues turned to the global Muslim community (*ummah*) for inspiration, as when one article promoted

organized almsgiving (*zakat*) as a practice of egalitarianism. Others turned to the history of peasant cooperatives and other forms of communalism in Europe and the United States as a means of resisting capital's encroachment, calling these other Marxist traditions forms of Sufi brotherhood (*tarekat*). Finally, the chapter turns to the writings of female activists like the writer Soewarsih Djojopoespito and the jurist Maria Ulfah Santoso to show whether their advocacy for women's rights did or did not intersect with their critiques of colonial capitalism. Lin is conscious, however, of the ambivalent efficacy of these forms of political movement: as they moved away from direct action, their focus shifted from confrontation with the capitalist class to "shaping future Indonesians" (p. 152).

Chapter 3 seeks to fill out the shape of this nationalist futurity with concrete content. Although Lin observes that by the time of the proclamation of national independence in 1945, Marxism had become oriented less toward the *ummah* and more toward the Indonesian nation itself, "future Indonesians" persisted in imagining their revolutionary efforts in terms of global solidarity with other proletarians, Muslim and non-Muslim alike. Correspondingly, the chapter examines the various forms of coalition building through formal independence from 1945 until the ensuing years of war and negotiation with the returning Dutch. As opposed to the conflation of Communism with the PKI, Lin notes that the latter did not emerge as an independent force until 1948. Thus, the goal of national independence was presupposed enough to allow for collaboration, even if factions were split on the matter of negotiating with the Dutch. Yet even amidst such realpolitik, questions over how to craft an Indonesian subjectivity continued to provide common ground for debate. For example, Lin shows how Islam and Marxism were theorized to be compatible by opposing figures such as Tan Malaka and Amir Sjarifuddin or even by someone as unsympathetic to Communism as Hamka. Additionally, such syntheses were no mere intellectual exercise among the well-educated, a point Lin demonstrates through the case of the Islamic boarding school (*pesantren*) of Goro, the writings of S.K. Trimurti (whose concern with Islam and feminism was often downplayed in favor of analysis of her economic policies), and Tamar Djaja's *Trio Komoenis Indonesia* (Indonesian Communist Trio), a partly fictionalized biography chronicling the overseas adventures of Alimin, Semaun, and Tan Malaka.

Chapter 4 follows up the heady first years of the republic with the equally tumultuous period of institution building from 1950 to 1959. Differences over what an Indonesian nation should look like, particularly in terms of whether Islam should be adopted as the state religion, continued to split as much as suture group affiliations. Thus, Lin argues, in this period "Islam" remained a powerful yet flexible signifier, as when the PKI chairman D.N. Aidit argued in a 1954 rally that it was the PKI, not its opponent the modernist Islamic party Masjumi, that truly represented Islamic values. Beyond the realm of politics, conciliations between Islam and Marxism continued to abound in the realm of cultural production. Once again, bringing home inspiration from abroad through translation played a significant role, as evidenced by Lekra's

publication of a series of translations of the Pakistani writer Muhammad Iqbal's poems, one of which is titled "Lenin before God."

Finally, Chapter 5 briefly studies the culmination of this conciliation between Islam and Marxism in Sukarno's infamous declaration of NASAKOM (Nasionalisme, Agama [Religion], Komunisme). Although it would be easy to read NASAKOM as Sukarno's attempt to ideologically shore up his autocratic turn under Guided Democracy (1959–65), Lin shows that Sukarno was by no means alone in invoking the revolutionary spirit of Islam. Lin cites Foreign Minister Ruslan Abdulgani's speeches and writings arguing for Indonesian socialism as well as a variety of plays written by Lekra-affiliated artists as evidence that NASAKOM was not simply Sukarno's own invention. In fact, Lin suggests that in the immediate aftermath of the attempted coup of September 30, 1965, it was the PKI whose action was seen as "a betrayal of NASAKOM" (p. 316). Even if NASAKOM failed to be galvanizing enough to create lasting structural change, it was an outgrowth of, not a deviation from, the by then well-established tradition of creatively adapting Marxism and Islam to each other.

Finally, Lin's book succeeds in bringing to life the spirit of creative conciliation that characterized Indonesian anticolonial nationalism. It amply demonstrates that, far from being nationalist-particularists, Indonesians thought of themselves as being, in the ringing words of the 1950 *Gelombang* manifesto, "heirs to world culture." The generosity and scope of Lin's book makes it a child of this tradition as well, although here we may note some questions that this book leaves us with: if the vision of egalitarianism promoted by Marxism was so popular, why did it ultimately fail? To what extent was this intellectual stance of creative adaptation confined to the discursive level? Is there room for other political affects besides conciliatoriness? The book's intervention into the long shadow of the New Order's equation of Communism with atheism is accomplished and timely, but perhaps that time itself is no longer ours. Indeed, we now live in its aftermath, the time of *re*-conciliation, which might turn out to be more difficult, since, in the words of the ex-political prisoner Tan Swie Ling, "There is no way we can do a real reconciliation without first admitting the truth" (Suwandi 2015). And perhaps there is no chance for the truth to reunite us if we do not admit that, first, it has divided us.

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